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Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel, and Why Not Every Man?

NOTE: THIS NARRATIVE RECAPITULATES events which took place in the course of a meeting of the Nova Scotia African Baptist Association held in Weymouth Falls in the year 1883. During this meeting the Reverend F. Randolph Langford, in a moment of inspired oratory, urged members of disparate factions to resolve the differences which had divided the Association for thirteen years. Peace was restored.

Of all the doctrines spread throughout Nova Scotia by itinerant preachers in the early 1800s—and this included the Anglican, the Methodist and the African Baptist—that of the African Baptists appealed most widely to the Africadians. It was perhaps because the Baptists drew on a liturgy with roots in the southern American states familiar to many of the Africadian settlers. But it was also due to the efforts of Reverend Richard Preston, a great Africadian abolitionist, orator and champion of the African Baptists in Nova Scotia. For Richard Preston, the gospel was the language of freedom as much as the language of salvation. The two were inseparable. It was Richard Preston who, after travelling and preaching among Africadian communities for some twenty years, founded the Nova Scotia African Baptist Association as a formal church body in 1854. Through this Association, the isolated settlements found a common meeting ground. For the first time since the two phases of migration and dispersal in Nova Scotia in 1787 and 1812, Africadian settlements in Nova Scotia spoke with a voice greater than that of a single cluster of backwoods families. Tragically, Richard Preston died only seven years after creating the Association; the year was 1861, and in the wake of his death, two headstrong men made conflicting claims for leadership of the Association. By 1870 the Association was split in two rival factions. This narrative joins the history of the

Association thirteen years later at the moment of its re-unification, during the memorable meetings in Weymouth Falls in the autumn of 1883.

The minutes of the African Baptist meetings for the year 1883 report on the events of those memorable three days in Weymouth Falls. The minutes come to us in the stern and bare outline which Mr. Peter McKerrow used for many years to archive the proceedings, and they set the stage for this reconstruction. Notable personalities are then brought onto the stage. Sister Langford is the most elusive since she was an old woman at the time and living memories of her are fading, so I am obliged in this account to rely on church records where there is reference to her strong character. F. Randolph Langford is a different matter because he was a fiery young man in 1883 and, at the time of my research, a number of elder residents, including his grandchildren, recalled stories of him and others of his generation. He was the uncle of Sam Langford, the boxing legend.

By returning to the minutes themselves, from 1854 to the 1900s, one can reconstruct the history of the church from its founding through its tribulations to the present, and in these minutes one learns the language of the church. All of this is then placed inside what researchers have already described, notably James W. St.G. Walker and Robin Winks. It remains to fill in details drawing on such treasures of the past as the hymnal compiled by F. Randolph Langford himself, which is kept in the Black Cultural Centre, the remarkable history of the church written by Pearleen Oliver, and many others.

This historical account may be somewhat more 'conjectural' than others. Whole sermons are written here when only the title was available in the minutes. Hymns were selected from F. Randolph Langford's hymnal without any assurance that this particular hymn was sung on a particular night. The church now overlooking the Sissiboo River is not the one standing in 1883, but there are enough fond memories of the old church to reconstruct parts of it for this account. We do not know for sure that F. Randolph Langford was out drinking the night before the reunification meeting, but we do know about his fondness for drink, his renown in calling the French eights and his zealous participation in the church temperance committee.

A CROWD GATHERED ON THE GRASS around the simple wood-frame church on the crest of the tallest among the hills strung along the south side of the Sissiboo River. In this late summer afternoon, the church glistened in the sun's rays late into the evening long after the light turned to shadows in the hollow. The church timbers were rough-hewn, beams and joints and rafters were squared with a broad axe and fitted together with wooden pegs. The outside planking came from Sabean's gang mill in New Tusket, where the up-and-down jigsaws spit out boards wide at one end and narrow at the other, and when the sun hit the siding head-on from the horizon, the slanting lines of the odd-shaped boards shone through the heavy whitewash spread.

