

## Brother Bird and the Man from Hell

Peculiar Brother Bird #6

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge  
Our peculiar Brother Bird  
Took some time to do some writing  
Which is what he most preferred.

Willie Waver was now married,  
Farren Brimstone done and gone,  
And the Big Feud just a mem'ry  
When the "rich man" came along.

Well, the rich man was a poor man,  
Or at least he so appeared,  
Clothed in rags all singed and blackened  
With a long white ashen beard.

And he smelled of burning sulfur,  
And he reeked of soot and smoke,  
With his face and arms all blistered,  
Wildly coughing when he spoke.

And he said he was the rich man  
Who was sent back from the dead,  
Just to warn of endless torment-  
Well, at least that's what he said.

And he stood out in the graveyard,  
Shrieking madly with each breath,  
"You will burn in Hell forever!"  
Scaring some folks half to death.

But most people thought 'im crazy,  
While some others thought 'im true,  
And a few were pretty shook up,  
And not sure just what to do.

That's when Sheriff Roscoe Ramey  
Hauled the rich man off to jail,  
And he asked him where he came from,  
And he said, "I came from *Hell!*"

And he asked him what his name was,  
And he said, "My name is Dives,"  
And said, "Abraham's my father,  
And of brothers I have five."

And whatever Roscoe asked 'im,  
He would answer just that way,  
And keep crying, "Hell's eternal!"  
And that's all he'd ever say.

Then the Sheriff asked our brother  
If he'd come down to the jail,  
And attempt a conversation  
With the man who came from Hell.

And it seemed that Dives was eager  
With our brother to converse,  
Almost like he had to do it  
To remove some awful curse.

And by then he was much calmer  
As he said with certainty,  
"I must tell you that my story  
Is most lit-er-al, you see!"

"But it's not," our brother told 'im,  
Sort o' playing right along,  
"And to prove you are the rich man  
You must prove that I am wrong."

"Oh, most gladly," said the rich man,  
"I can prove just what I claim,  
For a par-a-ble can never  
Ever use a proper name."

Bird: "Ah, the law of proper names, eh?  
And just when was that law writ?  
And by who was it enacted?  
And just who enforces it?"

Dives: "In the Scofield Reference Bible  
It is manifestly claimed,  
*In no par-a-ble*, his note says  
*Is an individual named.*"

Bird: "Yet another chapter, Scofield,  
Heads surprisingly enough  
As *The Par'ble of A-ho-lah*  
And (the name) *A-ho-li-bah*."

"And it's not coincidental  
In each 'Gospel Harmony'  
Luke sixteen and John eleven  
Are in close proximity.

"For a name Christ used was Laz'rus,  
And he planned just what He said,  
For His list'ners knew 'twas Laz'rus  
Who had risen from the dead.

"For a *certain* man named Laz'rus'  
from a poorer family,  
Had been sick and on his deathbed  
In the town of Bethany.

"And though Laz'rus had arisen,  
And had come back from the dead,  
Those same fellers weren't a-listenin',  
Just as Abraham had said.

"But this story of the rich man  
Never says that hell's for aye,  
And it's not the final Judgment  
And it's not the final Day.

"Otis Sellers has a notion  
He delineates with zest,  
That the story Jesus crafted  
Is pure satire at its best.

"It's a literary method  
That our Lord has used before,  
And it's not far-fetched to figure  
That He used it here once more.

"Whether parable or satire,  
Either-or, I know it's not  
Some newspaper-headline-story:  
*When? & Where? & Who? & What?*

"But a pointed poignant message  
From the Lord in simi-les  
To the covetous and scornful  
Mammon-serving Pharisees.

"For they could not serve their mammon  
And be servants of the Lord,  
Or call Abraham their father  
If ol' Moses they ignored.

"So the po-int of the story  
Is of negligence and greed,  
Not a cutaway of Hades  
For the endless torment creed.

"And when Pharisees and chief priests  
Heard some other such from Him-  
Well, they didn't take it lit'ral,  
But 'perceived he spake of *them*.'

"And in fact, one place, it tells us,  
Of our Lord so wise and meek,  
That without such kind of stories  
Unto them He didn't speak (Mk 4:11, 34)

"If it's concrete detailed data,  
Such could hardly be believed;  
But as lessons in a picture  
They are readily received.

"Would the wedding of a king's son  
Not at least appeal to some?  
Would the ones who were invited  
Kill the ones who bid them come?"

