Dick, the Babysitting Bear

and Other Great Wild Animal Stories

Compiled and edited by
Joe L. Wheeler

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Dedication

This is a first for me. Never before have I dedicated a book to someone who has had a huge impact on my books in two separate publishing houses. Not only that, but someone who helped me give birth to two separate series of books.

She was one of the two individuals most responsible for the success of the Christmas in My Heart series (now in its sixteenth annual collection) with Review and Herald® Publishing Association. When she moved to Pacific Press® Publishing Association, her visionary eye saw the same potential in the series The Good Lord Made Them All (now in its fourth annual collection).

So it gives me great pleasure to dedicate this book to a woman who not only changed my life but who has also had a significant impact upon the lives of all those readers who so love the stories in these twenty collections (so far):

SUSAN HARVEY

Introduction

Life's Defining Moments

Joseph Leininger Wheeler

It was a stunningly beautiful first day of April 2004 at the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge on the Georgia coast. All around us was serenity: white herons by the score, ducks of many kinds, dozing alligators and turtles, seabirds flying overhead.

As we leisurely strolled along an embankment, the moment came—completely unannounced. Had we been looking any other direction in the lagoon, we'd have missed it, for the entire scene took only a split second. At a speed one wouldn't have believed possible in such a sluggish-looking beast, a great alligator leaped out of the water at one of the largest birds on the Georgia coast, a condor-sized buzzard placidly sunning himself. As he was seized in those implacable jaws, the wings shot out in a futile attempt to fly away, and a millisecond later there was an empty space where the bird had been and barely a ripple to mark the spot where the alligator had attacked.

A professional nature photographer standing next to us completely missed the shot of a lifetime, so quickly did it happen. His wife turned to us and said, "Such attacks usually take place at night so they're almost never seen by the human eye—in all our

years of photographing wildlife on this coast, that was an absolute first for us!"

The six of us who'd seen it just stood there in a state of shock—one moment vibrant life, the next, a bone-crunching death deep in the lagoon. Not often in this fast-paced life in which we live is the veil between life and death so transparently thin. The only personal comparable I can think of occurred early one evening on a narrow Colorado river road seven years ago when an out-of-control driver lost his trajectory on a curve and smashed into my wife and me, totaling both vehicles. In the split second between seeing those headlights veering across the center line and the crash, we assumed we were breathing the last breath God would grant us in this life . . . but we lived through it.

The result of both experiences has been a heightened appreciation of how incredibly fragile is this thread we glibly label "life"—and how little it takes to snap it!

Such defining moments we call "epiphanies." One moment the train of life is barreling down a set of tracks in one direction; the next, it's racing down a new set of tracks in an entirely different direction. Rarely do we realize we're experiencing a life-changing epiphany; only in retrospect do we see how different our lives would have been had that day not taken place.

For my wife and me, the two experiences, four years apart, have resulted in a heightened awareness of life, of the need to savor to the utmost every day, hour, minute, and second God grants us, recognizing that each comes but once. Not all the gold in Fort Knox can buy back a millisecond of life.

One of the tragedies of our age has to do with the way we waste the only bullion that matters—Time. Waste it staring glassy-eyed at the television set, text-messaging inanities on our cell phones, exchanging trivialities on the Web—oh, the list is endless. Majoring in minors, that's what so many of us do with our lives, and we discover, belatedly, that though we took the normal number of breaths, we *never really lived!*

The stories featured in this book, as well as the stories in the other collections in *The Good Lord Made Them All* series, represent moments of heightened awareness, defining moments, if you will; attempts to stop the clock of time long enough to internalize value for what has just been experienced (be it actual or vicarious, matters little, as the mind has a difficult time differentiating between the two).

My prayer is that these stories will help us become more aware of the interconnectedness of all God's creatures.

About this collection

Every attempt has been made to gather one of the most powerful collections of wild animal stories ever gathered between two covers. Even though this book features headliners such as Zane Grey, Penny Porter, and Ernest Thompson Seton, the power of the story alone has been the deciding factor in determining which stories made the cut.

A wide variety of animal protagonists can be found in these pages—bears, rabbits, raccoons, moose, elephants, buffaloes, black-snakes, razorbacks, coyotes—even barn swallows and a peacock.