It was the last Saturday in September of 1883 on the opening day of the thirty-first annual convention of the Nova Scotia African Baptist Association. The Association met each year at one of the member churches, one year in Preston or Hammonds Plains, now Weymouth Falls. Next year Digby Joggins. The crowd on the crest of the hill were the delegates, the ministers, the parishioners and their families gathered for the first of the sessions on Saturday afternoon. There would be services and discussions for each of three days—Sunday, then Monday, and, glory be if hearts were glad and they sang in unison, they would stay into Tuesday.

Families from churches in the west of the province, up and down the South Shore, hitched teams to their wagons loaded with children and large jugs of water and plodded down back country roads. Two families had already come from Bear River, two from Yarmouth and Brother Pomp had driven two days and a half to make the trip from Granville Ferry. Delegates from churches in Halifax and Dartmouth took the night train and arrived in the morning at the station in Weymouth where Weymouth Falls hosts met them in buggies and drove the six miles back from the town to the Weymouth Falls church on the hill. Reverend Bailey from Hammonds Plains had put his whole family and a side of salt pork on the train. The dignified Reverend H. H. Johnson from the Cornwallis Street church in Halifax arrived with a trunk full of clothes. He was a new man, untainted by the past, and as pastor of the African Baptist mother church in Halifax his word carried weight, the better to fill these fine clothes. Reverend George Neale came from Third Preston and the Reverend and Mrs. Carvery from First Preston. By four

o'clock in the afternoon, the delegates' families had visited the homes of hosts where they would stay; they freshened up and converged on the hill.

Association Secretary Peter McKerrow, a sweet balding man with stern sad eyes, set foot for the first time in Weymouth Falls on this day; and as he waited on the hill for the meeting to begin he exclaimed *what beauty, a gift from the Lord, this land that rose and fell with the river*. Secretary McKerrow could turn a wizard's phrase. Reverend F. Randolph Langford walked through the crowd on the hill shaking hands, greeting brothers and sisters. Welcome. Praise God. Weymouth Falls was his home. Yes, Brother Carvery, the Lord is with us, look at this crowd.

There were more delegates, more families, more children and friends than any had seen in the past thirteen years. A new day would dawn as this day set over the Sissiboo because all the churches this year, after so many years, had sent delegations to the presentation of letters, and should the Lord guide their hands to inscribe the names of their churches on the ledger of the Association, there would be peace once again among the African Baptists.

Reverend F. Randolph Langford preached in this church. He had also preached in a half dozen other churches in the west of the province, and in the last few years his reputation had grown, from back-country Weymouth Falls licentiate and evangelist to ordained Reverend renowned for his faith and his sermons. His wife, Eliza, and their children served sweet cakes and water from the back of their wagon. Reverend Langford looked around. He conferred with his cousin, Deacon Tom Langford, the pillar and strength of the Weymouth Falls church, and they agreed. Time to begin. Brother Timothy Pleasant stood at the church door and he agreed. Deacon Tom Langford and Reverend F. Randolph Langford ushered the delegates into the church and when all were inside, Brother Pleasant softly brought the door to.

The women sat outside quietly, close to the church, and listened. They heard the men's voices, strong voices, sing the opening hymn, and the deep voice of Reverend Johnson call upon Reverend Cogswell to invoke divine blessing on the session. They heard the Moderator, Reverend H. H. Johnson, call for the reports of committees, and, finally, they heard Deacon Tom Langford convene the Committee to Examine the Letters From Churches. The men spoke in low voices. Meanwhile, the crowd outside grew with new arrivals. The voices of friends and the shrill cries of girls who

had married and gone to live far from home became louder, until the women listening against the church wall could hear no more. More buggies and drays drove in from the port town of Weymouth, swelling the crowd by evening to more than twice its afternoon's size, the voices outside blurring what little the women—strain as they would—could hear of the meeting inside.

Two hours passed. When the last golden rays of the day beamed straight at the door, it opened. Brother Pleasant and Deacon Tom Langford came out first, blinking their eyes. Then Reverend Carvery, Reverend Cogswell, Brother Johnson followed by Mr. Secretary Peter McKerrow, Reverend Bailey and the dignified Reverend H. H. Johnson. The women turned to see if an outcome could be read in their faces, but the faces were stern, unchanged; they were the faces of men who harboured hard feelings, whose hearts needed more time to soften.

