

Life and conversion of Alexander Church, jr.

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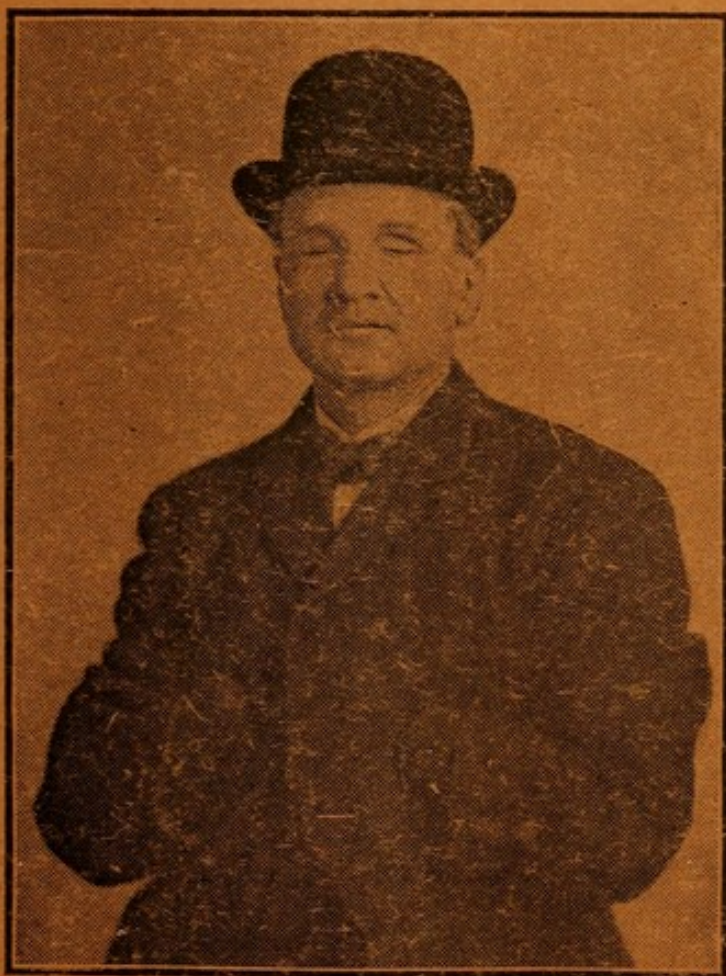


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LIFE AND CONVERSION

OF

ALEXANDER CHURCH, JR.



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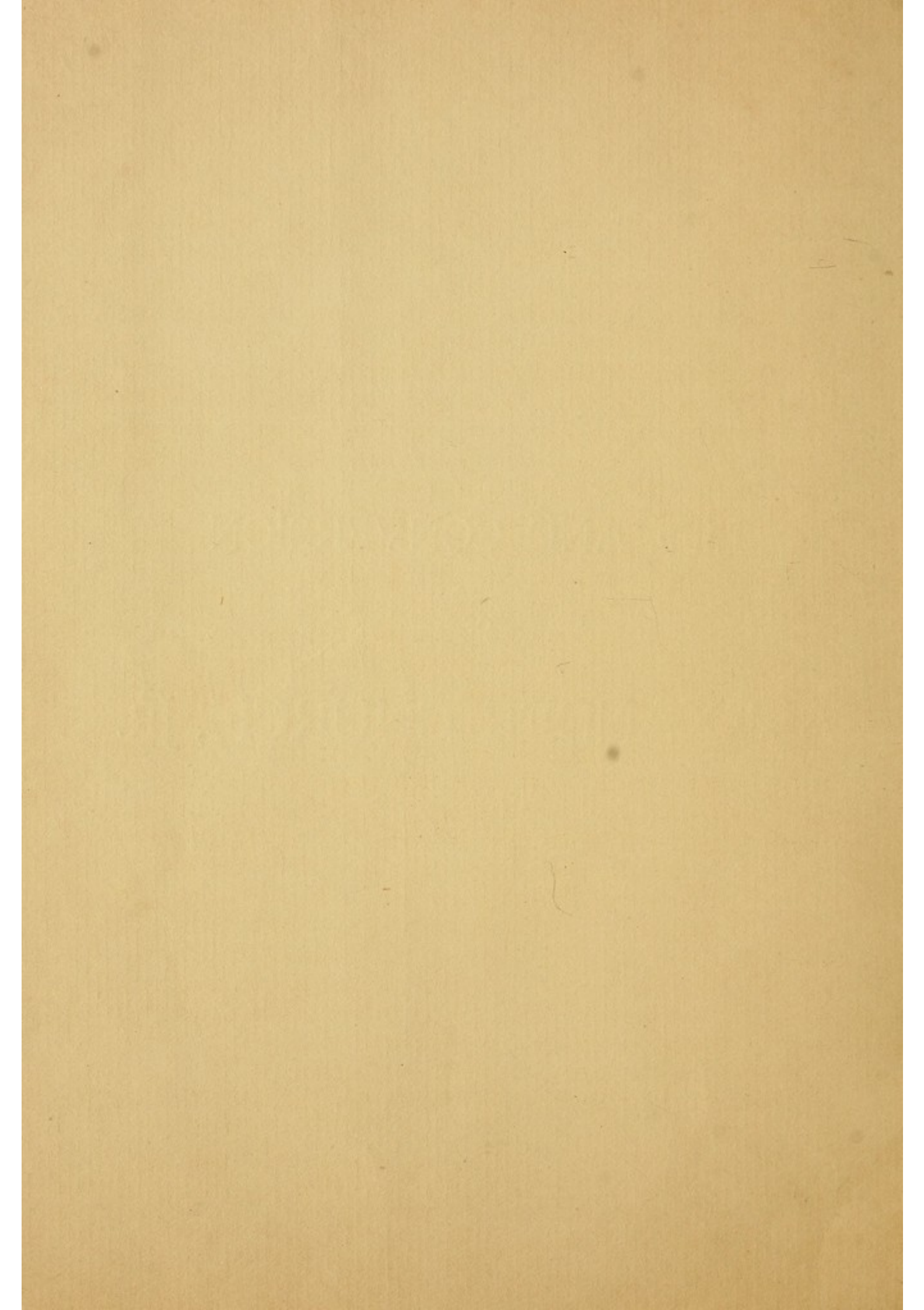


