

My Most Unforgettable Character

By M.D. ELLINGTON

My grandfather, William Ellington II, was a revolving gentleman. Any way you looked at him he was a gentleman.

He had little formal education, but he knew a lot about many things.

He chewed tobacco, drank liquor, cussed some and didn't go to church much, but he was a good man in the ways that are important.

He was kind, generous and honest to the nth degree. He raised my brother and me, teaching us not that honesty is the best policy, but that honesty is the only policy. Inscribed on his tombstone at the direction of his oldest son, who knew him best, is "An honest man is the noblest work of God."

His honesty and kindness were such that during the Civil War he would not fight for a cause he did not believe in, nor take up arms against his neighbors. Instead, he left his hometown of Ellijay, Ga., and spent part of the war in Indiana, living and working with a Quaker family.

His companion on that sojourn was his father, Coke Asbury Ellington, who after the war was one of only two Georgia legislators to vote for ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.

Grandpa didn't attend church much because he had read the Bible through several times and knew more about it than most of the preachers in north Georgia in his lifetime. He had two brothers who were Methodist preachers. One he had the utmost respect and admiration for. The other, he said, didn't know much and talked too loud and long.

He followed the Biblical teachings on charity. Once when our neighbors were down on their luck he gave them a bushel of corn so they could have cornbread with their black-eyed peas and sowbelly. He told my brother and me not to tell anyone, because in those days it was considered a disgrace to take charity.