An old man on a cane came out of the crowd to greet Reverend Johnson. It was Deacon James Langford. He had been nearly sixty years old when the great Father Preston had formed Weymouth Falls church thirty years before in 1853. His brother John and cousin Charles Langford had been there too, the first African Baptists in Weymouth Falls. Charles, then John, had gone to their eternal reward, but James lived on with the fierce Christian resolve still wide in his eyes. He still testified, he still prayed for the brothers and sisters when they asked him to pray, and this day he had walked with his cane up the hill, and when Reverend H. H. Johnson stepped out in the sun, the old Deacon seized Reverend Johnson by the arm.

Have they given the letters?

Reverend Johnson said sadly in his soft Virginia voice, No, not today.

James Langford's father was Grandfather James Langford Senior, the first Africadian to settle in the upper reaches of the Sissiboo. During the American War of Independence, when the British sought to undermine the southern economy by granting freedom and land to those slaves who would muster the courage to run from their masters, Grandfather Langford ran. From Virginia across the low Piedmont Plains, sleeping in barns, to Charleston with his young wife, they ran for their freedom. Toward the end of the war, the British transported those slaves enticed by their promise to Port

Roseway, Nova Scotia. Port Roseway—now Shelburne—received nearly 3,000 Afro-Americans between 1783 and 1785, among them the soldier, Stephen Blucke, the teacher Blind Moses Wilkenson and David George, the extraordinary preacher who had escaped slavery and hid out among Indians before seeking asylum with the British.

Their stay in Shelburne was brief. White persecution forced almost all of the immigrant Afro-Americans to leave within five years. They went family by family, homesteading on land located up-river from small coastal towns with names such as Digby Joggins, Tracadie, Horton and Granville, Waverly, and Greenwood up from Yarmouth. James Langford and his wife, then pregnant with their first child, settled up the Sissiboo River northeast of Weymouth on the coast, virtually alone among dispossessed Acadians and the occasional native band. They had their freedom, if freedom it could be called, to grow barely enough food in a land where there was more rock than soil. Some would leave Nova Scotia for Sierra Leone in the great exodus of 1792, but many were too poor, too tired, or too removed from the larger towns to hear of the return voyage to their native continent. Those who stayed settled like so many tiny solitudes, two families here, three families there, in separate micro-communities flung apart from each other, surviving in the woods.

One generation passed, then another. Grandfather Langford and his wife raised three sons, James, Charles and John, and each married and had children of his own. Charles married into the Cromwells who had settled farther up-river; her name was Susan (known later as Sister Langford) and she bore three sons, the last of whom was F. Randolph Langford. The lives of these Africadians, scattered from one end of the province to the other, changed very little in two generations; their families grew modestly according to their provisions and only on the rarest of occasions did one community meet with another.

All of this changed in 1854 when Father Richard Preston founded the African Baptist Association.

Father Richard Preston, the renowned abolitionist and orator, led the young Association during its first two decades from a motley dispersion of families to a strong confederacy of churches. The effect was incalculable. The African Baptist Association gave unity where there had been diaspora, and spiritual and social salvation where there had only been a dark horizon. Father Preston died prematurely in the summer of 1861, and after his death there

was no successor. Instead, two headstrong men vied for power in the young Association, and the animosity between them split the Association into two factions. For thirteen years, between 1870 and 1883, the factions met separately, cast aspersions one against another, and betrayed the spirit of unity Father Preston had forged for them.

In 1883, F. Randolph Langford was thirty years old, nearly the same age as the Association itself, and like Father Preston with his quick wit and his broad shoulders and long arms, he resolved to bring unity to the confederacy of two dozen churches and over one thousand African Baptist parishioners. It would take a miracle of diplomacy and oratory to mend the Association, but F. Randolph Langford believed in miracles. He had preached in all the churches of the Association of both factions; he had a fierce will and believed fervently in the power of God. And he had gone from church to church in the summer of 1883, announcing the meeting in Weymouth Falls, taking the deacons from one church and another by the arm to say it was time, time to bring the Association together again, time to mend the rift which divided it.