IN THE
Francis A. Countway
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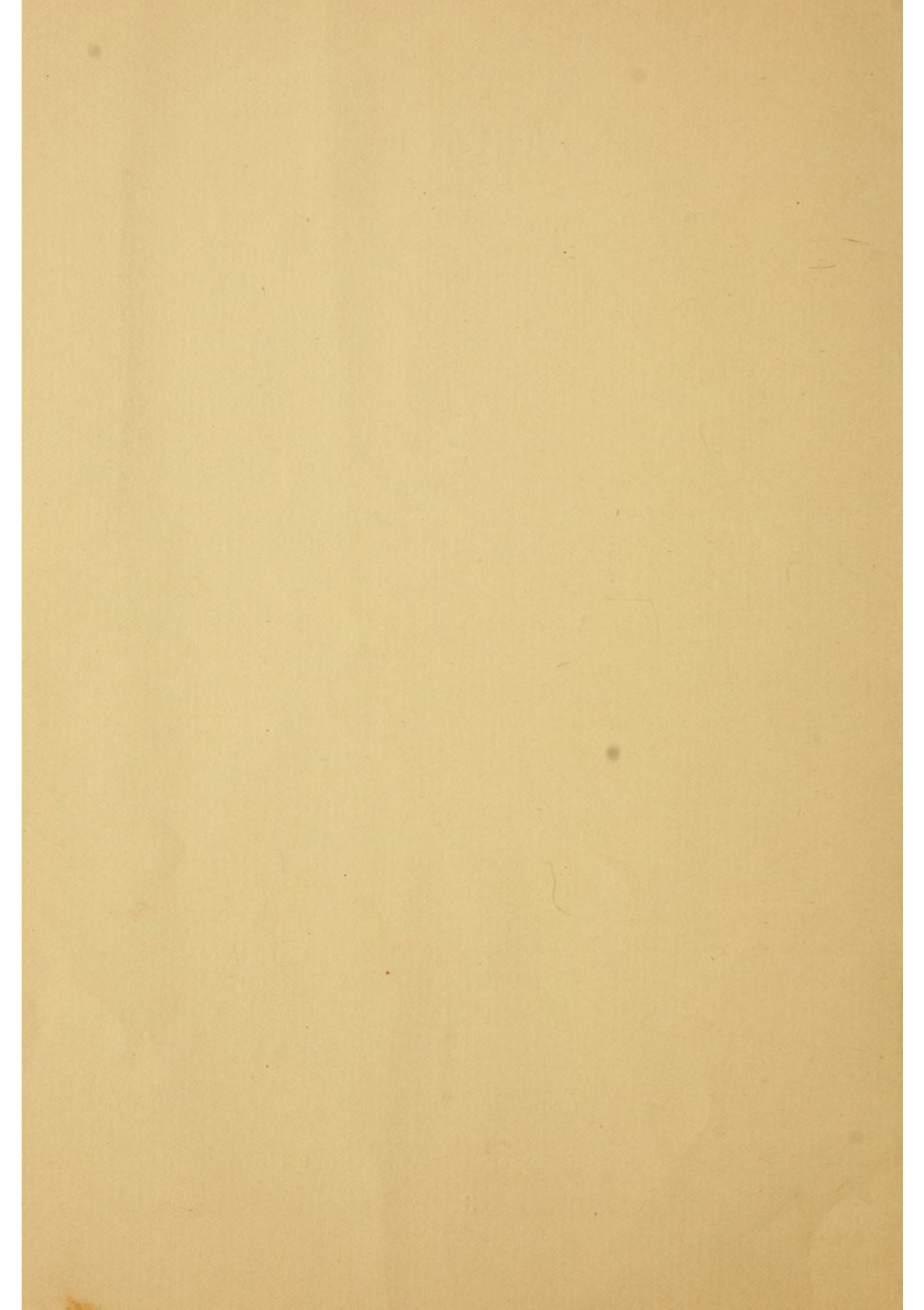


PREFACE.

Dear friends, the author of this work, after an extended season of prayer to Almighty God that He would in some way make me useful and the instrument in His hands of winning souls for Him feels called upon, having in mind my duty to God and my fellow man, and in answer to my prayer that God would use me, to bring before the world an account of my life as a sinner and my most wonderful conversion. Therefore by the help and grace of Him who gave His only begotten Son to die on Calvary's cross, that poor sinners such as I might be saved and fitted for a brighter and sweeter world to come and be made heirs to a mansion in His kindom and joint heirs with Jesus Christ His Son, I feel that it is the one way in which I can work for Him, being as I am without eyes to see or hands to do the things that others can do for Him, yet with all I thank God that He has given me an experience, which when once told may perhaps be the means, through Him who gave it, of leading many precious souls into His marvelous light. My conversion is but another of God's miracles wrought here in your midst, and my earnest prayer is that you will read carefully the things written in this account of my life, and that some precious soul may be brought into the fold and made one of His chosen ones through my weak efforts to do His blessed will. The facts recorded here are set forth in order to show that the Saviour of all mankind will not leave or forsake those who call upon Him, even in the hour of their adversities. May His richest blessings rest upon all who read this book and may we at last all meet around His throne in heaven, where we will praise Him and dwell with Him forever and forever, world without end, amen.

Sincerely your Brother in Christ for the salvation of precious souls,

ALEXANDER CHURCH, JR.



Dear Reader.—I was born in the little village of Mt. Airy, in Berks County, Pennsylvania, on the sixth day of April, in the year 1867. My parents were and still are good Christians. My father, Mr. Alexander Church, Sr., being class leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church, of Mt. Airy. My mother, Mrs. Martha Church was also a member of the church at Mt. Airy and was a sincere and devout Christian woman.

I began my early boyhood days by entering the school at Mt. Airy, which was taught by Prof. Henry Harrison. The school was situated on the Schuylkill road, about one hundred yards from the Schuylkill canal. The surrounding country being open, afforded a very good field for sport for the forty-five scholars in attendance at that time. In all the boys and girls attending this school I do not believe there was one to be found more mischievous than I. So much for mischievousness. One of the first real evil things that I was guilty of doing was disobeying my parents. This, as I will show, will lead to other evils or sins, and as you will follow me through my younger days into youth and manhood, you will see how the first act of disobedience led me from one sin into another. This is the way in which I began to serve the devil: first by disobedience, when I was told to go to school I did not go; disobeying them, when I was asked the next time I did go why I was away, I would say that I was detained at home because of sickness, or make some other excuse, which the devil always has a supply of, right at our finger tips. This was lying, the next step from disobedience. Now, I have set these things before you, not to encourage them but to show to those who read this book how easy it is to go from one sin to another; and then when you have done these things which the devil has prompted you to do, he leaves you right there, as he always did me, for in almost every case I would be found out and severely punished

