



know it all. And in our own strength we wander into places where no child of God should be. We allow our minds to be consumed by the lies that Satan feeds it. Jesus' own words to Peter should strike a chord within us too: "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Matt. 26:40)

Yes, we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. Therefore, Peter states, as obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires of the old nature, but be holy in all your conduct. (1Pet 1:14,15). All of our conduct? Yes! Even in our leisure, our time to ourselves. Even in our pursuit of hobbies and interests. For since He who called us is holy, so we too, need to strive for holiness. It is through obedience to God's Will that we do this.

So we come back to obedience. Obedience which is demanded us even amidst trials and temptations. How do we show obedience to God? In the way we speak, or the things we refrain from saying. In the way we present ourselves to the world. The places we go to, and those we steer clear of. The thoughts we do not allow to run through our minds. Even what seems to be minor details: the things we read, watch, listen to, even they must serve that greater goal: honour to God. Are we really living as pilgrims, travelling on to the Promised Land? Or have the sparkling treasures of this world stopped us from seeing that beautiful and rich inheritance that awaits us?

Obedience. It seems to be a tough

The Contender cover page is one inspired by a most biblical prophecy as well as incorporating an also well known piece of Australian flora: The Gum Tree.

Based on Isaiah 11:1 "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." The design reflects God's continued care for his people; also his people in Australia.

■ Russel Bergsma

demand. Obedience seems to be so hard, so restricting. Oh, we are ready to say 'Yes, LORD,' at the appropriate times. We nod our heads at meetings, but we fail to act. Is this not disobedience? Where, then, is our striving for holiness? As a whole, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to work, to roll up our sleeves as it were, cast off the worldliness of our society, and strive for holiness. As obedient children.

■ Joy van der Schaaf



# CONTENDER

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act Biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of the 16 to 30 years of age.

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The deadline for all material to be used in the next issue is **July 10**.



# CONTENDER

*"contending earnestly for the faith..." Jude:3*

The following is a short conversation I overheard some time ago after church, between two people, who we'll call Jack and John (no offence to anyone by these names). I heard Jack say, "So John, I hear you're going on a world trip in two weeks time," to which John responded, "Yep! I can't wait!"

When Jack asked him where he was going, John responded, "First I'm going to the UK and Ireland for three weeks, after which I'm going to travel through Europe for four months. Once I leave Europe I'm going to fly across to Canada, for the wedding of one of my friends, and then through to the States. When I've had enough of it, I'm coming home via South Africa and Bali. And then I guess I'll have to settle back into normal life again!"

What does the Bible say about this kind of talk? We can find a short portion in God's Word that runs along the same lines as Jack and John's conversation.

James 4:13-15 says something to the effect of: "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow...Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"

Sadly, in the conversation I overheard between Jack and John, I did not even hear the slightest hint that there was dependence on God. I wonder then, was it in their hearts? I hope so. When we plan something, is it in our hearts to say, 'If the Lord wills we will do this

or that'? Do we involve God in our plans? Do we make mention of our plans also in our prayers? When we hear people around us speak in a similar manner to John, full of self confidence and even boasting about their plans and what they are going to achieve, does it register in our minds that also their plans are subject to God's will? And to those who do conscientiously say, "The Lord willing", do they only think this when they hope to go on a world trip, or also when they pop down to Mc Donalds?

So what's the point of this editorial? To make us all aware that we live on this earth by grace alone. Without the will of God we cannot so much as move. It is of uttermost importance that we are fully aware of this, because it makes us truly thankful for the things we are able to plan and enjoy in this life. This thankfulness has to show in the things we say, the things we do and the things we think. So if we do not say, "The Lord willing", we do not show our full dependence on God. Therefore, I encourage those who think "The Lord willing", to also say it (I have to remind myself of this too), so we can stimulate the awareness that God is in control.

"So John, I hear you're going on a world trip in two weeks time, the Lord willing..."

■ **Matthew Schiebaan**

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**MAGAZINE FOR THE YOUTH OF THE  
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA**

# A Lesson in Contentment

There was a time when I wished for a simpler life. I imagined living in a quiet little place close to nature, away from the bustling, competitive rat race of the big cities. I dreamed of a life that wasn't ruled by a clock, a calm and peaceful place where I could live in harmony with family and friends and where I could walk close to God without the distractions and attractions of this noisy, sinful world.