If there is a theme, it is the interconnectedness of all created beings.

CODA

I look forward to hearing from you! I always welcome the stories, responses, and suggestions that are sent to us from our readers. I am putting together collections centered on other genres as well. You may reach me by writing to:

Joe L. Wheeler, PhD
P.O. Box 1246
Conifer, CO 80433

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Dick, the Babysitting Bear

Floyd Bralliar

This pre–Civil War narrative is one of the earliest of true stories about bear cubs. Dick was born in the Ozark Mountains more than a hundred and fifty years ago. Generations of readers have laughed at his antics ever since the story was anthologized in Elo the Eagle and Other Stories *in 1947.*

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Years ago, on the side of one of the Ozark Mountains, about twenty miles south of the present city of Springfield, Missouri, stood a schoolhouse the like of which very few of the present generation have ever seen.

At that time only a few families had moved into the country, and everything was crude and undeveloped; but with a desire to educate their children that has made America the foremost nation in the world in matters educational, these pioneers determined to have a school. Circumstances could scarcely have been more unfavorable or fewer facilities at hand. Nevertheless, undaunted by the difficulties in the way, they chose a place as nearly central as could be found and prepared to build their first schoolhouse.

Logs were cut and dragged to the site, the ends being notched so they would stay in position, were laid up to form the walls. Chips, twigs, and even small limbs were stuffed into the cracks between the logs. On one side of the room, window space was sawed out, and as there was no glass to put in it, ventilation was assured.

Clapboards fastened to cross logs with wooden pins—for nails were high priced, and difficult to get at any price—formed the roof. These clapboards were boards split from the side of a log with an ax, and quite unsmoothed. You can readily see that they would not fit closely enough together to make a water-tight roof; but as other boards had to be sawed with a handsaw, they were too expensive to use for this purpose. The door was likewise made of clapboards, and hung upon hinges made from strips of raw deerskin. When the mountain rats dined on these hinges, as they occasionally did, new ones were put on.

Desks and tables, there were none. A split log, flat side up, was fastened to the wall on one side of the room, and here the children could stand to write. The seats were crude affairs, made by splitting logs as nearly in the middle as possible, and putting in wooden pins on the rounded side for legs—not much to look at when compared with the cleverly adjusted, rubber-hinged, and finely polished wonders that adorn the modern schoolroom. Nevertheless, the children who gathered there to study and recite had eyes as bright, cheeks as rosy, brains as active and alert, plans and dreams as ambitious, and hearts as happy and hopeful and loving as any schoolchildren on the round earth today. They made the most of every advantage and the best of every disadvantage, and their later life proved that they had learned well the early lessons taught by hardship and privation.

The schoolroom was heated with a fireplace, so arranged that the children could cluster around it on cold days and be out of the direct draft of the window. The chimney was a crude affair, built of sticks laid up corncob-pen fashion. No school was held in the winter on account of the cold, and as it was usually warm enough at other

seasons to get along without more than an occasional fire, the heating arrangements answered every purpose.

Just in front of the door ran the road, where a place in the dust was kept smooth for a blackboard. The writing was done with sharply pointed sticks. Rains sometimes made it inconvenient to erase the work for a day or two, but as the earth hardened, the boys would loosen it, the sun would dry it, and then it was easily reduced to dust again. The abundant flat rocks were substituted for slates, and what boy or girl would use a slate pencil when there was an abundance of red and yellow keel to be had for the picking up?

The children had no schoolbooks, at least not in our understanding of the term, but Grandfather Hornbeak had brought a number of newspapers with him from Nashville, Tennessee, and these were placed at the disposal of the teacher. Being a woman of resource, she cut them in pieces and pasted letters, words, and even sentences on thin boards, thus providing every pupil with a "book" adapted to his years and attainments. Ink was prepared from the nutgalls that grew on the white oaks, and a turkey quill made an excellent pen.

Back of the schoolhouse the mountains rose bold and rocky, covered in places with heavy timber. About a hundred rods (1,650 feet) from the back of the building, in the side of the mountain, was a small cave, in which two black bears had their den. Their cubs used to come out and tumble and play by the hour in plain sight of the schoolhouse window; and the old bears even ventured to come down and eat the scraps of corn bread that were sometimes scattered about the door.