for them. Thus I continued for three or four years, and growing older I sought the companionship of older boys, and as a natural consequence fell into the habits of these new acquaintances, and so each new sin that I would commit would be worse than the one before it. These two evils are the first sins that once committed and followed up are the means of leading boys to prison cells and to the gallows—first disobedience, then lying. Now then, I would like to impress upon you the necessity of being obedient—first to God, then to your parents; for has He not commanded us to “Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Not one of us can honor our father or mother unless we are obedient to them. The object set forth here is to show to others by my past life of sin and misery the absolute necessity of making a change in the way they are living and become better boys and girls, for it is truly said that the boys and girls, young men and young women, become very great sinners even before they have become aware of how bad they really are. Let us see what was the result of my associating with those who were older in sin than I. I can recall one of the first steps I took in their direction. It was to learn to use tobacco; this, if nothing more, is a filthy habit. I would like to say a word here about the use of tobacco and what it leads up to after one has become addicted to its use. Let us begin with the article itself. It is a nasty, dirty thing; its use is a dirty habit. Let us picture a boy or young man coming up one of our principal streets, with a mouth full of tobacco. Here he comes, chewing away on his quid as though his very life depended upon each chew he gives it. Watch him as he walks up the stret. What has he done? Why he has just let go a great stream of the filthy juice of this dirty weed from his mouth onto the sidewalk, which is bad enough to satisfy almost anyone who sees it that this habit is a filthy one. But let us go with him a little further. First let me tell you how nicely he looks as far as personal appearance is concerned: he is dressed in a neat fitting suit of clothes made of a good quality of light cloth; he wears a

natty pair of shoes upon his feet, a stylish hat upon his head, and his newly laundered linen shirt bosom shines forth in its whiteness, as we see him coming toward us. But stop! What is the matter with him now? Why he has just let another of those streams of tobacco juice fly out of his mouth; and this time instead of going upon the sidewalk, as he intended, part of this filthy stuff had dropped upon his fine white shirt front. What do fine clothes, patent leather shoes and stylish hat amount to now? His pleasure for a time at least has been spoiled, he cannot go as he had intended to spend a day in the park, but must return home, and if, as it was in my case, this young man's father has been opposed to his using tobacco, what is he going to do when he has reached home, how is he going to cover up this sin of disobedience to his father who has forbid him using it? And how is he going to account for the stain on the bosom of his white shirt? Let us see what the sin of disobedience will lead to in this case. When asked by his father how the stains came there he replied that he had taken a cup of coffee at a friend's house and unfortunately spilled some of it upon his bosom. Thus you see the devil was there ready to help this young man into further sin with his cunning, and he has taken the second step on the road to hell by lying. Now I did not only disobey my father by using tobacco, when he had forbidden it, but I was guilty of lying to him about it in order to hide it, so from one sin to another the devil leads us on. As we are speaking of little things that sometimes become great let us see how some men have become gamblers. I began in this line when only a small boy by playing marbles. Now this is a sport that almost every boy indulges in, and in itself is really not harmful. But this is the harm that came out of it for me. I soon acquired the desire to win from those who played with me and would bet, or place a number of marbles against a like number set up by my companions, and then try to win them from them. This soon created a desire to play games for the sake of winning and to play for a stake. It does not matter how small the stake we play for, or what game we play at, if we

play to win a given amount we are guilty of gambling. I went from marbles to tossing pennies. This we did by tossing the pennies at a mark, the one nearest to the mark to take all the pennies. The desire to play games for gain grows, and from pitching pennies I soon began to play cards—first playing to see who could win, then playing for a penny; the one winning the game at cards would take both pennies. This soon led up to larger stakes and I soon began to visit the hotel and there I played for cigars and drinks and often for an amount of money. A great deal of my spare time was spent in this way. At first I would only take beer, and only a small amount of that, then more and more until very soon I found that it was a very hard thing to keep away from these places. After a while I became so much interested in the games played at the hotel, and began to like drink so well, that as soon as my day's work was done I would go to the hotel and play cards and drink until midnight. This was repeated from night to night, and on several occasions my father came after me. But the devil always had a way out for me. When my father would ask for me the proprietor or some of my companions would tell me he was there and I would go out the back window, and often beat my father home. This soon made me bolder and I soon began to go home under the influence of liquor. My father tried to influence me to stay away from these places, but it was of no avail for the devil had led me on from one sin into another for so long a time that I was becoming hardened to it and followed the dictates of the devil almost every time that he would prompt me to commit sin of any kind. My mother plead with me to leave the company I was going with and become a Christian, but the devil had me in his clutches so tight that her pleading was of no avail and I would eagerly grasp every opportunity that presented itself to be bad. Her pleadings and prayers would at times so impress me and weigh upon my mind that I would long to do better, but the evil one fearing to lose so good a servant he would come to me with some fresh and new induce-

ments thus hardening my heart and leading me farther away from the good impressions my mother made.

As I associated with the men about the hotel, I took a fancy to shooting with the shot gun and took a deep interest in the shooting matches that would take place from time to time in the vicinity of Mt. Airy, and soon became a very good shot with the gun. When the proprietor of the hotel saw this he would back me in these matches for a prize and sometimes money. These I often won for him, but my share of the proceeds would be a few drinks. I became so taken up with this new sport that I would often steal my brother's gun and would have no end of trouble on account of my great desire to be among these associates. Yet I continued on in this way shooting and going from the place where the match was held to the hotel, where I would be praised for my skill with the gun and would be given a glass of whiskey to drink as a token of the esteem in which the proprietor held me for winning these matches for him. This would make me feel big—to think that I could drink whiskey was to me something to be proud of. But this was only the work of satan; this was another of his plans to strengthen his hold upon me for he knew that when I was myself, or when I had all my faculties about me, or in other words, when I was sober, he could not use me in his work owing to the impression left upon me by my mother's pleading with me to do better.

