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THE TRUE STORY OF A GEORGIA MOTHER'S ACCOUNT BOOK

By Adeline Swenson

"Can I put some money in this bank?"

A fifteen-year-old boy in faded clothing stood before the teller's window of the bank in the little town of Barwick, Georgia. His suit, badly worn, and his general appearance marked him as a tenant-farmer's boy. Three layers of pasteboard thrust inside his ragged shoes kept his feet off the stone floor.

"How much do you want to put in, John?" the banker asked.

"Four dollars," the boy answered.

"How do you want the account made out?"

And the man's voice was kindly, for he knew the boy as one of the regulars over at the Methodist Sunday school.

"John W. Yates and Company," the youngster answered gravely.

The banker peered through the grating at the lad with a quizzical look on his face. "Who's the company?" he queried.

"God," the boy replied, very solemnly. "I got my first month's pay today, and I'm starting my tithe account. This is God's money. I'm just handling it for Him."

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John Wesley Yates was the fourth child of Wiley and Lillie Yates who lived in a little cabin at the edge of the pine woods. All of their lives the couple had struggled bravely against poverty. The husband, Wiley Yates, had been able to finish the fourth grade in school, but Lillie had gone on to the fifth and was able to "do decimals." But she was never able to keep her tithe down to ten per cent, though that is getting ahead of our story.

When John was less than a year old the ramshackle old cabin in which the family lived was burned to the ground, and they escaped with nothing more than their night clothes. Kindly neighbors, almost as destitute, came to their rescue as best they could with odds and ends of garments which gave them their new start in life.

By some strange miracle which only a mother like Lillie Yates could have managed, the family got possession of an acre of land at the edge of the woods near Barwick, and built a rough pine log house. But they could not afford a brick chimney, and had to be content with one made of mud and sticks. One of the proudest moments of John's life came, years afterward, when he was sixteen. He had contrived to buy the bricks, and he presented his mother with a brick chimney as a birthday gift.

The first job the boy ever had for which he was paid real money (twenty-five cents a day)

was one of "mindin' the gap" for a farmer. The hours were "from can to caint"—from the time he could see in the morning until he could not see at night. A few weeks after getting that position, at the age of nine, he made a contract with his father that he would assume all the financial responsibility for his own life if he might be permitted to attend school part time. Both parties kept the contract with scrupulous honesty. They were proud of it.

About the same time a revival swept through the country round about Barwick, and under its spell Lillie Yates entered into a new religious experience, and John was converted and joined the Methodist Church. To anyone as poor as Mrs. Yates, the thought of giving ten per cent of her income was an earth-shaking decision. But Lillie Yates was not one to count the cost when her soul was stirred, and in a solemn hour at the altar of the church she dedicated her tithe to the Lord. The fact that she could "do decimals" seemed to intensify her sense of duty. The next morning she opened an account book, and for the next thirty-six years she kept the record with a devotion that was as beautiful as it was heroic.

Years afterward, when John Wesley Yates had risen to be recognized as one of the most successful insurance men in the United States, having served as cashier in a big bank, army administrator handling many millions of dollars, and expert accountant, he showed his mother's tithe-account book, with its simple records, and said, "That book might not have the approval of a bigwig C. P. A., but I am sure our heavenly Father calls it mighty good book-keeping."

There was no money in the Yates family treasury for any frills in either food or education, with the result that John never attended but one complete term of school in his life, but by studying under the old kerosene lamp, sitting up late, and staying in nights, he "passed" every grade until the ninth, when he was compelled to go to work at full-time employment. Twenty-four years afterward he went back to Barwick to deliver the commencement address for the high school, and, seated among the children of his former chums, received his diploma in recognition of having satisfied the school requirements.

This was the boy, then, who stood before the teller's window, with pasteboard inside his shoes, depositing four dollars and starting his account with "John W. Yates and Company." At that moment he was earning \$40.00 each month in his first regular job, paying \$22.00 for board, \$10.00 for tuition at a night school, and did not own a complete change of clothing. But the influence of his godly mother,

and her unwavering devotion to the principle of the tithe, was a factor of greater force in his life than any poverty could ever be. She made of her son a tither for life!

The life story of John Yates reads like that of an Horatio Alger hero. Bookkeeper, bank teller, bank cashier, army quartermaster whose checks for \$10,000 were honored, insurance salesman and finally general agent with a national reputation, the son of this tithing mother has been described by two pastors of great churches as "one of the most valuable laymen in Methodism."

Lillie Yates's old tithing account book rests in the lower drawer of her son's big walnut desk alongside of his New Testament. He has shown it to tens of thousands of people in audiences before whom he has preached the doctrine of stewardship. Now, with the Georgia pines shadowing her grave, it has become to her son a sacred text, to be read alongside of the Scriptures.

The year after he came out of the army, John Yates had his first tithing check printed, and every gift he has made since to an agency of the Lord's work has been written on a check which announces that "the tithe is the Lord's" and has been signed by the donor in the name of "John W. Yates and Company." Among his business friends, as among his church acquaintances, he goes every day preaching the gospel of the tenth. "It is the first principle of my business," he says. "If my mother could tithe under the conditions of poverty through which she lived, anyone on earth can do it."

The Christmas gifts for the family might be purchased with coupons, but Lillie Yates tithed her eggs and vegetables. The cyclone might wipe out what the fire and the drought had left, but Lillie Yates tithed. Her education included no college degrees, but she was always proud of the fact that her ability to "do decimals" enabled her to figure out ten per cent and then add some more to it as a "special offering."

As the scores of typewriters click and the hundreds of salesmen and clients go in and out of the expansive offices of the big insurance agency, the door of John Yates' private office is always open to his pastor. No matter how important the conference may be in which he is engaged, he stops everything to see his preacher.

He has taught Sunday-school classes that have numbered up into hundreds of members, and he has held every office within the local church. The junior partner in the firm of John W. Yates and Company owes it all, he says, to the fact that his mother was a tither. Her devotion to that principle has marked him for life.—The Christian Advocate.

RIVERSIDE CAMP MEETING

At Robinson's Maine, A

24th 1941