One day, when one of the old bears came down to the schoolhouse for something to eat, leaving her cubs sitting by the den to wait for their share, one of the cubs decided to follow her. The old bear did not see him until he was by her side, just under the window. With a growl, she caught him under one paw, and sitting down on her haunches, turned him over her knee and proceeded to give the surprised fellow such a spanking as no boy ever received. He howled and screamed for mercy, and when he was finally released, scampered

back to the den with all possible haste, whimpering and crying as he went, a wiser and more obedient cub. Needless to say, he remembered his lesson and never again followed his mother to the schoolhouse. Bears are proverbially cross when they have young, so the children were allowed to play only in the road in front of the door. Parents always accompanied the children to school in the morning and came for them at the close of the session. There were so many wild beasts in the woods that it was not safe for them to go back and forth by themselves.

Things ran on in this way for some time, the old bears growing more ferocious each year, until one spring it was decided that they must be caught. Accordingly, traps were set, and the old bears and two cubs were captured. The reader may wonder why this was not done sooner. The reason is simple enough. The people depended on bears and deer for meat, and it was not only a waste to kill an old bear, whose flesh was too strong to eat, but it lessened the number of cubs that would be raised in the vicinity every year. Game was not killed merely for sport in those days.

One of these captured bear cubs, Dick, was taken for a pet by my mother's father. It is Dick's life history I mean to tell, just as my mother, who was then a little girl, has often told it to me.

At first, Dick was sullen and refused to eat, and had to be kept chained to a tree in the yard. Here he amused himself by lying perfectly quiet beside his food until a cat or a chicken stole up to eat it; then he would suddenly slap the intruder over. Young bears, like sullen children, soon come to their appetite if left alone, and it was not long until Dick ate quite heartily enough to satisfy his owner, and grew fat and good-natured. He was soon very tame, and was allowed to run about at his own sweet will. Now began his fun and mischief-making. He had an enormous appetite, so naturally his first mischief was in stealing forbidden food. Cream and butter were his favorite dainties, but for some reason he could never understand, he was usually given only milk, which he drank simply for courtesy's sake and because he could do no better. But Dick, though only a young bear, was no fool.

Around the point of the hill, at some distance from the house, was a deep spring, and there had been built a log milk house, which was thought to be proof against all wild beasts. But Dick was no common bear. He had not been born and brought up in plain sight of the only schoolhouse in the country for nothing! In those days, doors were made to close and catch with a strong latch on the inside. A string was fastened to this latch and passed out through a hole in the door, so that by pulling the string one could lift the latch. All the doors in the house were locked simply by drawing the latchstrings inside. Dick delighted to come into the house and sleep on the hearth, but as he was often much in the way, this privilege was usually denied him. He was a keen observer, however, and soon learned to pull the latchstring himself and open the door at will.

One day when Dick was passing the milk house, he smelled the appetizing odor of fresh butter and milk and immediately set out to investigate. He walked around the house, inspecting every part. He climbed on the roof and tried to move the boards; he got down and examined the stream running from under the house to see if that offered a solution to the question he wished to solve. Finally, he found the door, and the rest was easy. Promptly raising himself on his haunches, he pulled the latchstring and opened the door. What a time he had then! No milk for him! He licked the thick cream from crock after crock, and then, to show how little he thought of skim milk, dumped it into the water. This was fun, but very mild amusement compared to what followed when he found the butter. When he was discovered, the butter jar was wiped clean, and he was so full he could scarcely waddle. Of course he was whipped, but though he howled so loudly that those who listened could not but believe his repentance was heartfelt, he repeated the experiment a night or two later. This time, however, he decided not to upset the milk, since stupid humans seemed to think it of so much value!

Thereafter, Dick's raids on the milk house continued until the latch was placed beyond his reach. Then he would watch till the door was left ajar, dash in, drink cream as fast as he could until discovered,

and when sure that he was seen, grab a crock of butter and run. But he had no use for salted butter; it seemed queer to him that anyone would spoil so delicious a luxury as fresh butter by mixing salt with it. However, he was seldom annoyed in this way, for all the salt used in those days was brought 150 miles by wagon over an unsettled mountain country.

