

To Speak the Truth

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I had no idea what to expect. How could I have? The whole *concept* of a man like my father being in jail was itself so crazy as to be wholly unimaginable! And yet in jail—or, more precisely, in the jail attached to the Lumpkin County Courthouse in Dahlonega—was exactly where he was. Or at least that's what his lawyer, one Curtis L. Summers, had said in his letter.

It was a while ago: I was just nineteen years old—one third of my current age—when I left Savannah that June morning in 1839 to find out what exactly had happened to my father. Now that we all know what horrors were in store for our country at mid-century, we tend to recall the parts of our history that preceded them as a kind of golden age. But in its own way, the fourth decade of the current century was an extremely complicated time for our nation. We were into the second year of the Van Buren administration. In some ways, our eighth president was a novelty. He was the first American President actually to have been born in the independent United States. He was the first New Yorker to live in the White House. He was, at least so far, our only President raised speaking a language other than English. But Martin Van Buren was also a complicated man riddled with inconsistencies. Not a decade after leaving office—he lost the election of 1840 to William Henry Harrison, who was in office for about twelve minutes before dying of pneumonia (or something)—he re-emerged into public life as the leader of the strongly anti-slavery Free Soil Party. But that came later and, while in office, Van Buren had no trouble continuing the horrific policies of his predecessor towards the Indians in the Southeast, the specific program that my father opposed so vociferously and fully publicly that I was sure even before I got anywhere near Lumpkin County that it was that very vocal opposition to the President's plan that had landed him in hot water. The only real question, I think I knew even before I arrived, was just how hot that water actually was and what it was

going to take to cool it down sufficiently for my father not to end up permanently scalded.



It all really does feel like ancient history now. After suffering losses during the War Between the States that would once have been considered unimaginable (more than 600,000 dead, almost all young men), the number of natives who died on the death marches west during the Jackson and Van Buren administrations—something close to 17,000—seems almost inconsequential. But the horror of being stripped both of one's possessions and one's dignity, having one's land seized, and then being rounded up and sent off either to walk on foot to Oklahoma or to drop dead *en route*—that nightmare cannot be passed lightly by, even now, by people who like to think of themselves as moral human beings. At least the soldiers on both sides in the War were fighting *for* their governments! The Choctaws, on the other hand, were the victims *of* their alleged government. As were also all the others tribes uprooted and sent west to survive or not to survive: the Cherokees, the Seminole, the Chickasaw, and the Muskogee.

My father, Rabbi Aaron Caleb Klass, was born in London in 1789 and came to this country with his parents as a boy in 1803. His parents taught him at home until age ten, at which age they enrolled him in the yeshivah of Rabbi Asher Levitas, housed in those days in a clapboard house on what was then called Baxter Street in the Five Points neighborhood of lower Manhattan. It wasn't a brief stay either—he remained under Rabbi Levitas's tutelage for years, finally receiving rabbinic ordination in 1813 at age twenty-four. He got married to my mother that year as well and together they moved to Philadelphia, where my father took his first pulpit. He apparently liked the congregation and the city far more than his minuscule salary and so, when the opportunity presented itself five years later to move to Savannah to serve the United

Sons of Israel Congregation and be paid more than twice as much as he had been earning in Philly, he took it. They settled in easily. I was born two years after that. Life was good. But, as is true of all life's journeys that begin with single steps (which is all of them), no one could have imagined where this one was going to take him.

It all started, I suppose, with the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. In and of itself, the law needn't have been the herald of any misery at all because it merely gave the President the right to negotiate land exchanges with native tribes and to use federal funds to cover their transportation expenses if they agreed to move west. The key element, though, was that the President was specifically *not* empowered to force anyone at all to move west in the absence of a formally negotiated treaty between that individual's tribe and the United States government. A lot of people supported the idea. Even my own father didn't think that it was such a bad idea. But, of course, he didn't know at the time what was yet to come.

The story of the Indian Removal Act is long and complex, but the specific part that features my father getting himself arrested took place in 1838. The Treaty of New Echota, negotiated during the Andrew Jackson administration with some renegade Cherokees who specifically did not represent the legitimate tribal leadership, was neither ratified by the Cherokee National Council nor signed by their then-chief John Ross. To the U.S. government, however, these were mere details...and far more important was the discovery of gold in Dahlonega and the ensuing Georgia Gold Rush. By 1838, they had somehow managed to talk about two thousand Cherokees into abandoning their land and voluntarily moving to Oklahoma. But that was nowhere near good enough for President Van Buren, who sent in one of his best generals forcibly to uproot the remaining Cherokees from their homes and send them west as well. And that is when my father stopped being just a rabbi and became also a kind of a prophet. And a radical. And, yes, a bit of a crazy person.