I remember thinking these kinds of thoughts as the plane turned to make its final approach to Port Moresby airport. The view through the Perspex probably helped to dredge them up. The scenery was breathtaking. In my mind's eye I can still clearly see the turquoise blue ocean washing over white sandy beaches; the small huts bunched together near where the jungle met the sea and people sitting or walking around. Surely those people must be happy I thought.

Those same thoughts came back to me again when I awoke on my first morning in a small jungle village. I heard the sound of children laughing and shouting as they splashed and played in the stream which run through the village. From the balcony I could see the women washing the clothes in the creek, the simple wooden and tin houses and the places in the jungle where the men had their gardens. I envied these people and their simple lives. I wished that my life was more like theirs.

In the days that followed I learned more about these people and how they lived. And some of my enthusiasm and envy for their simple life slowly dwindled away. I heard about the dangers they have to face: poisonous snakes, dangerous wild pigs and malaria to name just a few. If they fall sick they must travel long distances to the nearest health clinic for help which they must pay for. I saw

the villagers plodding down the road under heavy loads they were taking to market. The sweat stood out on the foreheads of the men and women as they strained under the loads of sweat potato and pineapple. They smiled and waved at us as we drove past. I wondered then if I could still smile and wave with a load like that on my back.

During my stay I visited 8 Mile, a village close to Port Moresby. I stayed with a family in a small shack. The couple had thoughtfully asked a young man to dinner, as they couldn't talk English. While we ate a simple dinner the man's wife and the children waited till we had finished eating and then they ate the leftovers. The young man was about my age and he worked as a fisherman on a boat for about \$30 a week. I learned a lot talking to him. Compared to him I had so much and I could expect so much more from life. He lived very much from day to day with few expectations. He had a small transistor radio that he obviously treasured. Before he went to sleep that night he took it out of his bag and placed it carefully on the floor beside him. He listened to it for about five minutes (batteries are expensive) before stowing it carefully away in his bag again. He handled my camera dreamily, knowing I am sure, that something like it could never really be his. I saw that same look on the faces of other young fellows as they fiddled with the stereos and TV's in the stores in Port Moresby. It would not surprise me if they wished to have what I obviously did.

It seems to be in our nature to wish for what we do not have. The grass always appears to be greener in some other paddock, car, job, church.... We measure our happiness in terms of possessions, health, good times, friends etc. More often than not we refuse to be content with what we have.

We strive for more, for those things we don't already have. We're tempted when the media offers us tantalizing notions of a better life: a new house, an amazing vacation, a Lotto win. In time we confuse our needs with our wants. Our lives become dedicated to pleasing the most important person in our lives: Ourselves.

Paul's words to Timothy are worth reflecting on: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we will bring nothing out. And having food and clothing with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and into a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1Tim.6: 6-10) Paul is focusing on the accumulation of material possessions but we do well to focus on all those desires that get in the way of our love for God. A relationship with Him and a life dedicated to His service far outweighs the value of any new car, house or idyllic lifestyle. Renewed by the Spirit we are called to live lives of thankfulness, not grumbling discontent.

Somewhere in PNG I lost my desire for that simple, quiet life. I'm not sure it even exists any more. I want to focus on being thankful for what He has given me already and how I can use it to serve him better. God cares for me in such a wonderful way. He knows my every need. He considers me to be of more value than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and he feeds and clothes them every day (Matt. 26: 25-34). I shouldn't even dare to grumble.

■ **Wayne van der Heide**

# ...*Be Obedient*... *Who? Me?*

*Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children... (1 Pet 1:13,14)*

**O**bedience. Is it something which characterises our lives? Or is it a word which has lost its meaning for us? Obedience seems to be humbling. It indicates a subservience to the one we are obedient to, and usually we prefer to be our 'own boss'. After all, we can decide for ourselves what is good for us or not, can't we?

However, the requirement of God still stands - obedience. Do we fulfill this requirement? Do we act as God commands us, or resist His demands? As covenant children, are we really carrying out our obligation, or have we become adept at closing our eyes to what we are commanded to do?

Obedience. God demanded it throughout the Old Testament from His chosen nation Israel. During all the time spent in the desert, and then later in the promised land, God taught, admonished and disciplined His children to be obedient to Him. This requirement did not change in the New Testament. We see this in the first letter of Peter, in which the Christians being written to are encouraged to act 'as obedient children'. (1 Pet 1: 14)

The recipients of this letter were children of God - 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God...' (1:2). Whether or not they were Jews is uncertain. John Calvin argues that they were Jews who had been dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. However, chapter one verse 18 seems to indicate that these recipients had a pagan background since Peter refers to 'aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers' (1:18). 'Pilgrims of the dispersion' can then be taken as a phrase referring to the way any Christian is merely journeying through this life as a pilgrim.

