

The Currant Bush

BY ELDER HUGH B. BROWN
of the Council of the Twelve

This month the New Era is happy to introduce the first in a new series of articles to be published in the magazine: Stories from General Authorities. Over the years our General Authorities have recounted stories that have touched the hearts of their listeners and changed behavior. Many of these stirring examples come from their own lives or from the lives of friends and acquaintances. All ring as true today as when first recounted. It is with the permission and blessing of the authors that we print these Stories from General Authorities.

You sometimes wonder whether the Lord really knows what he ought to do with you. You sometimes wonder if you know better than he does about what you ought to do and ought to become. I am wondering if I may tell you a story that I have told quite often in the Church. It is a story that is older than you are. It's a piece out of my own life, and I've told it in many stakes and missions. It has to do with an incident in my life when God showed me that *he knew best*.

I was living up in Canada. I had purchased a farm. It was run-down. I went out one morning and saw a currant bush. It had grown up over six feet high. It was going all to wood. There were no blossoms and no currants. I was raised on a fruit farm in Salt Lake before we went to Canada, and I knew what ought to happen to that currant bush. So I got some pruning shears and went after it, and I cut it down, and pruned it, and clipped it back until there was nothing left but a little clump of stumps. It was just coming daylight, and I thought I saw on top of each of these little stumps what appeared to be a tear, and I thought the currant bush was crying. I was kind of simpleminded (and I haven't entirely gotten over it), and I looked at it, and smiled, and said, "What are you crying about?" You know, I thought I heard that currant bush talk. And I thought I heard it say this: "How could you do this to me? I was making such wonderful growth. I was almost as big as the shade tree and the fruit tree that are inside the fence, and now you have cut me down. Every plant in the garden will look down on me, because I didn't make what I should have made. How *could* you do this to me? I thought you were the gardener here." That's what I thought I heard the currant bush say, and I thought it so much that I answered. I said, "Look, little currant bush, I *am* the gardener here, and I know what I want you to be. I didn't intend you to be a fruit tree or a shade tree. I want you to be a currant bush, and some day, little currant bush, when you are laden with fruit, you are going to say, 'Thank you, Mr. Gardener, for loving me enough to cut me down, for caring enough about me to hurt me. Thank you, Mr. Gardener.'"

Time passed. Years passed, and I found myself in England. I was in command of a cavalry unit in the Canadian Army. I had made rather rapid progress as far as promotions are concerned, and I held the rank of field officer in the British Canadian Army. And I was proud of my position. And there was an opportunity for me to become a general. I had taken all the examinations. I had the seniority. There was just one man between me and that which for ten years I had hoped to get, the office of general in the British Army. I swelled up with pride. And this one man became a casualty, and I received a telegram from London. It said:

"Be in my office tomorrow morning at 10:00," signed by General Turner in charge of all Canadian forces. I called in my valet, my personal servant. I told him to polish my buttons, to brush my hat and my boots, and to make me look like a general because that is what I was going to be. He did the best he could with what he had to work on, and I went up to London. I walked smartly into the office of the General, and I saluted him smartly, and he gave me the same kind of a salute a senior officer usually gives—a sort of "Get out of the way, worm!" He said, "Sit down, Brown." Then he said, "I'm sorry I cannot make the appointment. You are entitled to it. You have passed all the examinations. You have the seniority. You've been a good officer, but I can't make the appointment. You are to return to Canada and become a training officer and a transport officer. Someone else will be made a general." That for which I had been hoping and praying for ten years suddenly slipped out of my fingers.

Then he went into the other room to answer the telephone, and I took a soldier's privilege of looking on his desk. I saw my personal history sheet. Right across the bottom of it in bold, block-type letters was written, "THIS MAN IS A MORMON." We were not very well liked in those days. When I saw that, I knew why I had not been appointed. I already held the highest rank of any Mormon in the British Army. He came back and said, "That's all, Brown." I saluted him again, but not quite as smartly. I saluted out of duty and went out. I got on the train and started back to my town, 120 miles away, with a broken heart, with bitterness in my soul. And every click of the wheels on the rails seemed to say, "You are a failure. You will be called a coward when you get home. You raised all those Mormon boys to join the army, then you sneak off home." I knew what I was going to get, and when I got to my tent, I was so bitter that I threw my cap and my saddle brown belt on the cot. I clinched my fists and I shook them at heaven. I said, "How could you do this to me, God? I have done everything I could do to measure up. There is nothing that I could have done—that I should have done—that I haven't done. How could you do this to me?" I was as bitter as gall.

And then I heard a voice, and I recognized the tone of this voice. It was my own voice, and the voice said, "I am the gardener here. I know what I want you to do." The bitterness went out of my soul, and I fell on my knees by the cot to ask forgiveness for my ungratefulness and my bitterness. While kneeling there I heard a song being sung in an adjoining tent. A number of Mormon boys met regularly every Tuesday night. I usually met with them. We would sit on the floor and have a Mutual Improvement Association. As I was kneeling there, praying for forgiveness, I heard their voices singing:

*"It may not be on the mountain height
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me;
But if, by a still, small voice he calls
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine:
I'll go where you want me to go."*

(Hymns, no. 75.)

I arose from my knees a humble man. And now, almost fifty years later, I look up to him and say, "Thank you, Mr. Gardener, for cutting me down, for loving me enough to hurt me." I see

now that it was wise that I should not become a general at that time, because if I had I would have been senior officer of all western Canada, with a lifelong, handsome salary, a place to live, and a pension when I'm no good any longer, but I would have raised my six daughters and two sons in army barracks. They would no doubt have married out of the Church, and I think I would not have amounted to anything. I haven't amounted to very much as it is, but I have done better than I would have done if the Lord had let me go the way I wanted to go.

I wanted to tell you that oft-repeated story because there are many of you who are going to have some very difficult experiences: disappointment, heartbreak, bereavement, defeat. You are going to be tested and tried to prove what you are made of. I just want you to know that if you don't get what you think you ought to get, remember, "God is the gardener here. He knows what he wants you to be." Submit yourselves to his will. Be worthy of his blessings, and you will get his blessings.