When I was about eighteen years of age, I was employed by my father, Alexander Church, Sr., who at this time, besides being employed as bookkeeper had the contract for stocking the mill and furnace of the E. & G. Brooke Iron Company, of Birdsboro, Pa. My work consisted in loading and unloading iron and stock and driving a horse and cart. This work I followed for about two years. I will say something about the horse I was driving at that time. He was a large roan, measuring about seventeen hands high and weighing about sixteen hundred pounds. He was of a kind disposition and faithful to every duty that was imposed upon him. I would like to make use here of an expression

that I have often heard. When a man has made some mistake which has caused him no end of trouble, and some one has mentioned it to a friend, I have heard this remark made a great many times: "Well, if he had only had good horse sense this thing would not have happened." There are a great many people who have not got even good horse sense, for if they had they would do as this horse I drove did. I have known this horse to leave the mill and draw a load of stock to the furnace, a distance of about half a mile, and go upon the scales; and when the man at the scales would snap down the guard on the beam of the scales he would start off for the stock house, turn around and back the loaded cart to the place where the stock was received, and stand there until the man who received the stock would unload the cart. He would often start back to the mill and be well on his way before I would meet him. This satisfies me to a great extent that the horse was more attentive to his duties than I was, for he knew that when the cart was loaded it was to be drawn away; or, in other words, he knew his duty and did it, while I knew my duties but was careless about them. Now as far as knowing our duty and doing it is concerned, a little horse sense would be of great value to us if put to practical use. Therefore let us do our duty to God. Let us not wait until we have been driven to do so by some means or other, but voluntarily and of our own free will come unto Him who can save from all sin.

It was during these two years that I drank and played cards and was indeed a very bad boy or young man, for I was about nineteen years old. At this age I gave up the horse and was employed by the E. & G. Brooke Iron Company as a heater's helper. About this time or shortly after I had gone to work in the mill the Spirit of God began to strive with me. There were times then, that I, like King Agrippa, was almost persuaded to become a Christian. But satan fearing that he was about to lose me, again placed temptation in the way and thus I was made the most miserable of men. I went on in this way for a few months longer, until at last there came a day when I could stand

it no longer. So one winter's night in 1886, I attended the revival services then being held in the M. E. Church, of Birdsboro, conducted by the Rev. T. T. Mutchler. It was in this meeting I gave my heart to God. From this time I fully made up my mind to serve God with all my heart and with all my soul and to allow Him to use me in any manner that He chose in His work, for I soon felt that I should go and tell to the world what a dear Saviour I had found. I believe that it was my duty to go and preach the Gospel and was preparing to do so, but there arose numerous obstacles to prevent it. A friend of mine had just left for college to prepare for the ministry and I desired to go with him and likewise be fitted for the ministry and so expressed myself to my parents. Bnt my going was put off from time to time and as I did not get the opportunity to go I became somewhat discouraged and downhearted. I was serving God with all my heart, but when the devil saw me down in the valley he immediately set to work to undo all the good that had been wrought within me, and it was not long ere I found myself as one would express it in a sleepy condition spiritually speaking, in other words I was like an old clock,—I needed winding up—in fact I had become so badly mixed up in my Christian experience that like the clock I needed to be all taken apart and cleansed and set together again in a proper manner. I had laid down my cross and as I have said had fallen into a spritual sleep, and like natural sleep I was like one who talks in his sleep, dreams in his sleep, and while dreaming of heaven, was really on my way to hell. I had—

Become a cold professor
 In worldly garments clad,
 I was living on profession,
 My heart was very sad;
 My path was very crooked,
 I was sorely pressed with sin,
 For the pathway of the righteous
 I had failed to travel in.

My back was heavy burdened
 For failing to bear my cross,
 I could not speak in meeting
 I was surely at a loss;
 I could only tell my trials,
 And what I used to be;
 I could not speak of freedom,
 Because I was not free.

I seldom read my Bible,
 I had no family prayer,
 Unless 'twas when the preacher
 Had been invited there;
 I could not think of holiness,
 Or that man could perfect be,
 And this is what the first sin
 Of disobedience done for me.

Thus I went on in this cold sleepy mood from day to day and slowly but surely drifted back into the world and away from God. First my old associates and hotel and shooting matches, then came cards again. Then he comes to me in this way:—A young man with whom I had associated in the old days would say: “Come Aleck, let us go and have a drink.” First I said no, but the devil is a sly old fox and began to explain that one glass would not do any harm and after awhile I took the drink. I did not stop to think of God’s command in Leviticus 10:8: “Do not drink strong drink; thou, nor thy sons with thee.” And disobeying this command I found myself in an awful state of mind; I was an outcast, I felt out of place, set to aside, for I had erred as Isaiah said, “But they have erred through wine and strong drink are out of the way.” I desired to do right but seemed to have no control over myself for in my heart was always a longing after God and holy things, but satan held the reins and seemed to drive me before him and I was soon far away from God. Still the dear Lord did not leave me, but made me miserable on account of my disobedience to

Him and sent punishment in order to show me that the way I was going through life after promising to serve Him was not pleasing to Him. Let us turn to Leviticus 26:14-18: "But if ye will not hearken unto me and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes or if your soul abhor my judgment so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of the heart; and ye shall sow your seed in vain for your enemies shall eat it; and I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies; they that hate you shall reign over you, and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." Dear reader, as you follow me through my life experience, you will see what relation this sixteenth verse has to my own punishment for disobedience to God.

About this time I was taken sick with typhoid fever and I lay for a long time between life and death. How my thoughts went out to God while lying there and I cried out unto Him to have mercy on me and save me and take me back into His favor again. I continued to ask His forgiveness and mercy for I knew that if I should die I would be lost. I could hear my friends in the lower part of the house talking of my serious illness, I could hear the doctor reply to my mother when she asked him about me. I heard him say, "He is very sick, he must be kept very quiet or the worst may come at any time." My illness endured for twenty days or about three weeks and never before this did I realize how near to another world man is living; and that death does not end all. It is only when a poor sinner like I was comes down to a bed of affliction as I had done and when he feels his last hour has come that he realizes his nearness to the hereafter. Now to return to my promises to God that I made when on that sick bed. Did I keep them? After He had raised me from that bed of affliction and restored me to health again did I fulfill my promises to Him

and serve Him faithfully and do His blessed will, take up my cross and follow Him as I had promised to do? Ah, dear reader, this is indeed to me a very sad and painful thought for instead of doing as I had promised to do I simply tried in my own strength to do better and lead a better life. As we are told that of ourselves we can do nothing I soon found that I could not withstand the wiles of the evil one and so slowly, step by step, I traveled along the path of the unrighteous, until I had wandered back into the old ruts of sin and folly, a miserable, wretched and helpless sinner in the sight of the Lord. Yet God's Holy Spirit never left me.

In the month of June, 1893, I began work with a firm known as Bland & Son. The senior member was Mr. John Bland, who was better known as Squire Bland, a much respected and benevolent gentleman and loved by all who knew him. The junior member of the firm was Mr. Caleb H. Bland, who was at this time, and is still a class leader in the M. E. Church, at Monocacy, Berks County, Pa. Monocacy is a small village of about two hundred inhabitants, and is about two and a-half miles from Birdsboro. Mr. C. H. Bland was a man who was well known throughout Berks County, and was very highly respected by all who knew him. The place of business was located at Mt. Airy and was known as Fort Sever, called so from the nature of the business they were engaged in. The business of this firm was that of breaking up large cannon and castings of steel by the use of powerful explosives. The cannon were shipped to the firm from Nicetown, Steelton and a number of places in Pennsylvania where the industry of manufacturing large cannon was carried on.

