

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

377

Dearest grandchild,

Jesus said: **“The poor you will always have with you” (Matt. 26:11)**. Of course, Jesus was right! After all those years, there are lots of poor people in the world. In my limited travels I have been places where a man can work hard seven days a week and never earn enough money to buy a bicycle. It is a godly thing to work. In fact, the Scriptures teach that if a man doesn't work, neither should he eat (2 Thess. 3:10). There is, however, a constant danger that in the course of working to buy food, we give money a priority over God. Jesus said: **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life” (Jn. 6:27)**. It is impossible to worship both God and money (Matt. 6:24). That's why Paul warned Timothy: **“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Tim. 6:6-10)**.

While God is the ultimate Judge, today's letter will deal with someone who seems to have worshipped money. Her name was Hetty Green (Nov. 21, 1834 – July 3, 1916). She was known as the “Witch of Wall Street”, and is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the “World's Greatest Miser”. She died of apoplexy at the age of 81 arguing with her maid about the virtues of skimmed milk. At the time of her death she was not only the richest woman in America, but also the richest woman in the world. Arthur H. Lewis tells the story of her pathetic life in his book “The Day They Shook the Plum Tree”.

Her fabulous fortune began in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1624 with one black cow. Over the next 200 years the wealth of her frugal family had grown to a six million dollar estate. Hetty inherited this fortune from her father, “Black Hawk” Robinson. Her father was a miser too and instructed her “Never owe anyone anything, not even a kindness”. Apparently, she followed his advice. Making money thus became the driving passion of her life. By the age of 6 she would sit on her father's lap and read the business news and stock market report. By the age of 15 she knew more about stocks and bonds than almost any man on Wall Street.

On July 11, 1867, at the age of 33, she married a millionaire named Edward Henry Green. Before their wedding, however, she made him renounce all rights to her money. When her Aunt Sylvia died she left a million dollars to Hetty and a million dollars to charity. Hetty forged her deceased aunt's signature in a failed attempt to inherit it all. Henry and Hetty fled to England to avoid prosecution. They separated in 1885 but never got a divorce. Two children were born to this union, Ned, and Sylvia.

Here are a few insights that earned Hetty the “honor” of being the world's greatest miser. She was said to have only owned one dress and one set of underwear. She didn't buy others until these were worn out. She apparently found it easier to make a million dollars than take a bath. She kept her apartment cold and didn't use hot water. She once spent half the night searching for a lost 2 cent postage stamp. She spent the last 20 years of her life with a painful hernia because she refused to spend \$150 on the surgery. She held the hernia in with a stick that was bound to her body by rags. She is reported to have eaten her oatmeal, eggs, and onions cold to save on the fuel bill. When her son Ned

had an infected leg she spent so much time searching for a free medical clinic that the leg had to be amputated. Her lawyers had to sue her in order to be paid. Etc.

Upon her death her vast estate was divided between her two children. Her one legged son, "Col. Ned" (6'4" & 300 lbs.) spent \$3,000,000 a year on "yachts, coin collections, stamps, diamond studded chastity belts, female teen-age 'wards', pornography, and Texas politics.

Her daughter, Sylvia kept \$31,000,000 in a bank account that paid no interest. Dan Chicko, was a hard working Italian laborer who worked as her gardener for 34 years. During all those years Sylvia only spoke to him twice. Once because he was late to work and she docked him 40 cents which was an hour's wage. The other time she spoke to him was to tell him to keep his daughter off her premises because she didn't like children. She had one book keeper who kept track of her millions. He was hired in 1915 and reached his peak pay in 1945 when his wages were increased to \$75 a week. He sat like Scrooge's Bob Cratchet on a high stool in a dismal room overlooking the cemetery.

Her son Ned died of heart disease in 1936. According to his wishes his amputated leg was dug up and buried with him. His widow and her sister fought over his estate which was estimated at \$44,384,500. Four states where Ned had lived also fought over \$6,000,000 in property taxes. Sylvia died in 1951. Her will was found stuffed in a tin cabinet along with four bars of soap. She bequeathed \$5,000 to a cousin who was her closest genetic relative. The court raised this amount to \$140,000 during probate. The rest of her vast estate was divided among 63 charities and educational institutions.

From 1624 to 1951 is 327 years. Hetty Green's family had obsessed with making money for many generations but in 1951 the plum tree was shaken and the fruit finally fell to the ground.

How much better and happier was the Apostle Paul. During the three years he spent in Ephesus he not only supported himself, but his whole evangelistic team. Here are his parting words to the elders at Ephesus: **“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'”** (Acts 20:32-35).

When Paul was executed by the Emperor Nero, apparently the only things he "owned" were his clothing, a cloak, and a few scrolls and parchments (2 Tim. 4:9-13). A question frequently asked at funerals is: "How much did he leave?". The answer, of course, is the same for Paul as it was for Hetty Green. He left everything! This is also precisely what every one of us will leave too!

Amos offered this inspired advice to ancient Israel: **“Prepare to meet your God”** (Amos 4:12). That's also good advice for us!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce

