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**Trochail**

**Liverpool, Nova Scotia  
August 15, 1997**

**"The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places;  
We have a goodly heritage." (Psalm 16:6)**

**Dear John**

I am passing on to you the military "Communion kit" which your grandfather, George Farquhar, passed on to me in the early 1960's. Of all the "things" in my possession and keeping, it is the ~~one~~ "thing" I have cherished above all others. First and foremost, that is because it was he who gave it to me. Since I was a wee lad there seemed to be an affinity between him and me...a close relationship which persisted until his death in 1975. As I reflect on it, it was more like a grandfather-grandson relationship than uncle-nephew. He was 21 years older than my father, his youngest brother, and I suppose was the nearest enfleshment of the "Chief of the Clan" on this side of the waters and in the Nova Scotia neighbourhood. Whatever..he always took a keen interest in what I was doing, whether playing football at Dalhousie or not doing all that well academically in that same institution. I held him in some awe in my growing-up years, and though he was intimidating to me (quite unintentional on his part) in my callow youthfulness, I admired him very much and was so proud of him, for he was a man of noticeable gifts and accomplishments. More than that, I was very fond of him, as he seemed to be of me. His approval was very important to me and I had high respect for his judgment. I remember how relieved I was when he obviously thought I'd made a good choice for a mate when I brought Glennis all the way from Saskatchewan in 1950. I went to him for advice and counsel more than once through the years...and he was free with advice and counsel often even when I did not seek it. He and my own Dad have been the largest influences in my life.

It was in Geordie's company one December evening in 1947 at the Comnaught Ave house I had one of the strangest and most profoundly moving moments of my own human experience. I think the "Celt" in you will understand it. I suppose there is a connection between that occasion and that fateful February day in 1889 in the Union Corner farmhouse near Brooklyn, Hants Co. Geordie's mother, Margaret, was on her death bed. Her husband, James (aged 46), and six sons, Donald 17, James 15, William 13, John 11, George 8 1/2, and Alex. 6, were gathered in her presence. She had a word for each of them..when she came to your grandfather, she said, "*Geordie is to be the Minister*". I have often thought of that moment... not only how Geordie must have felt to think that his fate and future were sealed there and then in the context of such a traumatic ally sad event (it is difficult to reconstruct how a little boy must have dealt with all that)...but how did the other boys feel that he was the "one" designated in that way. Perhaps it came to them as a relief. I've often thought about Geordie carrying that burden through adolescence and young manhood. You are probably aware that one year, unbeknown to his father, he switched from theology to first year Law. Significantly, he was back in Theology the next year. His father obviously felt the death-bed direction was inviolable.

Obviously, Geordie came to terms with what had been decreed. He followed through for

ordination and pursued his studies in Scotland and Germany. He was a fine Minister of the Church..indeed,I would say that he was a distinguished Minister of the Church. He played a large part in the Union "fight".. was the leader, really, in the "Union" cause in Nova

Scotia, and wrote widely on the matter. His writing was used throughout the church and his able leadership recognized by the moguls in high places. He was aware that his own Congregation, the "Kirk" Church in New Glasgow, would not go "union" and he would be pulpit-less. He got strong assurance not to worry.. 'the Church will look after you'. When Union came in 1925, the opportunities presented to him were not impressive. One post was the editorship of the "United Churchman" a church paper designed for the Maritimes...another was some embryonic suburban group meeting in a schoolhouse in the outskirts of Toronto. None of that was for him! As he said to me many times, *"I was 45 years old..at the top of my powers"* (that was the way he put it)....and posthaste, he was enrolled at the Law School. One of his last acts as a practising Minister may have been to preside at the wedding of my mother and father on August 18, 1925 in the little Church in Poplar Grove, which had been a "United Church" for but two months. The rest is history and probably better known to you than to me.

He confided to me more than once his misgivings about being a Minister. I can only surmise that there were many times during his 15 years in the Ministry that he wanted out, but, as he would always say, *"I could not break faith with my mother's death-bed wish"*. But in 1925 the break came. It is significant, I have always thought, that his father died in 1924. No longer would he have to face him with his action as he had done years before in college days. Notwithstanding, his sense that he had opted out of that obligation laid on him 36 years previously did not leave him entirely. I'm sure it was much more an emotional thing than rational..but it was there! He *had* broken faith with his mother's death-bed wish! A kind of guilt persisted.