The fort was arranged by the erection of two parallel hills or banks, which are built of heavy timbers; for a roof there are placed across from one bank to the other large timbers and trees. The cannon and castings that were to be broken up were rolled into this enclosure and drilled when they would be charged with dynamite and exploded. The object of these heavy timbers thrown across from one bank to the other was to keep the pieces of casting from flying

from the place and perhaps doing some damage or injuring some one. There were seven men employed at the fort, including myself. My duty was to help bring these castings into the fort and drill holes into them and to charge them with dynamite. These castings were hauled to the fort from the Pennsylvania Railroad siding at West Monocacy by teams of horses. These teams would sometimes consist of sixteen horses and they would bring at one load from fifteen to thirty ton. The house I lived in was situated only four hundred yards from the fort and is the house that I was born in. I was employed at the fort about one year, during which time I tried to live a moral life or a Christian life, but I was really a cold Christian. I was not in that place spiritually where I could say that I was ready if God called me home. I speak of this at this time because you will see that I was not right with God as you are brought along through the account given of the things that occurred at the fort.

We will now return to our description of the work at the fort and the things that happened there. These cannon sometimes weighed as much as thirty tons. They were drilled from ten to sixteen inches deep and would contain from four to six holes when ready to blast. These holes were charged with dynamite, each having a separate fuse with an explosive cap attached to the end that was placed into the dynamite. The dynamite would then be covered with earth to prevent it from catching fire before the cap on the end of the fuse was set off, for if it caught fire it would only blaze and burn up without exploding and would do no execution. This would continue until the cannon would be split in two pieces, charging and recharging, each time increasing. The men engaged at the fort were very careful and cautious as they knew the nature of the explosive they were handling. During the time that I had been at the fort there had been no accident resulting from the careless handling of dynamite until I had been there about one year, when one day in June after we had worked together

all day and had made a number of blasts, we started to work upon a large cannon weighing about twenty tons.

This was on the furth day of June—I shall never forget that day as long as I live. In the morning as I was on my way to work, I closed my eyes to find out how far I could go without seeing; as I walked on I suppose a distance of twenty or thirty yards, I opened my eyes and found that I had walked a considerable distance from my course. I remember saying, “God help a poor blind man.” I thought no more of this incident during the day the close of which almost marked the close of my career upon this earth. We were all at work inside the fort upon this large cannon preparing for another blast. There was a man named Francis leaning or stooping over it charging the holes with dynamite. I was standing close to Mr. Francis with three sticks of sixty per cent. dynamite in my hands—two sticks in one hand and a stick and a small pocket knife in the other. I had both hands in front of me and stretched downward to just below my waist and was in a stooping position preparing a stick of dynamite to be placed into one of the holes in the casting. Mr. Francis was trying to force a piece of the dynamite into a hole that was a trifle too small to receive it and in order to get it into place, he gave it a push downward with his hand; and then, seeing that it would not go down he took a small stick of wood and with it gave the explosive a hard punch trying to drive it into the hole. Mr. George Keller, who was standing a short distance away waiting to cover the charge with earth saw what Francis was doing and said to him, “Do not do that, it is dangerous, you might set that stuff off,” or something to that effect. This warning had not come in time to check Francis, or he did not intend to pay any attention to it, for he raised the stick he had been punching the dynamite with and was ready to strike another blow upon the dynamite already wedged tightly into the hole. As he did this I said to him: “My God, man, don’t do that! What are you doing? You will blow all our heads off.” But it was too late—the upraised hand came down upon the dynamite, and what fol-

lowed is better told by those who were fortunate enough to come out of the place alive or unhurt. Some of these I have asked to write an account of the explosion and will give them to the reader in their turn to show just how this explosion occurred and what the result of it was.

I was told by some of the men who worked with me that I was still as death for about five or six minutes. This I do know, I had a sensation in my head and eyes like one who had sand thrown into his eyes. I raised my arm to my face and thought to wipe my eye, for I did not know that my hands were blown to pieces, and as I did so I said: "My God, my hands are off." I then raised the other hand or arm and again exclaimed: "My God!" this time saying both hands were off. I then tried to raise myself up in a sitting position and as I did so I almost doubled up. I seemed to fall in or that my stomach and back had come together, I then fell back and called upon God to have mercy upon me and save my soul. For now I realized that if I were to die in my present condition, I would be lost. I then saw the folly of trying to deceive God. And dear reader, as I lay there in that fort, almost blown to pieces, my eyes closed by the force of the explosion, my hands blown off, and almost dead, my heart went out to Him who had never forsaken me, but was always round and about me, waiting to hear me call. There in that fort He spoke peace to my soul, and praise God the light broke in and mangled and torn as I was with my life's blood oozing from a number of wounds I cried out with joy and thanksgiving unto God, praising His holy name for standing close beside me in my hour of need. The next thing that I can remember saying was this: "Thank God that I am saved, take me home to my mother and let me die, for I am now ready." My first thought was of Jesus and then of my mother. Just then I heard Mr. Francis say: "If I die I am lost." This was the first knowledge that I had that he had been hurt and not knowing how badly he was injured, and knowing that I had made my peace with God, that it was well with my soul, my first thought was of his soul, so I called upon those

who were standing around to pray and ask God to have mercy upon this man's soul and spare his life. At this time my brother Harry came into the fort and coming directly to where I lay he removed his coat and placed it beneath my head for a pillow and with the tears coursing down his cheeks he cried out: "My God! my dear brother." I asked him not to cry for me that it was well with my soul; and told him that he should give his heart to God and live close to Him, adding that I was going home to glory and that he should meet me there. Then my friends and relatives gathered around me and prepared to remove me to my home. I was placed upon a board and carried out into the open air. At this time there was a very large crowd of people gathered around to see me brought out. I was laid down again upon the ground and while waiting for the wagon to come to convey me to my home I called all those who were standing around close to me and asked them to meet me in heaven. A few of them made this promise and then the wagon came and was backed up to where I lay and I was placed inside and taken home. When we arrived at the house and while I was being removed from the wagon, my mother, who was standing near the door waiting to see me brought in exclaimed: "My God, my poor boy!" I did not see her, I only heard her voice, but I knew that it was my dear old mother and I said: "Do not cry dear mother I have Jesus with me, I am going home to glory."