Just after dark one evening, one of the girls went to the milk house to bring up milk and butter for supper. Dick was loitering about, as usual, watching for an opportunity to enter, when a panther came near. The coveted dainty instantly lost its charms for Dick in this unwelcome presence, and with more haste than dignity, he waddled off in the direction of the house, climbing to the top of the tallest tree in the yard. The girl, my aunt, was naturally frightened, but with the nerve and foresight of every girl born on the frontier, she went quietly on and finished getting her cream and butter even when the great beast jumped on the roof of the milk house. Coming out, she closed the door firmly and started up the hill.

It was an unpleasant moment. The great cat jumped over her head, lighting at her side, but she walked on as if nothing had happened. He followed, frisking about her, jumping over her, back and forth, even striking her in the face with his tail; but he did not harm her. As they neared the house, the great watchdog (a half-breed gray wolf) rushed out, and the panther fled up the nearest tree, which happened to be the one where the pet bear was hiding. Without a moment's hesitation, Dick tumbled out and down and scampered away to take refuge in another tree on the opposite side of the yard.

The thoroughly frightened girl rushed into the house and told her story, but the panther was not troubled till morning, the dog keeping guard about his tree. Panthers have an instinctive and unreasoning fear of dogs. The least puppy will tree a panther, and there he will stay till the dog goes away. In the morning the unwelcome visitor was shot, but was only wounded, and so made his escape to the woods. Dick acted as if mortally afraid of him, and never again ventured far into the forest where such animals run wild. Indeed, so great was his

fear that when he heard a panther scream far up the side of the mountain, he would come close to the house door and beg to be let in.

Another of Dick's failings was his love for fruits and vegetables. He would risk a whipping any day for the sake of a fragrant muskmelon or a juicy watermelon. A sound thrashing he counted a small price for the privilege of gorging himself on roasting ears. Indeed, it was difficult for the farmers to raise corn in those days, for the wild bears were almost sure to despoil the fields completely at roasting-ear time.

Grandfather Hornbeak kept bees, and it was a never-failing pleasure to Dick to tease and annoy them. He would sit at the side of the hives by the hour and strike and fight and kill the busy workers, all the time whining as if very much abused. However, if they ceased flying about him in interesting numbers, he would hit the hive smartly to stir them up again. Flowers were so plentiful and honey was so easy to get that the bees often built combs on the bottom and sides of their hives, but after Dick came to the farmyard to live, all this stopped. He kept the comb broken off close and the drops of sweetness licked clean, for there is nothing that a bear likes quite so well as honey. Wild bees sometimes built combs in the corners of the rail fences in the peach orchard, and it was Dick's delight to find and rob such a nest.

Honey was so plentiful that it was served with every meal, and the ever-watchful bear soon found this out. At mealtime he was always loitering about the door, and if the slightest opportunity offered itself as the table was being laid, he would grab the honey dish and waddle off with it. The womenfolk soon found that to follow him meant only that the dish would be broken—but if he were left alone he would lick it clean, bring it back, and set it carefully on the porch. It soon became evident that no amount of whipping would cure him of the honey habit; consequently, if he once got hold of the honey, he was left alone till he finished it—and usually afterward. The only thing was to keep the honey dish where he could not get it, and then see that he did not come into the house.

Near the farm ran Findley Creek, which Dick visited every day for a bath and a frolic. One of his keenest delights was to find a shallow place where he could make a regular loblolly of mud. Here he would play and roll and sleep for hours like a hog, but unlike a hog he always went into the water afterward and washed himself clean.

Hogs were few and far between in those days; the only way they could be raised at all was to keep them in a bear-proof pen. This was made by building a high pen of logs, with a roof of the same, slanting toward the middle. Thus an animal could get on top of the pen and drop in, but he could not get out again. This was exactly what the farmers wanted, as a bear is very careful not to kill anything where he cannot get away afterward.

One night, the spirit of mischief—or the spirit of pilfering—entered into Dick, and he decided that one of the week-old pigs in the pen was just what he wanted. The pen was near; it was no trick at all to climb in. But that was not the end of the story. The old sow was of that peculiar variety known as "razorback," an animal almost equal to the lion in a fight. But Dick cared nothing at all for that. He was not looking for a fight—just for a baby pig. So in he climbed and caught one.