“Would a man choose ten to marry  
Five of whom he never knew?  
Could they purchase oil at midnight?  
Could this possibly be true?”

“Would the owner of a vineyard  
Send his own beloved son  
To some mean and wicked servants  
After all that they had done?”

“But those stories have a message;  
Yes a point so plain to see  
When they’re understood as pictures,  
And not taken li-t’ral-ly.

“Yes, our Father to His vineyard  
Sent the prophets who were slain,  
And the precious son is Jesus-  
Now, you see, it is so plain.

“And so many of Christ’s sayings  
Are constructed like this too,  
Where we know that they’re not lit’ral  
Yet the points they make are true.

“No one really swallows camels;  
No one really strains at gnats;  
But it’s so true to the figure  
That they really do do that.

“Who has wood beams in their eyeballs?  
Or casts pearls before swine?  
Wolves don’t really wear sheep’s clothing,  
And the Lord is not a vine.

“And yet spir-it-ual-ly speaking,  
Doesn’t ‘vine’ make perfect sense?  
Thus these stories and these sayings  
Are con-du-its to convince!

“And when people heard the Savior  
did they ask for facts or proof?  
No, they *knew* He spoke in pictures  
To point out a certain truth.”

Then the rich man said, “A *certain*-  
‘Twas a *certain* rich man, see,  
So ‘a certain’ means it’s certain  
That it is a *certain*-ty!”

Brother Bird then said, ‘A *certain*  
Was the way the Lord began  
Oft to tell a pointed story:  
‘And there was a *certain* man...’

“And ‘a *certain* priest and Levite,’  
And a couple *certain* kings,  
And a nobleman and farmer,  
And some other *certain* things.

“And then five times in the gospels  
These two words are in a mull,  
Where the Lord would say ‘a *certain*’  
When he ‘spake a *par-a-ble*.’

“So a *certain* doesn’t mean it’s  
Not a par-a-ble, you see-  
It’s a means of introduction,  
Not a lit’ral guarantee.

“And the story of the rich man  
Does not teach that hell’s for aye-  
On the subject of duration  
It has nary word to say.”

And then Sheriff Roscoe Ramey  
Brought some vittles in a trunk,  
With an inmate, Bogus Campbell,  
Who was drunker than a skunk.

In the trunk there was a pitcher  
And some Mason jars of tea,  
And some chicken, beans and taters  
From the Sheriff’s “Auntie Bea.”

And ol’ Bogus wobbly anchored  
On the cot inside the cell,  
And lay staring weirdly wide-eyed  
At the man who came from hell.

When they all had finished supper  
Brother Bird explained to them  
Of the contest now a-stirrin’  
‘Tween the crazy man and him.

Then the rich man said, “The ‘great gulf’  
Is a proof for endless hell;  
It is ‘fixed’ and can’t be conquered,  
Thus continuous as well.”

Bird: “If I spoke of ‘here to Venus’  
As impossible to climb,  
It is relative to distance,  
But irrelevant to time.”

Then the rich man said, “In torments  
Of my body and my soul  
I have been and ever will be  
While the ceaseless ages roll.”

“Of your *body*?” asked our brother,  
“Of your *body*?” Why, do tell  
How it joined your soul in torments  
In the nether world of Hell?

“Has there been a resurrection  
To restore your flesh and bones?  
Are there skeletons in spirits  
To hang tongues and eyeballs on?”

Then the rich man hesitated  
In a puzzled sort o’ way,  
As he ob-vi-ous-ly didn’t  
Know exactly what to say.

And then Bogus Campbell stammered  
As he stumbled to a post-  
“Bru- bru- brother, are you saying  
He’s some kind of gu- gu- ghost?”

“Well... exactly!” snapped the rich man,  
“I’m a phantom from Sheol:  
I’m a disembodied spirit;  
I’m a never-dying soul!

“But my mind and sense and mem’ry  
And awareness I retain,  
And the essence of my spirit  
Truly feels and suffers pain.”

“But how could it be your spirit?”  
Brother Bird asked half amused,  
But the rich man didn’t answer,  
But seemed cornered and confused.

Then our brother said, “A spirit  
Does not have a tongue or eyes,  
Or a bosom or a finger,  
As the Scripture testifies:

“When the Lord had resurrected,  
he said, ‘Handle me, and see,  
For a spirit doesn’t have the  
Flesh and bones ye *see* in me.’