The jail turned out not to be a freestanding building, just a wing of the courthouse—albeit one with bars on the windows and doorknobs only on the outside of the cell doors. My father was wearing tan slacks and a white shirt when I was ushered into his cell. There was no place to sit down—just a bed, a toilet discreetly positioned behind a paper screen, and a shelf hanging down from the wall. On the shelf I could see my dad’s familiar prayerbook and a Bible. He looked healthy enough, but thin and tired.

“Where are your *t’fillin*,” I asked idiotically. *That* was the first question I had for my father?

“Not allowed.”

“What about freedom of religion?”

“This apparently doesn’t extend to things you can hang yourself with.”

“Are you thinking of hanging yourself?”

“No, Daniel, not yet.” He actually chuckled. “But they have no way to know that.”

I chuckled too, but with less enthusiasm. And then I moved onto more weighty matters. “What are you charged with?”

My dad focused his gaze directly at me. “With speaking the word of God aloud and in public.”

“That’s not allowed?”

“Apparently not if you are standing in the road in front of a general’s horse and preventing him from taking the general to whence he would go.”

“And were you doing that? Standing in the road to keep the general’s horse from moving forward?”

“Yes, I was.”

“And how did you know the horse wouldn’t move forward anyway and knock you over before trampling you?”

“I didn’t know that.”

“I thought you were a prophet speaking the word of God. Shouldn’t a prophet know stuff like that?”

“You’d think.” Another wry chuckle.

“And when are they going to let you out?”

“You’d need a real prophet to answer that one, Daniel. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.”

I knew the quote and I got the point. “Amos said that of himself, Dad. But he’s remembered as one of the great prophets nevertheless. But let’s talk about more important things.”

“More important than Amos?”

I ignored his question. “So you have no idea when they’ll let you go home?”

“No,” he said. And then he fell silent as we both considered the possible implications of that thought.

Eventually, I got the whole story out of him. I myself had been in Charleston that week visiting with friends, but he had been home on Shabbat afternoon two weeks ago and had had a few hours free to read between waking up from his nap and the Afternoon Service at Sons of Israel. And the specific thing he chose to read was the letter Ralph Waldo Emerson had written to President Van Buren just three months earlier and then published for all to read. As he never did, Emerson didn’t mince words. That a treaty about to affect eighteen thousand people had been formally and unequivocally repudiated as illegitimate by more than fifteen thousand of them, he wrote, was not irrelevant and could not be thought so by decent people. And then he

asks the three questions at the heart of the matter: “Will the American government steal?”, “Will it lie?”, and “Will it kill?”. And then he asked, plainly and simply, whether it can possibly be so that “the millions of virtuous citizens, whose agents the government are, have no place to interpose, and must shut their eyes until the last howl and wailing of these tormented villages and tribes shall afflict the ear of the world.” Emerson himself was foremost among those millions of citizens. But among them too was my father, Rabbi Aaron Caleb Klass, one of Emerson’s greatest admirers and a man who did not take the suffering of innocents lightly.

And then we finally got down to it.

“So what exactly *did* you do, Dad?”

“I responded to Emerson and decided no longer to shut my eyes and make deaf my ears.”

“And how exactly did you do that?”

“Well,” my father replied slowly, “probably not in the very best way possible. I read in several places that the President was sending Brigadier General Winfield Scott to ‘relocate’ the remaining Cherokees to Oklahoma. The fact that relocating them without a treaty signed by their legitimate leadership was 100% illegal seemed to trouble no one. But it troubled me. And you know what I get like when I have a fire in my belly.”

I knew all too well. “And what exactly did you do?” I asked again.

“Well,” my father hesitated for a long moment, “well, I closed my eyes and looked into the future. I saw people dropping from exhaustion on forced marches. I saw barefoot men and women falling aside when they simply could walk forward no longer. I saw children fainting from hunger and dying of disease. And I decided not to turn away.”