F. Randolph Langford was a great man, though probably not a good one, for he was too strong-headed to be good. He made up his mind once to clear his land of the boulders which spoiled the fields for anything except growing potatoes. The Reverend Langford wanted to grow straight lines of corn. It took him years with his horse and a wagon and levers of wood, and when the big rocks wouldn't budge he banged on them with the butt-end of big iron axes till they burst in half; he would then lug them off to the side of the field for his fences. People would come by his field and stare at him picking up stones day after day, year after year, shaking their heads at the way he worked, working his boys and his girls as hard as he worked, digging up stones, hollering at them, working them till their fingers bled and they ran away crying.

Nowadays parents, talking about F. Randolph Langford and how he worked his girls, tell kids how good their life is. They tell them: Go look at those fences, snaking off through the fields, back behind where Mel Langford used to live, and go pick up one of those stones off the fences and carry it home and tell me you ain't got it good.

Some days he would be fine. He would be down at his mother's planting her beans or visiting the sick. Other days he'd be

rough with his boys, and even worse with his girls and his wife Eliza, and nobody said much because men in those days were rough, but there was the deviltry in him. You couldn't talk to him. Sometimes he would be off in his barn for days and days, sleeping there, and no one could get near him. One time it seemed he had shut himself in there for good. He had killed a sheep and had the skin drying on the side of the barn, and he was inside banging away. You could hear him hollering inside; some say he was talking to God, and then he'd stomp out the door and look up at the sky.

He was a strong man like most of the Langfords, strong in his arms, and his chest round like a barrel, legs sturdy as fence posts. In church he was all arms; one minute waving those big heavy things about like a dancing man caught in a fan, the next minute clutching his arms to his chest, then he'd fling them out in a way you'd think they'd pop off. In his barn all this time, he had got the idea that strong as he was, with big heavy arms, he would fly with the Lord's help to heaven.

He was making himself a pair of wings. Eliza did not dare say a word. He stretched the sheepskin pieces across a thin lattice-work of hackmatack wood laced together with thong, and onto this lattice he bound the wings from his upper arms to his hands with large straps out of cowhide. He buzzed around outside the barn muttering, whooshing his wings in the air, sweating profusely.

Cowering behind the window for fear he would see them and whip them for knowing his secret, Eliza and the children watched him from the house. She finally threw her apron to the floor, bravely flung open the back door, and rushed to the barn.

You'll kill yourself, please.

The Lord's voice is come unto me as unto Moses, and he bore him unto him on eagles' wings.

Too many times she had heard Randolph quote out loud to himself from that cursed Exodus 19, how God spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai and called him to the mountain ON EAGLES' WINGS.

You'll kill yourself, fool. You won't get off the ground.

Randolph hollered at her and whooshed his wings at her, took sticks and poked them at her until she backed off, away from the barn to the house. He held his wings out over his head like a monster from hell, unshaven and clothes torn, eyes red from no sleep, a twitch in his neck.

Wings of glory, he said.

He climbed to the top of his barn, dragging his wings on the ladder behind him where he strapped the thongs tight one last time to his arms and, holding his breath deep in his chest, he beat his wings until he literally rose on his toes off the peak of the roof, and maybe he rose upward for a split second with the wind under his wings before, thrashing his arms, he fell like a rag doll out of the sky brutally onto a pile of rocks.

Eliza came running.

She found him struggling to rise, his wings hanging limp over splinters of wood.

To this day Randolph lives as a man who took him a mind to fly up to heaven on sheepskin rags. That's Randolph. Any man acting foolish, doing things that don't make any sense, the older women in Weymouth Falls still say, that's Randolph. And yet he was a man who once thought he could fly, a man beyond the constraints which hold back ordinary men, a man with a vision, and in 1883, a man to step into the breach that had rent the African Baptists in two.