In 1947 I was trying to determine my own direction in life. From the time of my early teens I had some nagging impulse from time to time to go into the Ministry. No one was more surprised than I...and I did not reveal it to anybody. I found it difficult to imagine myself a Minister..just didn't think I was the "type", whatever that may be. I had thought of Law but decided it was only because our family seemed to have a proclivity to Law, and my father had always wanted to be a lawyer, that I was going in that direction. My love was sports and I felt Physical Education was for me. In those days Springfield College in Massachusetts was *the* institution for that. Dad was willing to mortgage his future to give me the chance so the way was open. But I couldn't eliminate those perturbing thoughts of the Ministry. They even populated my dreams. Finally, sometime in the spring of 1947, I sought out Geordie, and revealed to him my intention to go to Springfield, but also these urges to go into the Church. I'm sure he was surprised, if not bowled over, that I should entertain thoughts of the ministry. However..he gave me good counsel. He advised me to go to Springfield, because, he said, if I didn't, I would always wonder about it and wish I did. So in the fall of 1947 off I went to Springfield. I enjoyed it to the full, and applied myself more than usually, and did fairly well in the studies there. But I knew that was not what I wanted. There was that impulse to go into the Ministry to which I could not say *No*. So I came home at the end of the first semester and sought out Geordie again. I told him just how I was feeling and that the "call" to the ministry, or what I perceived to be a "call", just wouldn't go away. I shall never forget those moments. Those pale blue eyes of his clouded with tears and he looked intently at me through them and with a heave of great emotion he said quietly. *"Alex..you are my*

expiation".

Hardly an everyday occasion,eh! I'm not sure that I could articulate precisely just what

he meant,but I think I have *some* understanding. It has to do with our linkage by blood and love..and somehow my having what appeared to be a "call" gave some closure or fulfillment to that decree from the death-bed 58 years previously. There was still some guilt there to be assuaged,and perhaps what had happened to me,and that strange affinity between him and me,spoke to,and even alleviated some of it. I don't know. Perhaps you would have a more accurate reading of it from a less subjective viewpoint than my own. Whatever ...something of the emotion of it is still with me and sometimes brings tears to these now much older eyes of mine..it is among my most precious memories.

One day,in the early 1960's when I was serving at St. Matthew's Church in Halifax,Geordie called me as he would frequently do and summoned me over to that same Connaught Ave house. He indicated he wanted to give me something and produced the "Communion kit". He explained that he had used it when a Chaplain overseas. (It does have another name imprinted on it somewhere and I cannot explain that,except it might have been passed from another Chaplain to him) and he wanted me to have it. I was reluctant to accept it. I felt it should be given within his own family. He protested,"*No.you're the Minister in the family and I want you to have it*". I accepted it and told him that if any of his progeny ever entered the Ministry I would make sure that the kit would be put into his or her hands. He replied by saying that it was mine to do with what I wished. So it has been in my keeping for over 30 years now and I have used it many times..usually in celebrating the Sacrament with he sick ,and occasionally with the dying.

Now,John,I want to pass it on to you. It is much more fitting that it be reposed with you than with any of my own gang. Who knows,in years to come one of Geordie's descendants may be a Minister. Perhaps he or she might use it as he and I have done before them. I suspect it was with him at Vimy Ridge . There is a letter extant which Geordie wrote from the Vimy battlefield telling something of the scene and his own activity through those awful days...I do not have a copy of the entire letter,but probably Margaret does. It would be an apt companion-piece to the "Communion kit".

The case is not in the best of shape as you can see. That is simply the ravages of time. I took it to a skilled leather-worker once for repairs,but he felt there wasn't much he could do with it because of the conditon of the leather. But there may be somebody with more expertise who could restore it somewhat. Years ago I was chatting with a friend,Rev. Eldon Gunn,who was Chief Protestant Chaplain in the Canadian Armed Forces. I told him about this kit and he was anxious that it find its way to the Canadian War Museum.

It gives me much delight and satisfaction to put it in your hands,John. In return,I simply hold you to your agreement to play a tune over me when I turn up my toes and am buried over there in the Brooklyn Cemetery from which place,I trust,I will be gathered to my fathers..and beloved Uncles too .

Affectionately

Ally