

"In Grief They Lived To View The Finished Work Of Their Own Hands"

By Donald Townsley

The title of this article is a sentence from an article written by brother W. W. Otey in the August 14, 1947 issue of the GOSPEL ADVOCATE entitled "A Scrap of History". In this article bro. Otey briefly gives some highlights of the apostasy that resulted in the Christian church. He points out some history that we now see repeating itself in churches of Christ. He points out that the digression that resulted in the Christian church started with "little trends" called "expedients". He writes, "At first these "trends" were such little deviations from the New Testament model that they were discerned by few and denied by the great majority." (*emphasis mine --dt*)

What brother Otey says happened then has happened again in this generation of the church. Little "trends", "seeds of error" have been sown, watered, cultivated, and nurtured by many men of outstanding ability until we now have the full-grown, mature plant. Many who have given most of their lives and the best that was in them to get this plant to grow, are now beginning to realize that this plant they thought would be so wholesome and helpful to God's people is a "wild vine" that grows faster than johnson grass, and is one hundred times harder to "kill out". The fruit that is now growing on it is so poisonous that it will bring certain spiritual death. The fruit off of this vine is like the fruit the servant of Elisha gathered off the wild vine and shred in the pottage, not knowing what it was. Then the sons of the prophets began to eat and "*they cried out and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot.*" (2 Kings 4: 38 - 41) And many today, who have nurtured this "wild vine", not recognizing that its fruit would be modernism in the rankest forms; denominationalism; the social gospel; church-sponsored social and recreational activities; every conceivable human organization to do the work of the church; and the denominational theory of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, are like the sons of the prophets -- they have begun to cry, "*there is death in the pot.*"

The men who are now beginning to recognize this "plant" for what it really is are not a peculiar group standing alone in history -- there is a group like them in every apostasy. There was a group in the last one, and brother Otey writes about them. Men like J. B. Briney, who had defended the "trends" and supported the different societies that had been formed, but in the end found that which he had worked so hard to help grow had grown into a "wild vine" with fruit he could not partake of. Brother Otey points out that J. B. Briney opposed the movement to unite all their societies into one authoritative organization, the United Society, but he and the Old Guards were ignored. The young generation had taken over, and he points out that Briney's long and faithful defense of the societies as separate institutions meant nothing to the men who were now in authority. So he says of Briney, "From that day till the day of his death Briney opposed the United Society, which was only the merging of the organizations that he so courageously affirmed two years before were "authorized" in the New Testament."

Some of the "Brineys" of our day are W. L. Totty, Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Eugene W. Clevenger, Reuel Lemmons, and a growing host who have "in grief lived to view the finished work of their own hands". I do not mean to imply that they have fully seen their role in this apostasy or that they have given up the basic errors they hold on congregational cooperation, or the church contributing to an institutional orphan home (and some to colleges), but what these men did was to open the door for some unscriptural practices and through this door all the other unscriptural practices and unbelief

have come in. The men who have opened this door are now spending much time and using much paper and ink warning of apostasy, being unable to fully see and realize that this is only the merging of "the finished work of their own hands".

Ira Y. Rice, Jr. writes books with the title "AXE ON THE ROOT" and sends his "FAR EAST NEWSLETTER" all of the country warning of the unbelief now in the ranks of liberal churches of Christ. He makes this statement in the June 25, 1968 issue of the "FAR EAST NEWSLETTER": "With a major segment of this brotherhood evidently hell-bent for apostasy, as I have mentioned several times since returning to Singapore last November, there was some question in my own mind, whether I should have come back to the Far East at all -- at least for the time being." So, from the pen of one of the big promoters among the liberals you see the admission that the "major segment" of the brethren he is identified with are "hell-bent for apostasy".

From the pen of brother W. L. Totty we read warning after warning in his bulletin of the apostasy that is taking place among the liberals. In bro. Totty's bulletin, January 19, 1969, he writes, " We are drifting more closely to the Christian church. In fact some have drifted into the Christian church."

In closing I plead with brethren in this section who have gone the way of supporting human organizations and the sponsoring church arrangement, to give up these unscriptural practices and come back to the New Testament. These unscriptural practices will only lead to more and more departures from the word of God. In the words of bro. Otey, "So long as God's irrevocable law remains that "every seed shall bring forth after its kind," so long will uniting the church to human organizations mature in apostasy."

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