“Go on,” I said, only partially wanting to hear the rest.

“I went to Dahlongega because I had heard that that was where General Scott was going to begin the forced removal of the natives. It wasn’t that long a journey—about three hundred miles if you travel through Swainsboro and Athens. But of course you know that now yourself.”

“How did you know the general’s plans?”

My father closed his eyes and waited a long moment before responding. “I didn’t know the specifics, but it was no secret that he was to be the agent of the President’s pernicious policy. That much was in all the papers. So he seemed the man to confront.”

“Why didn’t you go to Washington and address yourself directly to the Commander-in-Chief?”

“I didn’t think they’d let me anywhere near him.”

“Moses seems to have gotten in to see Pharaoh easily enough.”

“True enough. But that was then. And, besides, Washington is six hundred miles from Savannah, not three hundred.”

“So what happened?”

“I don’t know what I thought I was going to do—I just went and figured that the spirit would move me to act wisely. And decisively.”

“And did it?”

My father hesitated again. “Maybe.”

“What did you do exactly?”

“I got to Dahlongega easily enough. And once I arrived it was simple enough to find out where the general was lodging. There aren’t *that* many hotels here to choose from, after all, and he was surely going to stay at the nicest one. Which is precisely

where I found him. Not in the hotel, I mean, but right in front of it.”

“And what was he doing?”

“He was getting ready to leave, already mounted and surrounded by an honor guard of very well-armed military men.”

“And you confronted him.”

“You make it sound like I accosted him.”

“You did accost him.”

“But in a good way, Daniel. I simply stood in front of his horse and forbade him to rip innocents from their homes or to uproot legal landowners from their legally-owned land.”

“That’s all you said?” I knew my dad better than that.

“Well,” he allowed, “I may have said something about God having sent me to prevent him from sinning grievously. About the price men pay when they turn their backs on the Almighty.”

I could actually feel the color draining from my face. “Anything else?”

My father looked away for a moment, but then answered. “I think I may also have quoted from that story in Daniel about the king who behaved like a beast and so was driven from the company of men and forced to live among the beasts of the field.”

“Really, Dad? You threatened old Fuss and Feathers with the punishment God meted out to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon? Did you mention the part about the king having to eat his grass naked in the field like an ox while his finger-and toenails grew as long as a bird’s talons?”

Dad smiled. “I’m impressed you know your Bible that well, son. How many people read Daniel or remember anything from it?”

Now it was my turn to smile. “He was my namesake, after all.”

“Yes, he was.” Dad was clearly pleased.

“And that’s it? They arrested you because you quoted the Book of Daniel to General Winfield Scott?”

Dad looked surprised by my question. “I may also have had a gun in my hand,” he said just a bit sheepishly.

“A gun?” I couldn’t believe my own ears.

“Well, not that *big* a one. Just a little one, the kind you shoot rabbits with.”

“I think people use shotguns to go rabbit hunting.”

“Whatever. I got his attention!”

“I’ll bet you did.”

“And now I’m in jail.”

“I can see that. And what happens now?”

“I was hoping you could help me work that part out, Daniel. My lawyer seems able and he’s eager to meet with you. His office is just across the street in that white building next to the bank. It must be very convenient when he has clients in jail.”

“I’m sure that’s the case.”

“So you’ll go see him?”

“I can hardly wait.”



Curtis L. Summers could not have looked the part more precisely if he was playing a southern lawyer in some music hall production. As gaunt as General Scott was stout and as tall a man as I have ever known, my father's lawyer would have cut an imposing figure in any context at all. But dressed as he was when I walked into his office—in an off-white three piece suit and pale yellow silk necktie that matched both the shade of his moustache wax *and* the color of his silk socks, he really could not have looked more the part of the Southern lawyer and gentleman.

He was more than cordial and didn't appear to be at all worried about my father's fate. At first, we talked around the topic. He asked me about our life in Savannah and I answered his questions honestly. He hadn't known that my dad was born in London—Dad doesn't sound like a son of Georgia when he speaks, but he also doesn't sound at all English—and was interested, slightly to my surprise, in genealogical details that I would have imagined to be wholly irrelevant to the situation at hand. But, hardly being in a position to second-guess the specific individual I was counting on to spring my dad from the hoosegow and restore him to his congregation and his family, I just answered all the questions he had about my paternal grandparents as best I could.

