

MARBLES

IONE COLLIGAN

Jerry thought a moment. Then "I can't remember any memory verse from last Thunday. If I'm not absent any Thunday this quarter, will I get a bag of marbles?"

Hoping to close the subject, I explained the advantages of attending church school every Sunday for three months. "Yes," I nodded to Jerry's repeated query, "boys sometimes get bags of marbles if they're not absent." Jerry scraped his little wooden chair closer to the first-year table and subsided.

"This morning," I began again, "We're going to talk about some people who help make church a happy place. Since you can't remember the memory verse from last week, we'll work on it a little more today. It was the one Jesus said when he was a boy: I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.' Why was Jesus glad to go to church?"

Jerry volunteered, "Maybe he wath glad; but don't you think he would have been gladder if he'd had some marbles to take with him?"

This time I eased the situation somewhat by explaining that in Jesus' time little boys didn't play with marbles as they do today. "I think Jesus liked to go to church," I went on to answer my own question, "because he liked to hear the things taught there, because he thought it a happy place. Today there are many people who make our church a pleasant place to work and play." Aware that I was taking a chance, I ventured another question. "Can you think of some of our church helpers?"

"The preacher," offered curly-haired Shirley. "He preaches and visits our class and comes to see us when we're sick."

My hopes for a satisfactory lesson began to rise. Dark-eyed Lynn thought

the choir would be helper. Phil suggested the janitor. Jerry took his attention from the second-year table where a poster was under construction. "Doesn't the superintendent make church a happier place when he givth a bag of marbles to the boyth that have been here every Sunday?"

Six pairs of snapping eyes waited for an answer while I mentally turned Jerry across my knee. "Of course," I finally replied. "But attendance records and prizes aren't the only reasons for attending church. Can't you thing of some other reasons why the superintendent makes Sunday school a happy place?"

Jerry folded and unfolded his lesson leaflet. He gazed profoundly at the picture on its cover. "Why hasn't the boy on my paper got some marbles? Betty'th girl has got a jumping rope."

In despair I made one last effort. "Jerry, you must pay attention! I don't want you to ask any more questions about marbles, nor even to mention them again this morning! Do you understand?"

Jerry understood. Two grimy little fists were folded and propped on the edge of the table. There was no movement inside the voluminous red sweater. The piping treble was still. Jerry would not even look up.

We went on with our discussion of church and church helpers with infinitely more peace and logic. Only once did Jerry forget. To the question "What can we do to make church a happier place?" I had received the usual replies: dust the tables, bring flowers, be quiet. Jerry could contain himself no longer. He hopped up with "I could bring my m," but he remembered in time and lapsed into silence.

After the lesson Jerry came to me, his

little brother's hand gripped tightly in his own. When I asked him if he had forgotten something, he said hesitantly and somewhat reproachfully, "Teacher, you said that when Jesus was in the temple he asked the teacherth questions and they answered him willingly. Why didn't you like my questions?"

In my best teacher manner I set out to point the moral. "The questions Jesus

asked," I explained, "were about the church and the Bible and God. Can you see why Jesus' questions were different from yours?"

One grimy finger twisted the front of the heavy sweater. "Well . . . ," came the low reply, "Jesus lived a long time ago, and he didn't play marbles; so he couldn't ask questions about marbles."

I fled.

COMBAT

JACK RETHERFORD

The place was a small clearing in a forest in British Columbia. The contenders were two buck deer of about the same build, but one was younger than the other. The time was early morning, and the prize at stake was a herd of four does.

Around and around went the two shaking their heads and stamping their feet. Neither wanted to start the fight, but it was evident that both were intent upon fighting. Finally the young buck made a lunge, and his antlers hit those of the older deer. The sound was like that of nothing I had ever heard before. It was like a mixture of a club hitting a tree trunk, a hard tackle in football, a knockout punch, and two wrestlers hitting the canvas at once. They then broke away and came together again. This time all the other likenesses of sound were there, and there was still another. Like the crack of a rifle one of the antlers of the younger deer broke, and it was left hanging by the outer covering. The angry snorts issued from him then, compared with the shouting of a street brawl. They fought on, becoming more fierce in their attacks, and louder in snorts, and grunts.

After about thirty-five minutes the younger deer succeeded in wearing out his opponent, and with one final lunge he ripped the older deer's side half open. The cry which followed sounded almost human. It made me think of a man being shot, or of a frightened woman. With this he backed away, and turned to run. The younger deer whistled a high shrill note in triumph and went away with the does following. That last whistle made me think of a boy, the leader of a gang of ruffians, demonstrating his superiority over his companions.

Feeling curious to know with what fate the old deer met, I picked up the trail, and late that afternoon I came upon him drinking at a small brook. His side was still bleeding, and it was evident that he was yet in a great amount of pain. He was not as quiet at his drinking as he might have been, and sounded very much like an old sow in mud. Just to see if the old buck had any life left, I jumped up and waved my hands to attract his attention. With a snort he turned and walked slowly into the woods, too tired to sense danger, or to run from it.