Within five years of Randolph's return to the church at Salmon River, he was ordained. He rarely preached in his home town of Weymouth Falls; perhaps they knew him too well. Instead he travelled from town to town, working revivals, delivering omens and oracles. He could be a tyrant, a prophet, a devil, a messenger, the watchman at the gate between heaven and the small churches along the South Shore, he could build temples of God and tear them asunder. By 1873 the split had begun to sink deep in the bones of the Association like a hairline fracture that refuses to heal and insistently spreads, cleaving an abyss between the two sides.

On Tuesday, the last day of the meetings, the wounds still had not healed. Randolph's mother, Sister Langford, took a spell mid-day during Bible study at the church, and word of her illness spread through the households in Weymouth Falls, where guests were preparing their bundles to return to their homes by the afternoon train.

She had fallen in a clump on the floor as if she were dead, and her eyes went up in her head. There was a great commotion. Give her air. A woman offered her fan to Peter McKerrow, who fanned vigorously at her face while onlookers gazed expectantly.

Sister Langford could not pass away, not now with the Association on the verge of reunion and she such a figure, their lifeblood. He fanned more, and she still did not stir. Her face was the colour of dry ash. Where was Randolph? Where is that Randolph? Someone go fetch him off the road.

There was no Randolph anywhere. Howard, her grandson, rushed to her side, picked her up wholesale and carried her out to the grass. Someone rushed into town for the compounder, and someone else jogged down the hill to a house in search of Epsom Salts. Not once did Sister Langford stir, and all the while the church emptied onto the yard and the elders tried to keep people away to give her some air.

The air is too close around, please.

A few men and young boys came up from the road to see the disturbance, and found the church elders gathered around Sister Langford. Howard Langford had resumed work with the fan. Some of the ladies had made their way to the inside of the circle, while churchgoers spread around her body and listened to Reverend Drayton as he offered a prayer for Sister Langford, that the Lord heal her and care for her as he had healed and cared for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. The Lord spared them, not one hair was singed. How strong they were in their faith. Sister Langford too had been strong in her faith. Bob Langford made his way through the crowd.

Bob was like a brother to Randolph. He was a seaman, swore like a seaman, drank like a seaman and fought like a seaman, and never cared for the church. Bob was shocked to find Auntie Susan Langford lying half dead on the ground.

What's wrong with her?

What's wrong with you? Can't you see she's half-dying? said someone indignant.

Where's Papa? Howard asked Bob.

We was up to William Cromwell's last night and I ain't seen him since.

Reverend Carvery was indignant. What were all of you doing up to William Cromwell's?

Bob said Alex Langford was calling French eights. Everybody knew Alex Langford could call the French eights best of anyone back in the Falls, and he could step-dance too like a man that ran rivers, walking on booms, and they also knew there must have been drinking because Alex Langford liked drinking. The men still

smelled of juniper beer. This was too much for Reverend Carvery. These men drinking with Randolph among them, and the Reverend F. Randolph Langford the chair of the church temperance committee.

Tensions mounted.

The Deacons decided there would be one more service after dinner. That evening, the church was full when Reverend George Carvery opened the meeting with a prayer.

Reverend Langford walked to the front to speak.

That's as quiet as we are going to get tonight, for we are going to praise the Lord the way we know how to praise Him, which is shout, if you got to shout then shout, thank you Brother Yowbanks, thank you Sister Robarts for shouting tonight, and let the Lord hear you. I can see there ain't hardly enough places for you to sit, but don't worry about that because if you're gonna shout you got to be standing. There's too much business for us to be settin'. This meeting is not over yet. There's not enough time in a good life for praising the Lord like we ought to praise Him, and there's not enough room in this church for all you people to praise Him and his great works sitting down. There's not enough notes in a scale to sing his praises, there's not enough time in this life to do all for the Lord we can do. We got business and we ain't done yet.

Hear the words of the Lord, Matthew 10.13: For he that endureth to the end shall be saved. I don't see nobody leaving just yet. Let us endure and let us be saved, Holy Jesus.