Either way, these were children of God, redeemed, not with gold or silver or perishable things, but 'with the precious blood of Christ' (1:19). Yet these Christians had not inherited a life of ease on this earth. The kind of hardships they endured is not known; most likely they received the sort of treatment that many Christians did in the first century: insults, slanderous accusations, beatings. Peter exhorts

them to rejoice even in the midst of various trials,

since the genuineness of their faith was being tested by fire. (ch 1:7) Just as gold is refined through the use of fire, so these Christians were also having their faith refined, purified of any extra dirt which was hindering their childlike trust in God.

Peter writes to pilgrims, temporary residents on this earth, travelling towards an inheritance that 'does not fade away' (1:4). As pilgrims, they could not make their home in a place through which they were only travelling, and as pilgrims, they shared, and would share in the suffering of Christ. To these pilgrims Peter emphasised the grace of God, the amazing gift of love God had given to mankind. Yet he doesn't stop there! For since God has shown such great love to His children, His children need to respond.

Therefore, states Peter, because you have been redeemed, because you are a people set apart, you have a job to do. Gird up the loins of your mind to start with: be prepared for serious work. The above phrase is clearly explained by Bentley (1990) in *Living for Christ in a Pagan World*: "The picture here is of a person dressed in the long flowing robes of the day. If he is going to engage in positive action then he will have to do something about his clothing which might flap around his ankles and impede his progress. The only thing he can do is to bend down, pick up the hem of his robe, pull it between his legs and tuck it into his belt. It will then be out of the way."

In the same way, hindrances to our work for Christ need to be taken out of the way. Thus Peter follows immediately with the command to 'be sober'. The combination of whole hearted work for Christ and a less than clear head is impossible. We cannot afford to doze off, or fill our heads with anything that hinders our kingdom work, or distracts us from the purpose of our life here on earth. "For our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8)

But our minds are so easily numbed. A world which tolerates most belief systems infiltrates our minds with a spirit of complacency. The words above which warn us about the likeness of the devil to a roaring lion have grown cold. We

# "Guard your heart and mind..."

Its 9am on a Sunday morning. An old lady is sitting on the bench waiting for her son's family to come in. Watching, waiting. Observing the people walk into church. She sees a young single mother struggling with her 2 year old child. She notices the rings under her eyes, the stress lines on her face, a 'fed-up', frustrated face. She says a silent prayer for the young mother and reminds herself to go and ask her how she is going after the church service is over.

She notices an unkempt, long-haired, red-eyed youth snuff his cigarette on his shoe, toss the butt on the pathway and shuffle into the church. Her shoulders droop slightly and she prays another silent prayer, "Lord show him the Way. Give him your spirit. Help him to see that You can cleanse hearts and make changes. Help him to know you...Be with his parents..." She reminds herself to speak to her grandson about involving the young man in their youth group.

She hears a footstep and turns her head. The pastor of the congregation walks past, his head down. She calls out a greeting; no response. She starts to feel slighted, then reminds herself of his task. "He's probably thinking about the upcoming sermon, such a busy man." She says a prayer of thanks for the pastor, "Thank you for the faithful preaching Lord. Bless him and his task. Help him in preaching this morning's sermon. Give him strength and wisdom...Bless our congregation Lord with its many needs..."

A touch on her knee. She looks down to see her grandchild looking up at her. "Are you sad Grandma?" "No child, I'm not sad. These are happy tears...Shall we go to church?" They enter the church building together, both smiling.

On the other side of the entrance is a man. He is dressed in a suit, waiting for his wife to drop the children off. He sees the young mother struggling with the toddler. He mentally shakes his head. You reap what you sow... he remembers when they found out about her....sad case really.

He notices a young man toss his smoke on the path way. Honestly!! Smoking on the church grounds! and to throw it on the path, and those clothes...jeans and a t-shirt to church!!...But then; what can you expect? Rebellious child that he

is...But then, his parents... they really should put their foot down. My children don't smoke...and look how they are dressed. He stands a little taller.

Ah...here comes the pastor. "Good morning!" he calls. He receives no response. Far out! Can't even say good morning to me! Such poor social skills. Thinks that because he's the minister he doesn't have to say good morning to the members of his congregation. His sermons weren't too crash-hot lately either. He'd discussed it with a few people now. What does he do with all his time...?