“And it says you *saw* ol’ Laz’rus  
And your father Abraham-  
Were they only apparitions  
In a nightmare of the damned?

“And just when did your free spirit  
Find itself in Hades’ fire?  
Was it instantly or shortly  
When at last you did expire?”

“Well... it was,” the rich man muttered,  
“When I closed my eyes in death,  
I im-me-di-ate-ly looked up,  
And in hell took my next breath.”

“But the order of the story,”  
Brother Bird at once replied  
States the fact that you were buried  
E’er before you even died.”

“Oh, that’s nonsense,” said the rich man,  
As if taken by surprise-  
“First I died, and *then* was buried,  
And in hell lift up my eyes.”

“Ah... you’re *right!*” our brother told ‘im,  
Yes, of course, I must admit-  
First you died, and *then* were buried-  
That’s exactly how it’s writ.

“So that means that you were buried  
Then, *before* you were inflamed-  
Not the instance that you died, hmm?  
As you earlier had claimed.

“For it was your buried body,  
Not your disembodied soul  
In the grave and in the gravedom  
Of both *Hades* and *Sheol*.”

Then he showed ‘im how that *Hades*  
Is the Greek word for *Sheol*,  
And can mean a *grave* or *gravedom*,  
And denote a *hole* or *whole*.

And that “*Sheol* in the Scripture  
Is the Gravedom of the *Dead*,  
Of the righteous *and* the wicked”-  
And he proved just what he said:

“In that precious psalm of David,  
Of God’s presence he did tell,  
How the Lord would still be with him,  
Though he made his bed in *hell*”

“And, ‘what man is he that liveth,  
And shall not see *death*’ said he;  
For the *Sheol* of the grave hole  
Is our common destiny. (89:48)

“In the belly of the great fish;  
In the belly of a whale-  
Is where Jonah cried in anguish  
From the belly of a...*hell*.”

“And it’s perfect in the English,  
Just the way they worded it-  
It is *hell* if it’s the *gravedom*;  
Otherwise it’s *grave* or *pit*.”

“And of all the *Sheol*’s mentioned,  
There’s not one in sixty-five  
That e’er speaks of endless torment,  
Or of souls that are alive.”

“And the story of the rich man  
Never says that hell’s for aye  
For it’s not the final Judgment  
And it’s not the final Day.”

“But it is a picture story,  
And not lit’ral as you tell,  
For the Lord used allegory,  
When He spake in par-a-ble,

Then the rich man interrupted,  
“I was there so I should know-  
It’s an actual and a factual  
Picture of the world below.”

It was then that Bogus cried out  
From the window ledge in dread,  
“There’s another spa- spa- spirit  
Ca- ca- come back from the dead!”

But the Sheriff only figured  
It was spirits from a flask,  
When about the rich man’s entry  
Brother Bird was quick to ask:

“In the instance that you entered  
Would you not have been confused?  
Overwhelmed in shock and terror,”  
Solemnly our brother mused.

“So just how could you have known it  
Was your father Abraham?  
How’d ya know it wasn’t Isaac,  
Or Bartholomew or Sam?”

“In the throes of fiery torment  
And the grasp of ghastly pain,  
Could you have a conversation  
So coherent and so plain?”

“Could you frame a fluid sentence,  
Or just weep and wail and groan?  
And ar-tic-u-late petitions,  
Or just shriek and flail and moan?”

“From burn-victim testimonies  
There is one thing we have learned:  
They can’t formulate a sentence  
In the midst of being burned.

“And how is it ‘outer darkness’  
In such fiery flames so bright?  
Or how is it “mists of darkness’  
In the midst of blazing light?”

“Since you’re sure it is so lit’ral  
And of stark reality,  
Then my questions are most proper  
To see if it’s ‘verily’!

“No, the texture of your story  
In the very warp and woof  
Of its contrasts, names, and features  
Speaks of metaphoric truth.

“Why, the preachers do not preach it  
As a text on saving grace-  
That to go to Abram’s bosom  
‘Evil things’ you have to face!

“Or that angels transport spirits,  
And then when they make it through  
Abraham’s the first to greet ‘em  
With the other side in view!

“And if Laz’rus heard your pleading  
Clear across the gulf in hell,  
Then he must have heard the screamin’  
Of a million more as well!