Where are you going to put your burden when it gets too big? Where is your refuge? Praise the Lord. The ninth Psalm says that the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And the twenty-second Psalm also says God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble and we will fear not though the earth be moved and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, Selah.

Selah, responded the congregation. The crowd began to move.

Suddenly, like a spectre from a tomb, a small figure appeared at the door holding onto the arm of her grandson Howard.

Angel of mercy, Randolph gasped when he saw Sister Langford, who was pale beyond white into grey, and her hand

shaking crooked around young Howard's arm. Randolph seized the edge of the podium to steady himself before rushing to take his mother's frail hand. A commotion welled up from the crowd. Sister Langford, we feared you was dead. Oh, Sister Langford, come on. And some members shouted for joy.

She wept at the welcome; a small white flowered hanky came out from under her sleeve, touching both eyes as she cried; her strength nearly gone. These were tears of surrender, and yet, for the crowd seeing her, these were tears of great strength. A dying woman risen from the bed. The courage of this woman lying half-dead in her house, to raise herself up for the evening service, and there she stood at the door, ageless, angelic, and no chair to sit on. The good Reverend Bailey rose and held forth his chair.

Since everyone was standing, Randolph raised up his small hymnal calling out the name of a hymn and everyone sang "The Gospel Train."

The Gospel Train is coming,
I hear it just at hand
I hear the car wheels moving
And rumbling through the land.

Get on board children
Get on board children
For there's room for many more.

As the hymn concluded, Father Bailey, still standing, said he felt blessed, that the blessing filled him with the glory of God, and he danced and stamped his feet. Everyone stamped their feet and clapped their hands. There were not many dry eyes, and when the clapping died down, he asked the Lord to keep Sister Langford safe and to strengthen her if it please the living God.

At that moment, to everyone's surprise, Sister Langford rose from her chair and went straight to the front of the church, and as she did, a sacred hush fell over the congregation.

Don't waste your prayers on me, Brother Bailey, I'm 'bout gone. I don't want to hear nobody hollering and moaning because I'm going to my reward, and nobody but Jesus knows what he's got ready for me. I hope it's easier with the Lord than it is here, because here what I seen ain't been easy and I ain't got the strength to keep this up. First thing I'm going to do when I get upstairs is sleep.

Sister Langford wiped her eyes and her mouth.

We've done buried too many God's people right here in this church. We buried this whole Association here a few years ago, and now it's trying to get reborn. There was one winter, some years ago, when they nearly had to bury me, I was so scared and running from everything; and just like Father Preston told me, the Lord came unto me and showed me I was ready for him, and I got reborn the next time that Father Preston come around. He done that for most of you people in this room, but all you young people can't remember back that far. I can remember, and I can tell you that man saved my life, and when he saved my life in that river he brought out from me this young man over there (she pointed to Randolph) who's grown enough now for the Lord to guide him right to where Father Preston left off. Father Preston died. I remember like it was yesterday, right here in this little church that me and a whole lot of them Langfords in this room helped build and, time it was ready for the Association and everything all white-washed and clean, Father Preston died on us. Standing right where I'm standing, Father Jackson and Father Thomas and Father Smithers stood right where all us is standing, casting bread on the water, praising the Lord, and all the while some of them was scheming to take this church away, having it for their own. I was sitting right there where you're sitting Miss Betty Baker, 'bout mid-half down listening, and they was saying all what they would do for this church, when what they wanted was take it and put it in the back pocket. You take any living creature and tie it up for all your own, and this living creature's going to die; and sure enough, it did die, and not too long after fell away in pieces like a bag of bones on a leash, right here in this spot, when two of our reverends rose up with angry words. Hard words'll kill anything. And all them years that passed in between, Lord, it seemed like all them coloured folks live up to Dartmouth and Granville Mountain that they call these days Fundy Section and Yarmouth and Bear River would never be together, all for them preachers wanting to have this Association all for themselves. This Association is where the Lord out of Africa uses all us coloured folk good, and would have all us folks together like Father Preston said, and I remember him saying it like it was this morning, Dwell Together in Union. Bear in mind, he would say, divided you fall, united you stand.