A young lady walks into church. Oh that was the one that his daughter had said asked all those questions in club. Just doesn't accept things, always has to question. And that guy that she was seeing...well people said that she was seeing him...shocking!!!

He saw the old lady walk in with her grandchild. Really keeps to herself that one. Not very active in the communion of saints. She's not THAT old.

His wife rounds the corner. At last! "Come on..." They enter the church...

Church is over. The man in the suit stands with his friends. "Good sermon on the Communion of Saints this morning wasn't it?" "Yeah - it's really something we need to work on..." "Hey did you hear about that girl of \_\_\_\_\_? She's going out with a guy from outside. Shocking! Haven't seen her in church lately either. Apparently she's on drugs." "Ooooh - I'll make sure my children don't hang around with her..."

The old Grandmother is making her way to the car. A lady taps her on the shoulder. "Please could you pray for my daughter. She's got a boyfriend outside the church and I'm scared she's into drugs...Please pray for her..."

## **Communion of Saints.**

**The way we think of people.**

**The way we speak about people.**

**The way we act towards people.**

**The way we pray...**

■ **Cheronne Vermeulen**

# Let us stir up love and good works in one another...

“**A**nd let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not for the sake of assembling ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10: 24, 25).

Paul speaks on the Christian use of our tongue, in Ephesians 4:29:

“Let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

How often don't we use our tongue for idle chatter, perhaps feigning interest in another's welfare when we really don't want to be bothered by their problems at all; or perhaps speaking words directed against their well being? We utter a flippant "Hi, how are you today" when we really couldn't care less, or steer the discussion away from personal matters, to 'safe' pastures of weather talk, or gossip. Often, our social and business interactions say one thing and mean another.

But is this edifying? Does it impart grace to our hearers? Does it stir others up to love and good works?

I think its probably safe to say that many of us often operate under 'layers' - layers that form a protection around the real 'us', that prevent people from coming

too close. Many people only ever get to see those layers, not what lies beneath. We fear exposure, believing that "under the makeup of decency, kindness, generosity and stylish clothing is someone who, if truly known, would provoke disapproval and criticism"<sup>1</sup>. We thus tend to speak 'layer to layer' with others - and after chatting from behind our layers, we feel unsatisfied, distant, untouched, superficial - and safe.

OK, you're probably thinking,

**"The ministry of encouragement requires that the encourager have some awareness of what is happening inside people and that he speak words which reflect a genuine regard for others as valuable. The effect of encouragement is to stimulate the hope that solutions exist for every problem and that, seen from an eternal perspective, life does make sense."**

**Crabb, L. & Allendar, D**

to overcome such 'surface' interactions we all need to be more open and honest. True, but picture this: suppose after reading this article you go up to a friend after church this afternoon and say "You know, I've never been fully honest with you. You've called me several times a week for months. And I've always said I welcomed your calls and enjoyed them. But that's not true. I have endured your tiresome chatter and catty com-

plaints because I thought I should, but now I see I was just being phony. So I wanted to set the record straight". Can you see where such sharing and openness might lead?

So while we need to be open enough to communicate without 'protective' layers', there are obvious restraints to such openness. In fact, Crabb and Allendar offer two important points when it comes to being open and sharing our feelings. Firstly, we should only share our feelings within the scope of a 'prior and overriding' commitment to the welfare of the other person. Secondly, in sharing honestly with others, we must be sure that our objective remains to develop relationships in which others are encouraged to lead a Christ-centred life, rather than simply to develop relationships that are personally comfortable and fulfilling. So, certainly, we are to share and be open, but then only with the right attitude!

Our task here is thus not to have a great conversation, but in all our communications (that includes nonverbal communication such as facial gestures) to encourage others in their Christian service; to stir up love and good works in one another. And this encouragement is not some communication technique to be mastered. Rather encouragement is about understanding the fears of other

people, and to reach beneath another's layers and quiet those fears - not by sharing ourselves, but by sharing the Lord! According to the letter of Paul to the Phillipians (Chapter 2:3,4): "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of (us) look not only for (our) own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Encouragers need to remind themselves constantly that the people God places on their path are facing problems in life which, but for the grace of God, are ultimately overwhelming.

Of course, looking out for the

interest of others means getting involved in other peoples lives, it means moving out of our comfort zone, fighting against what comes naturally. And it is simply not natural to react to another's layers with loving concern. The only motivation therefore, that will stir us to reach into other's lives with encouragement is love.