Finally, done with the preliminaries, he asked me if I myself had any questions. As it happened, I only really had one.

“What happens next?” I asked.

“You mean to your father?”

“Yes, of course. Can you get him out of jail?”

“He was denied bail,” Summers said.

“I’m well aware. But where does that leave him?”

“It leaves him in jail. But they’ll want to clear this up quickly. I expect we can expect your father to appear in court within a few days.”

“Do you know the specific charges against him?”

“The usual. What you’d expect. Disturbing the peace. Aggravated menacing. Vagrancy. Threatening a government official. It’s impressive they didn’t charge him with Attempted Murder, but I suppose the fact that the gun wasn’t loaded steered them off that course.”

I could hardly believe my ears. I had expected him to be charged with something *like* disturbing the peace, but this sounded way more serious than I had anticipated. I said as much to the lawyer, then asked the obvious question. “Can you get him off?”

Summers smiled slightly. “The last person I defended who was charged with a similar litany of crimes had waved a *loaded* pistol at President Adams two days before the latter left office back in ’29 and I got him off.”

“That’s very impressive.”

“Mind you, he’s going to have to spend the rest of his days in an asylum for the criminally insane. But the point is that he was not convicted of any crime at all.”

“That couldn’t happen to my Dad, could it?”

“Not in a month of Sundays, son,” my father’s lawyer answered, leaning back in this chair and smiling broadly.



The lawyer was right about them wanting to deal with this quickly and Dad's trial was set for the following Monday. It made sense to me too: why *wouldn't* the government want to avoid granting an articulate, forceful preacher a public soapbox to stand on while denouncing illegal, unjust, and morally reprehensible government policies while they were actually being carried out? They were probably sorry no one had just shot him on the spot, which could then easily have been justified after-the-fact with reference to fact that there had been no way at the time to know that the weapon in my father's hand had not been loaded. But that option no longer being viable, a speedy trial started and concluded before the General's work got underway was clearly their second best chance to tamp down public opposition to the government's plan before some crazy rabble-rouser got the locals all riled up.

I had nothing to do until Monday. I was permitted an hour each morning and afternoon with my father, which privilege I accepted gratefully. I had brought two volumes of Gemara with me, so that's what we did for those few days—learn Talmud—and try to ignore the fact that we were doing it behind bars. The rest of the time, I wandered around Dablonega and tried to amuse myself. I sat in a public park and read. I went to a local lake and swam. I had no way to cook for myself, so I basically lived on cucumbers, tomatoes, bread, and beer. (I had brought a few of my mother's sausages with me, but I gave them to Dad since he was obviously not going to eat the meat they served in the jail and I figured he needed that kind of fatty nourishment more than I myself did.) I *davened* each morning in my hotel room, trying to find some solace in saying prayers that I knew my father was reciting daily in his cell as well. Shabbat was as dull a Sabbath as anyone ever spent: no public worship, no Torah reading, no invitations for meals, no one to talk to, and, in fact, no company at all. And then, somehow, it was Monday morning. The trial was set to begin at ten o'clock. Wanting to be sure of getting a seat in the visitors' gallery, I was in place a single minute after the courthouse opened its doors at eight o'clock. I remained the sole person present for almost a full hour. Eventually, though, people started to trickle in. By half past nine, the room was full. I recognized no one at all other than the assistant who had ushered me into the lawyer's office when we had had that initial meeting and then, a moment later, Curtis Summers himself, dressed in what I now understood to be his customary off-white suit and yellow cravat. From

my seat, I could not see the color of his socks, but I presumed them to be pale yellow as well.

And then, at ten o'clock sharp, the door behind the judge's chair opened and the assembled rose to their feet as Judge Isaac L. Garfield took his place. A moment later, a different door opened and my father, dressed in his own clothing, was ushered into the court. He was rumpled looking, but neither handcuffed nor restrained in any visible way. He made his way to his lawyer's table and there they both stood, side by side, until the judge sat down and the bailiff (or whoever he was) invited everybody else also to be seated. A public prosecutor, one Lemuel Shaw, was seated at an adjacent table.

Some officer of the court read out the charges. It all seemed very cut and dried; even the judge looked a bit bored. But then things suddenly started to happen. The judge asked my father to rise and to state his name, his home address, and his occupation for the court. My father did so in his customarily clarion voice. The judge appeared to be listening carefully, then asked my father how wished to plead. A quick huddle between my father and the lawyer, after which the lawyer, not my father, spoke.