They's been enough dying in this place. If the Lord sees fit, I'll be leaving soon; I'm 'bout done with my fight and the good

Lord knows I tried to keep my faith strong. I ain't asking nobody's pardon. I ain't asking nobody for to hold my hand and tend me day and night. Let me be when time comes to meet Him, for I can't do nobody no good. Come on, death. Take me if you want me. I'm ready. What I am asking you is tend what can do you good, what is bigger than any tired old Sister dried up and shaking, tend what heals you, tend what brings you happiness and brings you the Lord and brings you together and brings you strength to withstand a world what wants you in chains. Tend this African Baptist Association. Tend it with all the care you got, because it's all you got to care for you.

Sister Langford dabbed her eyes. She sat down. Hallelujah, shouted brother Yowbanks from Massachusetts. Yes, Yes, Yes, said Father Neale, nearly in tears as he approached Sister Langford, gently clasping her in his arms, moving her gently around as some members clapped, some members clasped each others' hands and raised them high in the air. They sang once again the chorus of "The Gospel Train":

Get on board children,
Get on board children
For there's room for many more.

And while they sang, Randolph made his way slowly to the centre of the platform and put the little pulpit aside. A few of the men and women continued to hum quietly as Randolph said:

I want to talk to you about Daniel.

You might say to me, Brother Randolph, Daniel lived back in the land of Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar was king, and we don't even know when it was or if it was the way they say it was. We don't know if they even wore shoes or what they wore on their feet or what kind of writing they did or if they did any. You might ask me, what do I care about that Daniel or those things that happened out of that book? Listen to me. This book ain't no different than the way things is today. Our people been down like the people of Daniel in Babylon been down. We got powerful men today wanting us to do whatever they say, like Nebuchadnezzar telling Daniel do this and do that and setting traps for Daniel like they set traps for our people. You heard Brother Preston tell us about them times when our people first settle here, they promise them land, they promise them freedom, they promise them jobs. Our people

come up here. We believe them. We believe what they say about land and about freedom, and when they got here they give them nothing. There wasn't no land, and if they did give them land, they never give it outright. If they did give them freedom, they never had nothing to eat; and what's freedom with out something to eat? What's freedom without jobs?

C'mon Brother Randolph.

What's freedom without land?

C'mon.

What's freedom without a table to eat it off of?

Hallelujah.

What's freedom without shoes? I mean they didn't even have shoes. That's our people. But that's Daniel there too. That's what I'm telling you, look at Daniel. They threw him right in with a whole mess of lions. This book tells like it is today.

C'mon Brother Randolph.

Wasn't nothing free for Daniel. He worked for everything he got. He risked his life more than one time because Nebuchadnezzar never could get it through his thick head that Daniel was serious about his God. Daniel was serious. You see, God could depend on Daniel.

Take your time.

I'm glad God has someone he can depend on. Is that someone you tonight? Can God depend on you? Can you depend on God? Did God get you out of bed this morning? Did God take you as far as coming to this church tonight? Is God going to be with you when you get to your bed as soon as we get through with our business tonight?

Yes, Lord.

But we ain't finished yet. We got a little more business to do.

Nebuchadnezzar done his tricks on Daniel. He had a dream one time and he didn't tell nobody. Then he called on Daniel, and asked him what was that dream. But you see, God could depend on Daniel, and Daniel saw that dream in a vision from God, and told King Nebuchadnezzar, and after that, Nebuchadnezzar let Daniel alone. But when Nebuchadnezzar passed away and they had another king, just like we got a governor up in Halifax, some of the princes got jealous of Daniel and they tricked him. Them and the new king passed a law that anyone who prayed to anybody but the king himself would be thrown to a lion's den.