I was taken inside and placed upon a bed that was prepared for me in the dining room. The physician arrived and made an examination of my wounds and found it necessary to make arrangements for the amputation of both my hands which were torn into shreds. As the physician was leaving the house to complete these arrangements my mother came in and asked him if he was going to take my hands off. He replied that it would be necessary to do so. She then said to him: "Oh, doctor, save his life for God's sake, save my boy, keep him with us." The doctor said he would do all in his power to save my life. Mother then retired to her room and lay upon her bed, from which she

did not rise for about one week. I called for my father and he came to my side. I noticed that father was much affected and I said to him: "Do not cry for me; it is the will of Almighty God that this accident has occurred." And that I knew or felt that my time had come to leave them and go home to God. He heard these remarks from my own lips and shed bitter tears, for it was hard for him to see me lying there, torn and bleeding and know that I was about to be removed from among them. Ah, dear reader, those of you who have children that you love as my father and mother loved me, think how your heart would go out to God in prayer if a son whom you loved should leave your home in the morning for his work, happy and in full possession of his health and ere the day has closed be brought home to you torn and mangled by some terrible accident. Look upon him on his bed as he lay there, his head upon his pillow patiently awaiting the summons from on high. Then you can perhaps realize the pain and agony of my father's heart as he stood over me and watched for the time to come when I would pass from this world into the glorious presence of that dear Saviour who had not forsaken me in my affliction. But the God of all Grace can comfort under all circumstances and knowing that should I die I was going home to Jesus, I told my father to be faithful for a little longer and he would meet me over there. As I talked to my father I felt that the hour was fast approaching when I would be with Jesus and I told my father that I was going to die and that I was ready to go and I wanted to go. For I felt I would be a burden to those around me in my condition, having neither hands or eyes. I felt my usefulness in this world was at an end. But again comes the word of God telling me: "Thy ways are not My ways; thy thoughts are not My thoughts." For He had willed that I should not be taken home to Him, but that I should recover. And I am firmly convinced that the prayers of my dear parents and friends that God would bless the means used to restore me to health, were answered. We are told in His Word that "the pray-

ers of the righteous availeth much," and I am sure that they did in my case.

Now this was on the evening of the 4th of June. When the doctor returned, he came into my room and his first salutation was: "Well, how are you El'?" I replied that I was all right and ready to die. He then said that I would not die yet. I asked him if he thought there was any chance of my recovery and he told me that I might get well. But this did not satisfy me and I asked him to give me his candid opinion of my case. He then told me that he did not think that I would come out of my room until I was carried out, meaning of course, that I was going to die. I then told him I would not have my hands operated upon for it would be of no use to make me go through this operation, that I had been butchered enough already. I asked him to give me something that would put me to sleep and so pass away, for I wanted to go peacefully over the dark river of death into the glorious presence of my Saviour. He then explained to me that it would not do to leave my hands as they were for if I should die other physicians would complain that he had not done his duty in trying to restore me to my health and that if I should live and not have the operation performed that my hands would be a very unpleasant object to look on, so I consented to have the operation performed. I told him that he should amputate my hands and if I should die during the operation he should tell my friends that I had felt that I was going to die before the operation had been started. The doctor asked me who I would like to have to assist him with the operation and said he would call in any physician I desired to have, but this I left entirely into his hands. Dr. Hetrich then called or communicated with Dr. Weidman, of Reading, Pa., who arrived at the house about 9.20 P. M. Dr. Weidman came into the room and to my bedside. I asked: "Is this the doctor who is going to take off my hands?" He said that it was, and I told them to get at the work as soon as possible and get through with it.

Dr. Hetrich was preparing to administer ether, while Dr.

Weidman toyed with the knives and other tools with which he was going to remove my hands. When Dr. Weidman heard me say they should begin at once and get through with it, he remarked that I had a wonderful amount of nerve. I heard him and said that it was not my nerve at all, but that it was the strength and power our Heavenly Father gives unto those who are willing to serve Him and abide with His blessed will in all things.

I had prayed to God continually for strength to bear up under it and believed He was going to do it and I therefore had that freedom of mind that only comes from above. When you pause to consider that when this terrible affliction came upon me I was in part a slave to the delusion that I was all right spiritually when indeed I was only deceiving myself, you will see that in my closeness to death I was without any hope of heaven. If my readers would only reflect on this matter of deluding or deceiving themselves into the belief that they are all right, when they are slaves to sin, they would then see that freedom is indeed a great blessing, if after receiving our freedom we would use it wisely. There are thousands in our land to-day who are bound in the enslaving idea that they are free. They may be free as far as the law of the land is concerned but slaves to vice and sin. It is the glory of the Christian to be the true servant of the Divine Redeemer who has bought us with His own precious blood. All who reject that service are slaves by choice to intemperance, lust and a thousand other things that go to make the life of a sinner miserable. Think over these things, dear reader; examine your heart. Are you ready to stand before God, are you prepared to meet death or are you deceiving yourself? Remember the words in God's Holy Book, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." He knows your inmost thought and unless you allow Him to change your heart and make you to understand that you are deceiving yourselves, or being deceived by the evil one you must as I have done some day realize you are lost.

Now to return to the sick room. Dr. Hetrich adminis-

tered the ether to me at about 9.30 P. M. and I was placed under its influence. I knew nothing for some time, but came to while the doctors were at work on the last hand, I said to them, "hold up doctor, I can't stand this; you will have to give me some more of that stuff." They did so and went on with the operation and finished it and dressed the arms. This is the last thing I can recall from that time until about two weeks later. An abscess formed at the base of my brain as a result of my injuries and this added to my other injuries nearly caused my death. During the two weeks I was unconscious of all that was going on around me and in order to cover this period of time I have asked some of those who were in attendance at my bedside to write an account of the things that occurred at the house and at my bedside during this time. This I have done in order to show that the God of our salvation does not, even under the most trying circumstances leave us.

The following is a statement from Mrs. John D. Smith, of Mt. Airy:

On Monday, June 4, 1894, my brother, Alexander Church, who was employed at Fort Sever, a place where men were at work on that day breaking up large cannon by the use of dynamite, was brought home seriously injured by a terrible explosion which had taken place there, the result of a premature explosion of some dynamite which was being placed into one of these large cannon. I was at the house of our parents when he was brought in and I then saw the most horrible sight that I have ever witnessed in all my life. My poor brother was literally blown to pieces; his eyes were blown out, his hands were blown off, and his face and body were torn and covered with blood; the lower part of his body was terribly lacerated and in all he appeared to be almost entirely blown apart. He was brought home about 6 o'clock in the evening.