"Your Honor," Curtis Summers began, "my client has a proposal he would like to make."

The judge looked surprised, but not hostile. "Go on," he said.

"My client will plead guilty to all the charges except for the charge of vagrancy—because the very last thing Rabbi Klass is, or even could imagine himself being, is a vagrant—but he will plead guilty to all the *other* charges in exchange for the right to explain this incident at length to the court before sentencing."

My mouth actually hung open at hearing this, but the judge looked as though he could hardly believe his good luck. "Does the defendant own a home in the State of Georgia?" he asked, clearly trying to sound genuinely curious.

"Yes, Your Honor," Summers said, "he does."

The judge, smiling broadly, turned to the Public Prosecutor. “In light of that fact, Mr. Shaw, do the people agree that the charge of vagrancy be dismissed?”

Mr. Shaw did not seem at all surprised. “Yes, Your Honor,” he said.

Judge Garfield turned to face my father directly. “Rabbi Klass, the charge of vagrancy is dismissed, but it was the least serious of the charges you are facing. Do you understand the implications of pleading guilty to the others? They are not without weight.”

Now it was apparently my father’s turn to smile. “Yes, Your Honor,” he said. “I have an excellent lawyer and he has made me fully aware of their gravity.”

“And all you are asking is the right to address the court in advance of sentencing?”

“Yes, Your Honor.”

“Well, then, your plea of guilty is accepted by this court. Go right ahead and give your speech!”

My father stood up. His posture, always erect, was ramrod straight. His white hair was neatly combed. His black *yarmulke* was firmly in place. He looked like he had lost some weight in jail, but he radiated, not the sallow pallor of the temporarily incarcerated, but the robust demeanor of a prophet barely able to keep the word of God from issuing forth on its own from between his lips. He looked, in short, a bit crazy. I suppose people thought the same of Amos in his day.

Taking the invitation to address the court to imply permission to speak to the entire courtroom, my father stepped to the side of the room so he could address the judge and the visitors’ gallery at the same time. For a long moment, he said nothing. And then, as though responding to some signal that only he could perceive, he spoke.

“Your Honor and welcome friends,” he began as though he were welcoming guests to the sanctuary of his own congregation, “I am here today to explain my actions of just a few days ago. On the 29th of April, I stood up in a public thoroughfare—a place in

which I, as a member of the public, had every right to be—and saw before me a mighty sorrel steed bearing on its broad back Brigadier General Winfield Scott, the officer whom I knew to have been charged by President Van Buren with undertaking the fully unlawful task of removing the local Cherokee from lands they had possessed since time immemorial and forcing them into exile, an illegal act specifically and unambiguously *not* permitted according to the terms of the Indian Removal Act.”

When my father paused to catch his breath, the judge asked a pertinent question. “But, Rabbi Klass, is there not a treaty in place that makes the removal of the Cherokee legal?”

My father looked at the judge as though he could hardly believe his ears. “There is not,” he said simply. “Nor is there a living soul in this state,” he said, stepping onto even thinner ice, “who doesn’t know that that the Treaty of New Echota, the treaty to which I presume you are referring, was a sham that was neither ratified by the elected tribal leadership of the Cherokee Nation nor accepted by any but the tiniest minority of its members. And the Indian Removal Act solely grants the President the authority to use federal funds to assist Indians in abandoning their ancestral lands if and when the government successfully negotiates such a removal to the so-called Indian Territory beyond Louisiana with the legitimate leaders of the tribe in question.”

The judge seemed slowly to be realizing what a huge error of judgment he had made in permitting my father to speak at all, let alone “at length.” But he could hardly go back on his word: the reporters seated in the two rows behind me were visibly taking notes, as, of course, was the court reporter who was busy taking down every word spoken in the courtroom in some sort of shorthand script.

And now, having moved himself into position, my father opened up with both barrels. “Your Honor,” he began, “I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But....”

My father glanced upwards as though corroborating with the Divine what he was planning to say next.