“If such sights and sounds surround ‘im  
That are anything but nice,  
Could you say that he finds ‘comfort’?  
Would you call it ‘paradise’?”

And then someone went to bangin’,  
Loudly bangin’ on the door,  
And the Sheriff let him enter  
Lest he bang on it some more.

Who then said, “My name is Laz’rus,  
And I’ve come back from the dead  
To refute this lyin’ con man”-  
Well, at least that’s what he said.

Bogus Campbell was a-frightened,  
And he slunk back in the cell  
From the man who came from Heaven  
And the man who came from Hell.

“Laz’rus” looked just like a mummy  
Wrapped in gauze from head to toe,  
And he smelled just like a dishrag,  
And his eyes were all aglow.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge  
People came from hill and dale  
To see Laz’rus and the rich man  
In the Surry County Jail.

Willie with his darlin’ Daisy,  
Ernest Ladd and Sister Smoke,  
Ida Clara, Ima Vera,  
And a bunch of other folk.

Like detective Diddy Doright,  
And ol’ Fetch, his blue tick hound,  
Okie Dokie and his neighbors,  
With ol’ Bogus gathered round.

That’s when Laz’rus started listing  
Useful facts from A to Z-  
Fascinating information  
Versus endless misery.

Of the contrast in the Scriptures  
Of *eternal life* and *death*,  
And of *perish* and *destruction*,  
And of how the Scripture saith

That the chaff will surely burn up  
In a fire you can’t put out,  
And that *perish* means, well, *perish*  
With no shadow of a doubt.

How the pictures in the Scriptures  
And the words within the Word  
Fully verify the teaching  
Of peculiar Brother Bird.

And he pondered how the story  
Could have ever come to be  
Any proof for endless torment  
When it’s just not there to see.

“This account our Lord has given  
Does not state that hell’s for aye-  
On the topic of duration  
It has not a word to say.

“And it was a buried body,  
Not a disembodied soul,  
And between his death and entrance  
Was a proper fun-er-al.

“It’s a pointed picture story,  
And it paints the picture well;  
Illustrative allegory,  
Not a window into hell.”

And that’s when the rich man figured  
Who this “Laz’rus” really was,  
And remembered a computer  
That was named *the Wiz of Oz*.

So he pulled one piece of wrapping  
With which Laz’rus had been bound,  
‘Til the beggar went to whirlin’  
Round and round until unwound.

Bogus Campbell’s head was spinnin’  
And he blamed the whole affair  
On an impure run of moonshine  
Which he swore off then and there.

Then the beggar was the focus  
In the Surry County pen  
In his night shirt and his long johns,  
And an impish little grin.

Willie whispered to sweet Daisy,  
“What a clever little sneak;”  
While the rich man roared in fury,  
“It is Micro Chip the geek!”

Well, I guess that was a miscue;  
Yes, a careless little slip,  
For our brother asked the rich man,  
“How do *you* know Micro Chip?”

And just then ol’ Fetch the coon hound  
Toward the rich man quickly veered  
Lickin’ greasy scraps of chicken  
Tangled in the ashen beard.

And the beard and wig fell off ‘im,  
And to ev’ryone’s surprise  
It was Doctor Farren Brimstone  
In that soot and smoke disguise!

How he wished he *were* a spirit  
And could quickly disappear,  
But he wasn’t and he couldn’t  
And then Brother Bird drew near.

“And said, Farren, oh poor Farren,  
What you’ll do your case to win,  
And with such determination  
That the torments never end.

“If it’s true it can’t be altered  
By a question or a doubt,  
And my tiny little squirt gun  
Will not ever put it out.

“If it’s not you can’t create it  
Through a vote or by a creed,  
So relax and get your Bible  
And just open it, and read.

“No one’s dug down to the center  
Of the earth so they can know,  
But we can dig in the Scriptures  
For to see if things are so.

“And this story of your ‘rich man’  
Never says that hell’s for aye,  
And it’s not the final judgment,  
And it’s not the final day.

“But it is a picture story  
Of the mammon-servers greed,  
Not a cutaway of Hades  
For the endless torment creed.

“No, the story of the rich man  
Does not teach that hell’s for aye-  
On the subject of duration  
It has nary word to say.”

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge  
Bogus Campbell sobered up,  
And you won’t find bootleg whiskey  
In the bottom of his cup.

And our brother hopes that others  
Will respond as soberly,  
And soon learn that endless torment  
Is as bogus as can be.