Which Daniel did. You see Daniel prayed to his God. He believed. He believed in God. He believed in miracles. He believed in the Bible. He believed if the Bible says so, then it's so. He believed if the Lord wanted him to, he could fly like eagles to a mountain top. He believed the Lord would deliver him from the burning fiery furnace. He believed the Lord would deliver him from the den of hungry lions, and Daniel prayed three times a day facing toward Jerusalem. Which is why, listen to me now, they threw him in with the lions overnight and in the morning he was sitting straight up amongst the lions that spoke not nor roared no more. And Daniel said unto the king:

"My God hath sent an angel and he shut the lion's mouth as you see them and they have not hurt me for I have done no wrong."

The king believed him and fell down on his knees before the God of Daniel, and sent for those men that had falsely accused Daniel and cast them into the den of lions, them and their children and their wives, and the lions bared their teeth and tore the skin off their bones and the bones off from one another till the accusers lay at the bottom of the den. Do you believe what I'm saying?

Praise God.

Because if you believe what I'm saying, then you can be a Daniel. You can dare to be a Daniel. You don't have to wait until God comes right down from heaven like he did to Moses and gives you a piece of paper with his name on it in his handwriting saying, come on. You don't need no piece of paper. You don't have to have anybody's permission to worship God. You don't have to have anybody's permission to believe in God. All you got to do is stand up for what you believe. Dare to be a Daniel.

There had been a few members humming throughout Randolph's message, and toward the end of his message more members joined them, humming and swaying and fixing to sing and, without a cue they followed Randolph's clarion voice and the words of the familiar hymn, "Dare to be a Daniel":

Delivered Daniel from the lion's den
 Jonah from the belly of the whale
 And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace
 And why not every man?

At the end of the first verse, Randolph stepped into the crowd, and with his deep voice carrying the hymn, picked up other voices, lifting them.

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
 Daniel, Daniel
 Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel,
 And why not every man?

Out of his broad shoulders and black shirt, shot two arms skyward, as Randolph asked the chorus' question, why not every man? Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, and why not every man?

But this time, when they asked the question, they got an answer. The answer boomed from inside the confines of the church in a rollicking churning that rippled through the rafters down and seized every man and woman opening their throats; and when they posed the question this time, it was no question but a profound certainty that somehow, in this little church, far from Daniel and far from the scattered places of their births, far from the pain of the fields and the sea and salt pork and the solace of juniper beer, the Lord made his presence clear. He had chosen them. He had chosen Daniel, and why not every man? Why not this little church, for he is merciful and good to those in need and they needed him this hour. They needed a sign, and when he gave them that sign it startled them so their voices boomed and merged in a way that did not sound like separate voices, but one, his voice, a voice from outside of themselves which entered them and filled them and rang out as if it were their own, rolling in unison off their tongues.

The moon run down in a purple stream
 The sun forbear to shine
 And every star disappear
 King Jesus shall be mine.

The staid and proper Peter McKerrow, secretary of the Association, a man of measured words and steps and cautions, threw caution to the wind this time and found his voice joined with the voices of others and the Lord. Tears filled even his stern dark eyes. He sang, but it was not he who sang, it was another who sang inside him as another filled each of them and sang out as one voice the chorus over and over again.

DANIEL, DANIEL,
 DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL,
 AND WHY NOT EVERY MAN?

And in that moment, Mr. McKerrow did what he always did. He searched for his tablet and his pen. There would have to be words. He tried to find them. Some months later, he would write in the minutes of the Association, these words: Every Christian heart felt that the Holy Spirit was hovering around. He also wrote how many members cried out: Brethren, pray for us and our children. And how others that had slipped from the Lord's path also cried: Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. And how mothers and daughters and sisters and brothers and fathers and sons and distant cousins and friends and those that had struggled together through years of difficulty and who had grievances came together and embraced one another with God-like kindness.

But that was later, and those words, he knew when he wrote them down, did not fill the space of the booming thunderous answer from God which said yes, every man, why not every man. Peter McKerrow did that day what he rarely every did. He raised his hands to the sky beseeching, brimming with a spirit that filled everyone, as Randolph walked among them, strong black suit and broad shoulders and long arms stealing words from angels and tossing them fiercely down on iron anvils showering sparks.

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