“...I am a man who knows right from wrong. I am a man who knows what it means to be held in contempt by people whom I have never met and who have no basis for judging me positively *or* negatively. And I am a man who understands that the Commander-in-Chief of our great American nation has ordered his army to betray the very principles upon which this Republic was founded sixty-three years ago. He has ordered soldiers to ignore the law of the land, to turn their backs both on mercy and on justice, and to rip people from properties that they have farmed not for centuries or even for millennia...but, as far as anyone knows, for the full length of human history in this place. And he has done so by relying on a treaty that a man of his great perspicacity and intelligence certainly knows is not worth the paper it is written on. Indeed, it would be a mark of disrespect unworthy of *any* citizen of our great land to suppose, even for a reckless moment, that our President could possibly be sufficiently dull-witted not to understand the evil he is perpetrating in this place.

“I stand here today, therefore, not to preach or to scold, but to attempt the simplest and most difficult of all tasks: to speak the truth. But because the psalmist wrote that truth and justice are the twin works of God’s hands, I have come here today not solely to speak the truth but also to demand justice for the downtrodden and the powerless in our midst. But I will not lie to do so.” My father raised his voice slightly as he closed his eyes. “I will never lie. Certainly not to the court, which sin the Ten Commandments could not more clearly forbid, but also not to myself. I am an honest man. And I that is why I have pled guilty to all the charges leveled against me except the one of which I was in truth not guilty. What I have done, I have done. I hurt no one. I threatened no one in any consequential way. The court is surely aware that there were no bullets in the gun, which I carried solely to get the attention of the man I wished to address. But every single word I spoke to General Scott was true. He surely knows that. As, I am certain, does also every single person present here today. I pled guilty because I did the things of which I am accused. I stand before you, therefore, in the expectation that the punishment meted out will fit the crimes to which I have admitted. That, I will accept as my due. And so I conclude today by observing that the real challenge to be met today is not mine, but this court’s.” Here, my father pivoted to look directly at the judge. “I have the voice of a single man,” he said. “I doubt I could raise my voice loud enough for it to be heard beyond the four

walls of this courtroom. But you, Your Honor, you have the ability to speak loudly enough for the President of the United States to hear what you have to say. I bless you with courage. And I pray that you too will stand up today for justice...and for truth.” And, with that, he sat down.

The courtroom was completely, utterly silent. For a long moment, all I could hear was the sound of birds twittering around in the trees outside the courtroom’s windows. My father whispered something in his lawyer’s ear, who smiled and then handed my dad his handkerchief to the sweat off his forehead. I felt a bit lightheaded, but fully focused on my father as I wondered how I could ever live up to the example of gracefulness, eloquence, and courage he had just set.

Things wrapped up quickly after that. Since the accused had pled guilty, there was no need to prolong the proceedings. The judge asked my father to rise in his place. He and his lawyer both stood up. It was so completely still in that room at that moment that you really could have heard a pin fall to the floor. I felt somehow like I too should stand up, something in the way my mother and I do at home when my father is called to the Torah. But no one else was standing, so I remained in my seat. Honestly, I’m not sure I would have been able to stand up at that moment even if I had wanted to.

For a long moment, the judge seemed lost in thought. But then he looked at my father and spoke. “I’ve already accepted your plea, Rabbi Klass,” he said quietly. “And now I sentence you to time served. You are free to go.” And it was at that very moment, while the word “go” was still hanging on the air, that the entire courtroom, with the sole exception of the judge himself, rose to its feet and applauded. I felt overcome with so many conflicting emotions that I can’t even begin to separate them. Relief, of course, that Dad would be coming home with me to Savannah. Love for my father too, also of course, but the specific kind rooted in respect so genuine and intense that for a long moment I found myself wondering if just possibly my father wasn’t *actually* a prophet of God sent to this specific place to say the words he had spoken. And intermingled with all those positive emotions, of course, was also a deep sense of foreboding tinged with outrage rooted in the fact that we all knew that, whatever else

might happen in the distant future, the near future was going to include the exile of the Cherokees—and the other tribes caught up in the net Van Buren had inherited willingly from Andrew Jackson—without regard for the law and without regard for even the most elementary canons of justice.

This was all a very long time ago. I was nineteen in 1837. Now, thirty-eight years later, I can already see sixty on the horizon. My father is long gone, as is also my mother. I haven't lived in Georgia since I was in my twenties, but the recollection of those few days in Dahlonega stays with me still, days in the course of which I learned what it means to speak the truth....and what it means to earn the right to bear the image of God in which we are all made.