I shall never forget that evening for the garden surrounding the house that had contained beautiful flowers and plants was trampled down until it had become like the road outside by the hundreds of people who had walked through

it to try and get a glimpse of my brother as he lay there in the dining room of the house.

That night was a night long to be remembered. As I recall the circumstances, I shudder to have flash across my mind the scenes that I was called upon to witness there in the dining room of that house. There lay my brother upon what we all believed to be his death bed. Torn almost to pieces, yet with all his pain and suffering he was praising God for saving him from immediate death and for saving his soul as he lay in that fort almost dead. Then as the doctors came to operate upon his hands and dress his wounds, how we all had to leave the room, going out to the barn, for there were none of us who could stand this terrible trial that had come upon us that day. The night was spent mostly in prayer to God that He would save the life of my dear brother and restore him to us again. Then as I recall the terrible ordeal that we went through with him during his first two weeks of unconsciousness, how he raved and tossed about in his bed as though he was mad fighting with his best friends. My heart melts as I recall these sad scenes that I witnessed in that house during this time. After two weeks of this seeming madness, there occurred scenes of another nature. My brother suddenly became very quiet and began to observe the things that were taking place around him and would talk to us and hold intelligent conversation with those around him. The first words he spoke were about Jesus. His whole mind at this time seemed to be upon his soul's salvation and his conversation was of how he had been saved and not been forsaken by his Saviour. And then he would praise God and say he was ready to go home at any time. I earnestly hope the words in this book and the account of my brother's life and conversion will be the means of leading some one to that dear Saviour who so mercifully saved and so tenderly watched over and kept my brother during his affliction and who is so sweetly keeping him day by day as he journeys through this life without the use of hands or eyes. And with an earnest prayer to God that He will always keep him faithful to

Him and make him useful in the work that he has undertaken of bringing precious souls to the foot of the cross, and that He will make my dear brother an instrument in His hands of saving many souls and a sincere hope that his crown in heaven will be a starry one. I remain sincerely your sister in Christ,

MRS. JOHN D. SMITH.

Another account of the scenes is given in the statement of Mr. George Keller who was employed by Messrs. Bland at the fort at the same time. Mr. Keller was working in the fort on the day of the accident and was but a few feet away from where I was standing when the explosion took place, and as a consequence of his nearness to where the accident happened, received very painful, though not very serious injuries to his body. These confined him to his bed for nearly three weeks. Mr. Keller is a sincere Christian gentleman and makes this statement with the knowledge that it is to be given to the people through this book. This is the account as given by him.

“I have known Brother Alexander Church for a number of years; in fact I have known him since boyhood. Aleck, as he was called at the fort—and I might say by all who knew him—was a boy who had a very kind disposition, though at times he would be somewhat wild. But in this I do not think he was much different from other boys or that he was any worse than they. Aleck had a great many hard trials in his early life and I have heard something of some of the trials he has had after reaching manhood, but in all his troubles, I have never heard him murmur or complain. He came to work at the fort in June, 1893, was always attentive to his duties and was respected by all who were employed at the fort. His duty at the fort consisted in drilling holes into the large steel castings which were broken by the use of dynamite. He would also help to charge these holes with the explosive and at times would help bring these castings and cannon into the fort. On the day of the accident we were all busy at our work breaking up castings

and about noon or near that time had started to work upon a large cannon weighing about twenty tons. We had drilled and made one blast in this cannon and were preparing for another at about 5.15 P. M., at which time there occurred one of the most horrible accidents that it has ever been my lot to witness. John Francis was stooping over the holes in the cannon charging them with dynamite. This was the second time to charge these holes as the first explosion of dynamite in them had not broken the cannon and the shape of the holes was somewhat altered by the blasting already made. As I have stated, John Francis was stooping over the cannon, loading or charging the holes and Mr. Church was standing close beside him with his back toward the opening or entrance to the fort or blasting tunnel. He had at this time two sticks of dynamite in one hand and one stick and a knife in the other. This knife he used to cut the paper from the dynamite before handing it to Francis, who was placing it in the holes. The holes were so changed that the dynamite would not go down easy and so Francis at first tried to force it down with his hand; he then took a short stick of wood and with it gave the dynamite a punch to drive it down. I was standing at a distance of four or five feet away from them waiting for Aleck and Francis to finish charging the cannon. I had a shovelful of clay or earth ready to cover the holes with as soon as they were charged. When I saw what Francis was doing, I said to him, "Don't do that Francis, you will hurt someone." He raised the stick for a second punch, and as he did so Aleck said to him, "My God man, what are you doing, you will blow our heads off if you do that again." Hardly had the words left his lips when there came a terrific explosion. Francis struck the dynamite again and the force of the blow or the concussion had exploded the charge. But to add to the horror of this terrible affair the three sticks of dynamite which Brother Church held in his hands were exploded by the shock of the first explosion. Mr. Church was blown a short distance away, landing in a crevice or corner of the fort near the front or entrance to the place where we were blast-

ing. Mr. Francis was hurled a few feet away from where he was standing and I was blown backward a distance of four or five feet. I was not so badly hurt as Mr. Church and Francis and soon regained my feet. I ran out of the fort crying aloud with pain, for I had received considerable of the force of the explosion and was badly torn about the abdomen. On returning to the scene of the accident, I saw Mr. Church lying in the position I have described, blood covering his face and body and both his hands blown into shreds. He was not making a sound and I thought that he was dead. This sight was more than all my injuries to me. To see lying there upon his back, one who had only a few moments before stood among us and whom we had learned to love, was more than I could bear. He lay with the whole front of his body torn open and as I then thought dead. I turned away from this horrible sight, and with a prayer upon my lips I walked away. As I turned to go another horrible sight met my gaze. They were bringing Francis out of the fort covered with blood and his arm hanging down by his side torn into strings. He was more dead than alive, for he made no sign of life as they bore him out and laid him upon the ground. He was shortly after removed to his home in a wheelbarrow. These things had so worked upon my feelings and my sympathy for my fellow man and brother, that my own injuries were for a time forgotten and I completely broke down and cried out to God to save the lives of my friends, if they were not already dead. In a short time they took Mr. Church to his home, after which there came a reaction and my wounds began to pain and need attention. I was taken home where I was confined to my room for two weeks. The first day that I was able to be out, I paid a visit to Brother Church at his house and thanked God for finding him alive. As I looked upon him as he lay there in his bed, pale and mangled by his terrible misfortune, I saw in that pale face that peace, that joy, that only comes to those who have knowledge that Christ abides within. He was happy and rejoicing in a Saviour's love, constantly praising God for his salvation. This is convinc-

ing proof that there is more in the salvation of Jesus Christ than health and worldly happiness and pleasure, for when a man can praise God under such circumstances as these, how much easier is it for us who have our health and strength to serve Him.