In the morning, it was noticed that something unusual was going on in the pig pen. When Grandfather arrived at the center of the storm, Dick was sitting up in one corner with a little pig in his arms. He would sway back and forth, rocking it gently till it became quiet; then he would box its head or nibble its ear to make it squeal. Naturally enough, this proceeding worked the old sow up to a frenzy, and she would attack him, only to be slapped over as soon and as often as she came within range of his powerful paw. Every little while, appearing to see the hopelessness of the fight, she would retreat to her corner, and Dick would rock and lick the little pig as tenderly as if it were the dearest thing in the world. Then when all was quiet, he would slyly bite its ear again. When he was found and realized that the pig was to be taken from him, he was ready for a real fight. For a

while it looked as if he would have to be killed, but a whipping was all that was needed to straighten the matter out. Afterward he was taken to the house, where he sulked for a day or two, but he never climbed into the pig pen again.

There was another thing that gave Dick great delight for a time, but soon got him into trouble. The dogs in the neighborhood were trained to tree bears. This suited Dick very well since he knew just how to handle dogs. He would get several after him, running till they came close. Then he would turn around, plant his back against a tree, and slap them over as fast as they came near enough. This was great sport for Dick. He learned that he could manage any number of dogs if he could get his back against a tree.

But alas for pride! A bench-legged bulldog, with a consuming ambition to hunt bears, was brought into the neighborhood. Then Dick's troubles began in earnest. The other dogs were tall and easy to get at; but while Dick was boxing them, this little stranger would come up, seize him by the haunch, and there was no way to get rid of him but to climb a tree—not an easy thing to do with half a dozen dogs ready to grab him as soon as his back was turned. Nor could Dick remedy the matter, for the bulldog was so low that Dick could not easily reach him to box him over. Things became so uncomfortable for the bear that he ceased to encourage these hunting parties; indeed, he thereafter avoided all places that contained dogs.

With cats, it was different. Dick caught a cat every time he had a chance, stroking it, smoothing its fur, and making as much fuss over it as any girl—as long as it behaved. But if it dared to bite or scratch, he would spank it unmercifully. No matter how much it snarled and spit and scratched, he would not let it go until it quieted down and allowed him to play with it. Often that meant that it was dead. The cats soon came to know and avoid him—all but the household pet, who learned that Dick did not mean her any harm and enjoyed having him stroke and play with her.

Toward fall, a strange feeling came over Dick. One day he stood by one of his favorite trees, and putting his arms around it as if

preparing to climb, began scratching and biting and tearing the bark as high as he could reach until his mouth frothed, and he became exhausted. Thus, perhaps unknowingly, he posted a sign to everyone of his own tribe who might pass that way that there was a male bear in the neighborhood—and informed them just how tall he was and hence how powerful in battle he was likely to be. For a time, he repeated this often. But as no other bears came near the house, he gradually ceased these demonstrations and did not renew them till the same season next year. Later, when he was installed as head of Grandfather Farrer's bear ranch, he would fly into a tremendous rage if he happened to find a similar mark made by one of his own cubs.

There was one trick of his youth that Dick never forgot, and that was how to catch chickens, but in his old age he ate them as well. Taking something the chickens liked to eat, he would go where they were likely to gather, taking good care that the chosen spot was out of sight of the house. Then Dick would place his bait, sit down near it, and pretend to go to sleep—all but his eyes, which the chickens were too stupid to watch. I am told that a wild chicken is a very wise and wary bird, but long generations of domestication have certainly taken all this out of our barnyard fowls, till they are as stupid as any creature I know. Dick would sit still as a stump till a hen came within range of his paw. One slap was enough to ensure his dinner, for he never missed. When he had eaten all he wished, he would go off innocently about his business.

Just so, a wild bear on the mountain ranges learns to kill cattle. Going out in plain sight of a herd and in such a way that the wind blows from him toward them, he will stand straight up on his haunches. Of course the cattle run, but when they notice that he does not follow them, they circle about and come back nearer and nearer to see what it all means. Closer and yet closer they come, smelling and sniffing. Presently one will leave the herd and steal up within range. Then the hitherto statue hurls his thunderbolt of a paw at its jaw, and the cowboys tell me that they have never known one to escape after it has once been slapped. Of course, the rest of the cattle

run when this happens and leave the bear to finish his victim in peace.

