



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

The fellows came to mow the pasture late yesterday afternoon. The hay was up to the haunches on the ponies and needed to be cut. Since I'm up here in the mountains of North Carolina to finish writing a book, ordinarily I would have not paid any attention to the operation. But my shoulders were aching from sitting long hours at the typewriter, and the sun was just setting in the western sky, sending rays of burnished gold streaming over the mountains. It was time to get up and stretch my legs. Besides, I hadn't talked to anyone in two days and, since one of the men was leaning on a fence post while the other worked the tractor, this looked like a good chance.

The fence-post leaner was a welder by trade and mowed pastures after work. Born and raised "just across the holler," he was full of mountain wisdom. When he found out I was writing a book about jungle pilots who fly missionaries, he started talking about the area churches.

"We got two kinds of churches in this place," he said. "Dead 'uns and live 'uns. The dead 'uns don't bother nobody, but the live 'uns is a-fightin' each other somethin' fierce."

He then told me about a big fight over at Hebron Church. Hebron, if I remember correctly, was one of the old cities of refuge set up under the administration of Joshua. It was to be a place of peace. But this mountain Hebron was anything but that, according to my mountaineer friend.

"It seems that half the folks wanted to throw out thar pastor," he said, "while the other half wanted to keep him. So they'n went storming outten the church

house and had a big free-fer-all on the front lawn. Some of 'em get ter hittin' each other with thar fists. And women tew. You never seed the like a-them women, hittin' at them men and pullin' at each other. My wife and me had visited our nephew that Sunday. He was one a-them fer the pastor and he was right in thar with the rest, swingin' his fists and stomping with his boots. We nigh didn't get outten thar alive."

My friend reached over and pulled a hay stalk out of the ground, peeled it back and stuck it between his teeth.

"Well, somebody finally called the sheriff and he came up with his siren a-blowing and stopped the fight. Then he got up on the hood of his car and told them folks how sorry they was and that they should all go home and pray. I don't rightly recollect what the sermon inside was about that morning, but that sermon from the hood of the sheriff's car was about the best one I'd ever heard."

About that time something broke on the tractor and my friend had to go out in the pasture to see about it. I returned to my studio, glad I had a chat with him. He seemed to have his head screwed on straight, although he was thoroughly confused over the way some of God's folks act sometimes.

Who ain't?

Anyway, other than that and a big explosion day before yesterday when the revenooers blew up a still down in the valley, things have been peaceful around here. However, I think I'll stay in and write this Sunday. I just don't know whether I can stand too much mountain religion.