

## A Precious Jewel

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They were neighbours.

In fact, they had lived next door to each other for over forty years.

It could in truth be said that they got along quite well, even during those years when the children did the usual damage to lawns and gardens – and to an occasional window. They settled the quarrels of their children without becoming personally involved. Their respective pets, a dog and a cat, had various exciting confrontations; yet this did not spill over to build the barrier between them. In fact, neither one of them at any time even thought of building some kind of fence

between their yards.

They did, however, carry on all these years a verbal battle – let us call it a controversy – in which neither one would budge an inch, and in which neither one could be said to have bested the other and to have run away with the victory.

You see, Mr. Noel was a science teacher in the local high school. He had a keen mind, was well educated, and was wholly dedicated to his work. He lived in the fifteen-room house which his father had built; and he was living there as a college student when Mr. Adams bought the smaller house next door and moved in with

his blushing bride. This being a university city, Mr. Noel was at home all through his years of education. And though his father died the year before Mr. Adams moved in next door, there was plenty of money for the full education of this only child. Upon finishing his education and upon obtaining this teaching position, Mr. Noel moved in with his attractive bride into the home where he had been living all these years with his mother. After all, a fifteen-room house of this type could accommodate three conveniently and give privacy. Mrs. Noel, Sr. died shortly after the second birthday of the first grandchild. And now Noel and Adams were family men living next door to each other.

Mr. Adams was a certified public accountant, a man quick with numbers, but a man also quick with his mind in other matters, possessing a clear and logical mind. He had always wanted to go to law school; and his ambition had been that of a trial lawyer. But there never were funds to make this possible; and he settled for his present position. He did delight in debate and did not hesitate to vie with his educated neighbour in this verbal battle, or contest, whatever you want to call it. In fact, they both seemed to enjoy these sessions of controversy, which they kept on a high level, never parting with any harsh words or ridicule of each other.

We must point out, however, that there was a tremendously important difference between these two men. Mr. Adams was a believer, and for years he served in an office in the church across the street and half way up the block on the corner. He was not just a member. He was a very active and zealous member, never ashamed of defending the position of his church. Mr. Noel was an unbeliever and had never in his life entered a church to hear as much as a Sunday School lesson. His god was science; and he worshipped his god with a fervent devotion. His Sundays were spent out in the field, on some scientific research, or in sports. He was not a lazy man who would use that day to lie around and waste time. He was far too energetic for that.

Their verbal battlefield almost always was Darwinism, evolution, the origin of this world, and its development. But there was no victor in this "battle", and really could not be because they could not agree on a common set of rules. Mr. Noel would not accept the Word of God; and Mr. Adams would not put stock in the "findings" of men who contradicted anything in Scripture. Mr. Adams often would appeal to the flood for his proof; but Mr. Noel would remind him that the Bible was nothing more than a beautiful piece of human literature. His "proof" was the words of men whose breath was in their nostrils, and who so often contradicted each other.

Mr. Adams, wishing to continue the debate that carried on through all these years, sought to undermine Mr. Noel's claims by scientific reasoning. He did much research also to find scientists whose "findings" varied

with those which Mr. Noel held to and defended with all his ability. He tried in every way apart from quoting the Scriptures to show the impossibility of Mr. Noel's position and theories about the universe and the origin of the creatures.

When Mr. Noel spoke so freely of the billions of years it took for this to form and that to happen, Mr. Adams would insist that a half-billion-year period of darkness would with its freezing, sub-zero cold kill off all life that had begun to form in the half-billion-year period of the lighted part of that day. But Mr. Noel would remind him that he was going back to Scripture which spoke of six days, and of an evening and a morning for each of these days. He, Mr. Noel, claimed no such one-day and one-evening period in that billion year stretch of time when things began to evolve. He preferred a gradual warming up or cooling off through all the billions of years.

One argument that Mr. Adams kept bringing up did irk Mr. Noel and gave him trouble, even though he did not want to admit it. It was the question as to where that first cell, or that first gaseous vapour came from. From what did it evolve? Mr. Adams did note, though, a bit of hesitation, no matter how slight it was, in Mr. Noel's defence and counter-question as to where his, Mr. Adams', God came from.