Remember, when you encourage in love, you may have to forsake a relationship with another, but Christ will never forsake His relationship with us. Encouragement is a sensitivity to people and a confidence in God that must be nourished and demonstrated. Share with your brothers and

sisters the relevance of Christ's life to our lives.

<sup>1</sup>Crabb, L. & Allendar, D., 1984, Encouragement : How to give and receive it, Zondervan Corporation, p 32.

Many of the thoughts in this article are also expressed in this book. Crabb and Allendar also offer a lot of practical advice for giving encouragement, as well as 'encouragement' for those who feel they are always on the giving end of encouragement, rather than the receiving end.

■ **Ruth Bax**

## *"The devil made me do it! "*

One of the excuses that many people use after they have committed a serious sin is that the devil tempted them and overpowered them, or that they could not withstand the devil. The fact that the devil was too powerful for that person is an easy way out of a tight situation, or an excuse 'that sounds good'. But it is certainly no excuse for those who have been converted to God.

The devil is referred to frequently in the Bible, and is given various names including 'the evil one,' 'the tempter,' 'Belial,' 'the god of this age,' 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air,' 'the enemy,' 'the one who is in the world,' 'the serpent' 'the dragon,' and 'the accusers of our brothers.'

According to 1 John 3:8-10, sinful behaviour reveals that one belongs to the devil, for those who belong to God do not persist in sinning. Living in sin is a sign of being under the devil's power, "because the devil has been sinning from the beginning."

In 1 John 5:19, we read "that the world is under

the control of the evil one." This could easily be understood as an expression of defeat and despair, but such an understanding would be seriously mistaken. To be sure, John was mindful of the sinfulness of the world. But here John wants to convey a sense of confidence and hopefulness. The world has given Satan plenty of room to exercise his power, but believers have no need to fear him.

In 1 John 2:13,14 John twice addresses the "young men" with the reassuring words, "You have overcome the evil one." We must remember that John is addressing his brothers that have been converted. In a very important sense, they had already triumphed over the great enemy, the evil one. John then goes on to tell his readers to overcome the temptations that the world had to offer them. This sequence of ideas suggest that temptations may be faced with confidence when believers recognise that they have already won the victory over the one who is ultimately behind the temptations they face.

Similar optimism is found in 1 John 4:4, where

the readers are assured that they have overcome those who sought to convince them to accept false teachings "because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." John wants to assure his readers that, despite Satan's apparent power, Satan is no match for the One who dwells in them, namely, God the Spirit. It may seem that we are not equipped to resist temptations and the lie, but from 1 John 4, we learn that we have "resources" more than sufficient to protect ourselves from Satan's attacks and heresies.

*"Put on the whole  
armour of God,  
that you may  
stand against the  
wiles  
of the devil"  
Eph 6:11*

The final reference about our victory over Satan is found in 1 John 5:18. "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born to God keeps himself, and the evil one cannot harm him." The devil may exercise great power in the world and believers may have to face all sorts of temptations, but John encourages us to confidently face our struggles with the promise that the devil will not triumph over us. There is no reason to fear the devil and his devices.

In James 4:7, James exhorts us to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you," and offers sure hope that such resistance will be successful. This verse tells us that resistance to the devil is one of the things expected of those who are submissive to God. The word resist here means, "stand your ground." By using this word, James implies that the devil can indeed be resisted. As an incentive to resisting the devil, James adds the promise that Satan will flee from those who resist him, and reminds his readers not to over-estimate the power of the devil. Satan is not invincible, and we are not to think that we are powerless to defend ourselves from his attacks.

Maybe one of the reasons we commit the sins we do is because we did not use faith, through the power of God to ward off the power of the devil. We should become more aware of and equip ourselves with the power of God, as Paul says: "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your

waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." (Eph 6:11-18)

In Christ we are more than conquerors! That is the powerful message of Scripture that Martin Luther also wrote about in his well-known Hymn "A Mighty Fortress."

1. A Mighty Fortress is our God  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our Helper He, amid the flood  
Of mortal ill prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe.  
His craft and power are great  
And armed with cruel hate  
On earth is not his equal.

2. Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing,  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.  
Dost ask Who that may be?  
Christ Jesus it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth His Name,  
From age to age the same  
And He must win the battle.

3. And though this world,  
with devils filled  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God has willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure;  
One little word shall fell him.

■ **Anson van Delden**