Whenever Dick got into too much mischief, he was whipped—sometimes quite severely. It did not take him long to learn which of his offenses brought punishment, and when he was discovered in some forbidden prank, he would run and climb to the top of a tall blackjack tree that stood in the yard. Here he was reasonably secure, as no amount of shaking would dislodge him. There was only one way to get him down—to pelt him with rocks. When this was begun, he would whine and try to hide, but finally he would slide down to take his punishment with what grace he could muster.

There was one strictly forbidden thing that Dick particularly enjoyed—taking care of the baby. He would rock the cradle, lick the baby, and manifest his pleasure in it in every way he knew, but he was altogether too fond of putting into practice the old saying about not sparing the rod. Sometimes he would decide to spank the baby, and spank it he would, despite all protests.

Grandfather Farrer had a bear ranch. That was not what he called it, but that is what it would be called now. It consisted of a large enclosure or pen, where he raised bears to kill for meat. In this way he not only had all the bear meat he wished for his own use, but sold both bear bacon and bear lard. Dick was installed as the head of this family living in the enclosure. The mother bears and their cubs were allowed to run loose in the pen, but as Dick grew older, he became so vicious that he was kept chained. He could go in and out of his own log house at will, but no farther.

These bears were a great attraction to the children, even in this wild country, and whenever the neighbors came to the house to visit, the children always flocked out to watch the bears at play. But at last Dick grew so ill-natured that they were forbidden to enter the pen.

One well-remembered day Grandmother Hornbeak made a visit to the Farrer house. While the women were busy in one room, the baby slept in a cradle in another. It was a warm day, and the door stood open. Dick had been restless all day. Finally he slipped his chain, and unseen by anyone, went straight to the house, entered the room where the baby was sleeping, and carried it off. Had he been a wise bear, according to bear standards of wisdom, he would have gone to the woods; instead, he took the baby to his house in the bear pen, and going to the corner farthest from the door, sat up on his haunches to rock it. Just how long he held it, no one knows, but the baby finally awakened and began to cry. Grandmother Hornbeak heard the child crying; that was the first she had missed the baby.

You can imagine how frightened they all were when it was known that Dick—who had grown so cross that it was hardly safe for a man to come too close—had stolen the baby. The men were summoned from the field, and as soon as Dick saw them, he began to growl. The poor baby was frightened, too, as well it might be, and began crying afresh at the top of its voice. Then the bear swayed back and forth, rocking it, licking its face, and apparently trying to soothe it. He seemed to understand that the men would try harder to get the child if it cried.

For several hours they coaxed and threatened and did everything they could think of—all to no avail. Finally, the baby fell asleep. Dick held it as gently as he could and acted as if afraid of awakening it. Grandfather Farrer proposed shooting Dick, but the others would not hear of that. They thought it would mean almost certain death to the little one. Finally, they went to the deer park (Grandfather Farrer raised deer as well as bears) and brought a little fawn, which they tied as far from the bear's house as they could and yet have it in plain sight at the same time.

At first, Dick paid no attention to the fawn, but finally he laid the sleeping babe carefully down and ran to get the little deer. Then the men quickly jumped through the window into Dick's house and picked up the child. Dick was greatly enraged when he saw the trick that had been played on him, and even after he had partly quieted down, he had to be whipped.

A few nights later, Dick got loose again; and though it almost staggers belief, yet it is actually true that he went a mile and a half, pulled the latchstring, entered the Hornbeak cabin, stole the same babe out of its sleeping mother's arms, and carried it to his den. The parents were frantic when they found that the child was gone. And you may well imagine that when they learned in whose care it was, they did not feel greatly relieved. Dick was furious this time when discovered. But the child was finally rescued once more, and after that Dick did not get loose again.

Finally, Dick did a terrible thing, and had to be put down. But he had lived a long time, and had been in many ways, a remarkable member of the bear family. It was his misfortune that he was judged by human standards, standards his bear mind found impossible to understand.

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"Dick, the Babysitting Bear," by Floyd Bralliar. Included in Bralliar's book, Elo the Eagle and Other Stories *(Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1947). Reprinted by permission of Joe Wheeler (P.O. Box 1246, Conifer, CO 80433) and Review and Herald® Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD 20740. Floyd Bralliar wrote around the turn of the twentieth century.*