Mr. Adams pressed his point at a later friendly session on the edge of their lawns and asked Mr. Noel whether it was really scientific to maintain that dead matter can produce life. Living matter dies. But what has science to show that dead matter can produce life? And that first cell, or gaseous vapour, that was there, how could it change without something else being there to feed it or to exert influence upon it? There must have been something more to feed that cell. There must have been something more to cool off or heat up that gaseous vapour.

Mr. Noel boasted of the latest achievements of science to create life in a test tube. But Mr. Adams pointed out that this was not a case of dead matter bringing forth life and that he, Mr. Noel, was overlooking the fact that *living men* were combining chemicals to produce what seemed to have life. And so the controversy went on from year to year, assuming different forms, but always about this difference of beliefs of the two men.

Shortly after one of the most heated discussions on this subject of dead matter moving toward life – and Mr. Noel did not like the way the matter was going – the funeral of Mrs. Adams was held in the corner church. Out of courtesy and sincere sympathy Mr. Noel went to the funeral service. The text was those words of Jesus to Martha in John 11:25, 26, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" The pastor explained that the dead believer

will rise again to glory. But he also took time to emphasize that there is a worse death than this physical death. He quoted Ephesians 2:1 to point out that there is also a spiritual death wherein people who are physically alive may be. He pointed out that God told Adam that the *day* he ate, he would die, and that this did happen. Adam died spiritually that day. And when Jesus says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," He is not giving a promise to the believer that he will never die physically, but that the spiritually alive will never experience the eternal death of hell. The man who dies physically while spiritually dead dies hopelessly. The man who is spiritually alive when he dies physically shall never lose his spiritual life, nor enter the lake of fire.

Seeing Mr. Noel in his audience the pastor "pulled out a couple of extra stops," and, looking right at him, stated, "The spiritually dead are not without hope as long as they still live physically. You still have a chance. Let God have His way with you. Tell Him right now that you want to become spiritually alive; and He will give that life to you. He will make you spiritually alive. Just ask Him. He is waiting."

Even in the midst of his deep sorrow Mr. Adams was grateful for those words of the pastor to his neighbour and hoped that they were well received.

Days later, knowing that Mr. Adams was lonely, Mr. Noel went one evening to visit him, not intending to introduce their controversy. But Mr. Adams brought up the matter without really intending to do so. He began by thanking Mr. Noel for his presence and concern to take off from his teaching to attend the service. He added that he hoped that the message was well received by Mr. Noel.

Mr. Noel's answer startled him so much that he jumped right out of his chair. "Adams", he said, "I did not know that your pastor was an evolutionist, or I might have visited him long ago." "He is not", almost shouted the shocked Mr. Adams, "he and I both hold to the infallibility of the Bible, and believe the first eleven chapters of Genesis to be fact, undeniable fact.

We both believe that God created all things in six successive days of twenty-four hours each."

"O", replied, Mr. Noel, "I did not mean that he believes that the earth and the universe came into being by the process of evolution. I never heard him speak anything about that in the sermon. But I have my answer now to your question about dead matter producing life; and your pastor gave it to me. He told us that men are born spiritually dead but that they can become spiritually alive by an act of their own. He also spoke of a change of species: the sinner can change himself into a saint by an act of his dead will. The dead have in themselves the power to reach out for life."

"Adams", he said, "either admit that the Bible is fallible and that the *man* who wrote Genesis chose the wrong word and should have said, 'God said, In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt become very weak and sick'; and that the man — I believe it was Paul — who wrote that man is '*dead in trespasses and sins*' should have been more careful and written that man is spiritually weak and sickly, and therefore, he trespasses and sins; or tell your pastor to preach that dead matter cannot desire life and cannot make the movement unto life. Otherwise you are not consistent. You speak of creation by an almighty God; but in the realm of salvation you hold on to an evolutionistic process whereby the dead initiate the act toward life. You speak of a sovereign creator, but you also hold to a sovereign sinner who can hold off your sovereign saviour. You teach that God *calls* all the creatures into being, but you also teach that spiritually dead creatures *call* God into the act of saving. I find it hard to follow, and very unscientific."

Indeed, we must be consistent in our defence of the truth of creation. But consistency is also a precious jewel in our defence of the truth of salvation by grace, and as the work of a sovereign God Who *creates* us in Christ Jesus as His workmanship (Eph. 2:10), and does not wait for the spiritually dead sinner to step forward to obtain life. There is no more evolution in salvation than there is in creation.