

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE MAN WHO HEARD GOD LAUGH

But his mother prayed.

Through the years of frolicsome laughter and irresponsible pleasure, this sober fact was the only touch of solemnity that ever brushed the life of Walter R. MacDonald. "Making the other fellow laugh seemed to come as second nature to me even when I was very young," says MacDonald. "So my aim was the stage. I thought that if I could ever have my name in marquee lights for the public to gaze upon, that would be the height of my ambition."

That goal was reached. A veteran entertainer who for more than thirty-seven years had sparked hollow laughter into empty hearts encouraged the lad's interests. Before many months had passed Walter was on the upper side of the bright lights. It offered a gay crowd, this vaudeville and stage business. And a good fellow couldn't refuse an occasional drink. So the proverbial camel had wedged his nose into MacDonald's life: more and more, whiskey became an actual threat to the entertainer's success. At the end of 1924 came the beginning of a six-months' drunk. During this time he was playing with one of America's leading comedians who told MacDonald that the top of the ladder was easily his if wild life and whiskey stepped out. But already there was no more shaking of this awful vise of drink.

Several months later the switchboard operator, a pretty little thing, at the Illinois Masonic Hospital where MacDonald was visiting a friend, said, quite startlingly, "Sir, I don't know of any doctor who can help you, but I do know of Someone else who can." There was no asking what she meant; the tiny office couldn't very well conceal a drunkard's breath. "What is his name, and what is his address?" was MacDonald's reply. "His name is Jesus, and His address is Heaven," said Miss Alberta Schultz, who only a year previous had found Christ. She wasn't ashamed of the New Testament on her desk, either. He asked her out; she asked him in—to Pacific Garden Mission, her spiritual birthplace.

Together they attended Pacific Garden Mission meetings for several weeks. Then MacDonald hurried away to fill his engagements as entertainer. Queer evenings they were: an appetizer of Gospel singing, testimonies and preaching, followed by a diet of comedy and error. For five weeks MacDonald continued in this manner, entranced by the powerful singing, varied music, witnesses and Gospel messages, and then swallowed by the whirl of night revelry. Laughter was still coming MacDonald's way.

One night Pa Taylor shifted the scene. MacDonald was booked to entertain a lodge that evening. Since it was too early for his act, he wandered into the mission. Already under the influence of liquor, MacDonald propped a hymnal under each arm to hide the trembling of his alcohol-wracked body. Thus he sat, inwardly feasting on what he heard, and admiring again the forceful, unabashed words of Superintendent Taylor. This was the second week after the Taylors' return from a vacation. Although the preaching the three previous weeks had been excellent, there was something about this man's sermons which came from the very God Himself. MacDonald listened, and winced as the misshapen tip of the preacher's crooked index finger seemed to veer constantly in his direction.

PSALM I

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

It was the Scripture reading for that night, supplemented by these words, unnerving to the gay MacDonald: "**He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh**" (Psalm 2:4).

Then followed the full-toned voice of Taylor as he interpreted how God's laughter might sound. And there was the accusing crooked finger again coupled with the repetition: "**He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.**" Strange, thought MacDonald, that God or a preacher or conversion could have any joy and laughter. That was the very thing he had always feared: the loss of laughter. That was why MacDonald was gayer than ever that night, staging his act and drinking his health. Nevertheless Taylor's laugh stuck, and those shattering words of Psalm 2:4, "**He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.**"

Despite the upsetting message of the previous evening, MacDonald returned to Pacific Garden Mission the next night, May 29, 1925. It was the first time he failed to fill his engagement as entertainer. Instead, when the Gospel invitation was given, MacDonald was on his knees before God, uttering a penitent's prayer and a sinner's need of Jesus Christ.

It was MacDonald who first called the Taylors "Pa" and "Ma." It was a mark of true love, growing from the realization that Pa Taylor, instead of being "hard on him" as Walter complained to Mrs. Taylor, was seeking to ground this new convert in the faith and in a dedication of talent to God.

For two years MacDonald worked at the mission, using his excellent voice, song-leading ability,

laughter and testimony for God's glory. Meanwhile he learned, too, that Pa was right in saying, "You're not worth your salt unless you read the Bible and pray."

For the occasion of his first anniversary at Pacific Garden Mission, MacDonald brought his parents and younger brother from Detroit. That night became brother Roy's spiritual birthday. Later Walter had the joy of leading other family members to Christ.

Seven years as song leader followed, before Walter MacDonald entered independent evangelistic preaching. So great is his testimony and work for Christ, and so multitudinous the harvest of souls throughout the United States and Canada that when Pacific Garden Mission asked its son to participate in the sixty-fifth anniversary celebration, it was two years late. Walter MacDonald is booked for meetings that far in advance. Fortunately, however, rearrangements in schedule permitted the Pacific Garden family to see and hear this great soul-winning evangelist.

Walter MacDonald is no longer the prancer; his feet are grounded on the Rock Christ Jesus.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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