I have made the statement of the facts connected with the accident which deprived Brother Church of the use of both his hands and eyes, with the knowledge that they are to be used for the purpose of showing to the reader of the book he is writing how merciful God is to those who will call upon Him in their hour of need. Knowing this, I feel called upon to say, give God your heart while there yet is time, for we know not when the hour shall come when we will be called to face Him and give an account of our lives here on earth. And I ask God's richest blessing upon the means Brother Church has taken to work for his Master and earnestly hope that his experience as related in this book will be the means of leading many souls to Christ, who is our only refuge.

Sincerely yours,

GEORGE KELLER.

I again became conscious of my surroundings on June 18th and the greatest and the most remarkable part of all my experience was that I suffered very little pain. This I could only account for as the blessing of God in answer to prayer that He would sustain and comfort me in my affliction. On the 4th of July I sat up for the first time for one hour, then each day after this I sat up, increasing the time that I would be out of my bed each day. I continued to grow stronger each day and about seven weeks from the time of the accident, I was able to be up for a whole day at a time. I was taken to the Wills Eye Hospital, in Philadelphia, and the Medico-Chirurgical Hospital of the same city, where I had the attention of the best medical skill known in these institutions. The object of taking me to these hospitals was to try to restore my sight, but at both places I was told I would never see again. I had now so far recovered that I was able to

be out and go about from place to place alone. I began to attend the M. E. Church at Monocacy, and to take an active part in the church work, and so far as I was able (being blind) to do some good for my Master. I have never neglected an opportunity to speak for Jesus since the day I was so terribly injured and have done, and am doing at the present time all I can to bring precious souls into the fold of God, and to this end I have spoken in a number of meetings which have been held by different denominations or churches, including the Salvation Army. In 1895 I attended the camp meeting at Joanna Heights, which continued for weeks. The meetings at the camp were very spiritual and I had been greatly blessed and strengthened at these meetings. The evening meetings, or revival services, were conducted by the blind evangelist, James A. Mace. He being blind also, a mutual friendship sprang up between us and I had several very pleasant interviews with him about Jesus and his love.

On Thanksgiving Day, in the year of 1895, I went to Reading, Pa., to attend the convention held there by the Holiness Christians Association, and while there and in one of the meetings I sought after and obtained the blessing of sanctification. This was the beginning of a life of usefulness in the Lord's vineyard and the starting point in my life as a true follower of the Lamb, for I knew that this great blessing of holiness was the one thing essential to my becoming a successful worker for God and the salvation of souls. Dear reader, if you would be made useful in the work of the Lord, if you would be the instrument in God's hands of saving precious souls, if you would be true to God and hope to win His favor, seek this wonderful blessing of holiness, go to Him as I did and with a true heart with the Psalmist: "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Ps. 51:9.

In July, 1897, I became connected with the American Salvation Army with a commission as captain. About the same time a friend and brother was commissioned also, he being filled with the Holy Spirit, found great pleasure in

leading me about from place to place, reading to me, helping me in the meetings and in my business, in fact, doing anything and everything he could to please God and at the same time helping me. We spent many very pleasant and helpful hours together talking about the blessed Saviour and His many blessings to us.

In 1899 we left Birdsboro and moved to Monocacy, where we have resided ever since. This separated my good friend and I, and not being able to find any one who was interested in me or along the line of church work my opportunities for doing this kind of work became less frequent.

I then engaged in canvassing books (not being satisfied with sitting around in idleness) and succeeded fairly well, managed to save enough from my earnings to purchase a team and hire a man and deal in old iron. I soon purchased another team, for it paid very well, but soon competition became so great that I had to get into some other business, consequently I was obliged to make sale, which resulted in a heavy loss for me.

Then I started giving moving picture exhibitions. This paid fairly well, but was a very rough life for me, so much so that I soon decided to work a change. From that time to this no matter what business I engaged in I met with little success. I always felt that God had something better for me and have prayed continually that He would open the way for me to enter His service again and to do the work I loved so much. Notwithstanding the fact that I still remained a worker, it was only in a small way, for I was handicapped by circumstances which prevented me doing that which my heart dictated. There are many circumstances of which I could speak, but I will omit them and not weary my readers.

I will next call your attention to the bedside of my dying mother who had been suffering for several years. This proved to be a great blow to me to stand by the side of her dying bed as I did, not being able to see her, and having no hand to extend to her to bid her a last farewell. Though

dying she reached out her hand and grasped my arm and said, "Jimmy be faithful, I will soon be with Jesus and I want my children to come to me in Heaven." And between her breaths she gasped: "Poor boy. God help and bless you." This was more than I could bear and it nearly broke my heart, yet, with all this God was good for he was right there to help and sustain me and I left the room praising God and by His grace I expect to meet my dear mother in glory.

Mother died September 27th, 1906, and was buried October 1st. Then my oldest sister, Bertha, took the place of mother with the children. She was a dear, good sister, and as much like mother as a daughter could be, always ready and willing to help anybody in need and a faithful Christian and a worker for God. Thank God for this knowledge, for on May 4th, 1907, less than a year after mother's death, while sitting at the breakfast table a neighbor came in and said to me: "Do you know that your sister Bertha is dead?" and I having no knowledge of it, replied no. She said, "Yes, she went to bed last night as well as usual and was found dead this morning." This was another terrible blow, for she was so kind and attentive to me and could not do enough for me and her whole ambition was to see me succeed and prosper in life. To say that her sudden death was awful to me is putting it very mild, for my grief was awful. Could I have wept as others, I would have been relieved, but that privilege was denied me, and my suffering was intense. She was buried May 7th, three days later. Father was 78 years of age April 3rd, 1909, and still lives, but is entirely helpless and has to be waited upon and attended like a little child. He is quite rational and trusts in God as his Saviour, he says he will soon be with mother and sister in a beter world.

How sad to part with loved ones here on earth knowing we will never see their dear faces here on earth again, but sadder still if we have no hope of salvation, for that will exclude us from their presence through all the ages of eter-

nity. Again how grand and glorious it is to know they have left the evidence behind that they have only taken one step from this old earth full of its troubles and trials into the haven of rest, where all is peace, happiness and bliss.



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