

Book Review by Mike Atnip

Following hard on the heels of an article condemning the foolish reading material that the world provides for children is the joyful news that there *is* something positive to replace the negative that you may have just cleaned off your bookshelf. Yes, in place of Marvin K. Mooney and Curious George, there is the beautiful book called *Coals of Fire*, authored by Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman. Instead of filling your children's minds with foolishness and plain old rebellious attitudes found in *The Cat in the Hat* and similar nonsense, why not give your children a dose of overcoming evil with good? A dose of the kingdom of light overcoming the kingdom of darkness?

*Coals of Fire* is just the book to do that. While it is written for younger people, there is absolutely no reason why an older person will find it too childish. In fact, the stories will challenge the most mature Christian to examine his walk with God and his response to his fellow man.

Some books are written, read by one generation, and promptly forgotten. Not *Coals of Fire*. The copy I have on hand was loaned to us by my wife's grandmother, a well-used 1954 printing that has told the stories of returning good for evil to four generations now. I hope my great-grandchildren will read them as well.

For an introduction to the book, I will quote the introduction that is found in the edition I have in front of me:

COALS OF FIRE tells the stories of men and women who practiced doing good for evil. They didn't just talk about loving their enemies; they lived what they talked about. These are the kinds of stories that make you

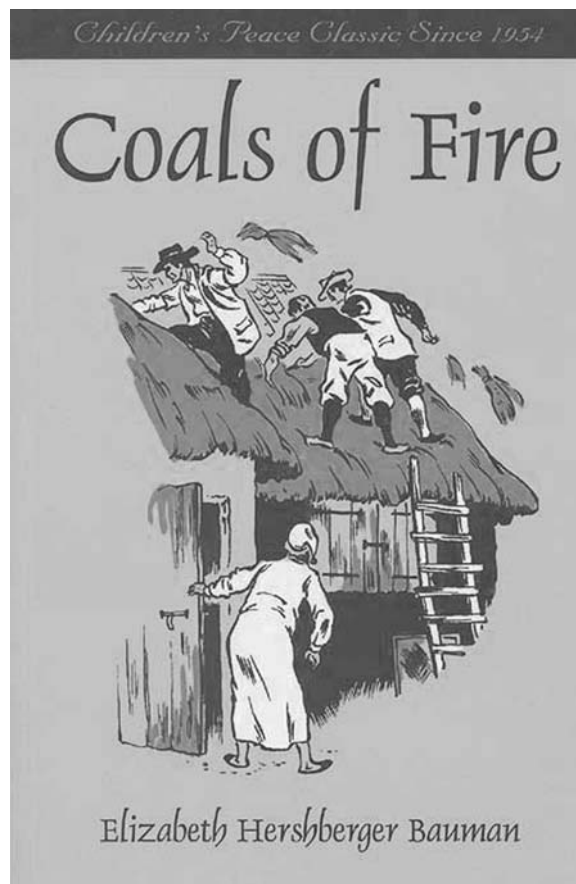
remember how you felt when the boy you detested in school gave you a piece of chocolate cake the day you forgot your lunch. They make you remember how well you slept the night you invited the neighbor girl along to visit the zoo, a whole week after her dad had shot your pet cat in his chicken pen. You will remember the shame you felt when coals of fire burned on your head. How sorry you were down inside when your enemy did you a good turn. You will remember the coals you heaped on the head of your enemy, or the ones you knew you should have and never did.

These people believed that love does no ill to its neighbor. These people lived their love. Because they lived their love they nursed sick refugees and gave them warm coats. Because they lived their love they sat behind jail bars without Bibles. Because they lived their love they had their heads cut off and were drowned.

They lived heaping Coals of Fire. Some died heaping them!

One of the interesting aspects of this book is that many of the stories are "modern." Obviously, since it was written over half a century ago, it lacks the "just in the news last week" touch to it. But many of these stories happened in the last century, in contexts that we can at least identify with to a degree.

For example, in the chapter called "The Pick and Shovel Army," the setting is Europe in the 1920s and 30s. While to a preteenager this may seem like halfway back to the Stone Age, most of us older ones realize it "was but yesterday." Or perhaps, "A Man Who Could Not Yield" could happen today instead of in World War I. This chapter chronicles the experiences of a man



jailed for being a conscientious objector, living on bread and water for 14-day stints. And, yes, that did happen right here in the United States of America. For Canadians, “On Corridor Two” relates the similar incident of Ernest Swalm and his time in Kingston Federal Prison ... again, for being a conscientious objector to war.

The 17 chapters span across time—from Old Testament to modern—and space, from Montana to the Indian Himalayans. It catches a variety of expressions of kingdom Christianity, from Quakers to Brethren in Christ to Mennonite, and more. The uniting bond across the chapters is the theme of living out the principle of overcoming evil with good.

In an age of much evil, which keeps getting worse, these stories are dreadfully relevant. And in the context of the previous article in this magazine, in which evil books were exposed, *The Heartbeat of the Remnant* rejoices to tell our readers of a good book to exchange for the evil ones. Your children’s, and your own heart, are in good hands reading *Coals of Fire*.

Marvin K. Mooney, in the name of Jesus, go to the burn pile now! And, *Coals of Fire*, will you please take his place on the bookshelves of believers in Christ!

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Ro. 12:21 ~

*Coals of Fire* is available from many bookstores and Anabaptist publishing houses. It is also available in Spanish under the title *Ascuas de fuego*.