

Edwin Alcander Russell

B. March 17, 1835, Concord, New York

D. August 24, 1920, Portland, Oregon

A BOY'S HISTORY: A TRUE STORY

By Edwin Alcander Russell

EARLY HOME

My father was born in 1804, my mother in 1806. They were married in 1824 and at once set up housekeeping for themselves in a log house where he made a little clearing of ten acres. All the rest of the quarter section was heavily timbered. This had to be cleared in the old-fashioned way of removing the underbrush in the fall and early winter and then, during the winter and early spring, the large timber was chopped down, cut into logs, and piled in great heaps and burned; the ashes were made into lye and boiled down, just as we boiled sap into maple sugar. The result was "black salts," which was about the only thing we or our neighbors had that could command ready money.

Children came to bless the union of these two young people and I was the fifth child of the family, born March 17, 1835. When, however, I was almost too young to feel the hardships of such a journey, my father, along with other unfortunate settlers, was summarily ejected from his land because of a defect in the title of the old "Holland Purchase."

Years before, a syndicate from Holland had bought large tracts of land in that country which had been sold and transferred to others who had also sold to individual purchasers. My father was one of these. He was envied as the most "forehanded" of all because he had managed by careful economy and the sale of nearly all his personal property—except one cow and a yoke of oxen—to make the last payment on his land. He walked one hundred miles to the "land office" and returned with a deed to his hard-earned acres.¹

Alas, their rejoicing was of short duration, for that deed was not worth the paper it spoiled. There was a prior title. So, after saving and economizing for more than fifteen years, denying themselves every luxury and many of the supposed necessities of life; after saving from scanty earnings one thousand dollars and paying it at the land office fifty or a hundred dollars at a time, making the journey on foot, and sacrificing everything that could possibly be spared to make the last payment, he enjoyed the supreme satisfaction, for two short weeks, of having in his possession a title to a home for his wife and children. Then he and his neighbors were notified that they must vacate their lands because another had a prior claim. It would be impossible to describe the feelings of my parents as they loaded all their earthly possessions into a wagon and,

¹ According to Dave Battersby, Town and Village Historian of Concord, New York, the lot was purchased on February 25, 1834 (Lot 13, Township 7, Range 7)—Editor's Note.

with their yoke of oxen in front and the cow tied on behind, took up their weary journey to a more western portion of the State.

Another quarter section of land was articed in the dense forest, the family finding shelter as best they could while a log house was being erected. Neighbors were few and far between but they kindly assisted and something we could call a home was soon ready for occupancy. I remember well the privations and hardships of these years.

The house was built with unplanned boards for a floor, with a slab roof. The logs were chinked on the inside and plastered with mortar on the outside. In the middle of the south end was a great, old-fashioned fireplace made of stone and mortar. An opening was cut through the logs for this fireplace, the chimney proper being on the outside. What an appetite and capacity for wood it had. But the saving of fuel was no object; the more we burned inside, the less we had to burn outside. The fireplace was five feet wide and the wood we burned was cut four feet long. This left little space on either side for the ashes. The place of honor was given to the "back-log," which was, preferably, of sugar maple, the largest we could get. These were cut in the woods twelve or sixteen feet in length and hauled to the house on the ox sled and finished in the "chip yard" near the door. Early each evening the fire was raked forward, and one of these great logs was hauled in on the hand-sled and rolled back to its place among the hot coals prepared for it. Then a smaller one was put on top. The hand irons placed against the backlog supported a big "forestick." Between that and the backlog were arranged the burning brands and a good supply of chips. There was soon a blazing fire by which Mother cooked our supper while we attended to the "chores." A "crane" hung in the chimney on which were suspended a number of "pot hooks" for hanging kettles, and the delicious "boiled dinners" of cabbage, meat, potatoes, beets, and carrots are not surpassed by modern cookery, if a boy's appetite may be placed in testimony. But for supper there was nothing quite so good as a tin baker full of Mother's biscuits with potatoes baked under the fore stick with fried meat and milk gravy. A great "spider" full of hash in the morning for breakfast was a regular institution at our house after a "boiled dinner" on the day before. It was a medley of all the vegetable we had raised with such meat as had been left from dinner, all seasoned with Mother's carefulness. It was served up smoking hot with another batch of biscuits. In this way we consumed a barrel of flour every four weeks; thirteen barrels of flour a year, equal to a sack a week, which my Mother worked up into bread and biscuits, together with all the other work for that large family of eleven persons.

I have now taken you far along into the rugged experiences of this unadorned home, with its many privations, where, notwithstanding, some of the happiest hours of my life were spent. The family moved into this new log house in the fall of 1841² to begin again in keen earnest the labor of breadwinning and home-earning toward which every energy must be exerted to the utmost. Every little hand and foot was made to do its part toward this object. The good of the hive was the good of every individual bee, and it was a lesson early learned.

² A few miles northeast of Little Valley, New York. The farm can be seen on an 1856 map of Cattaraugus County (section 73), <http://www.paintedhills.org/CATTARAUGUS/1856WallMap/Townships/LittleValleyReduced.jpg>.-- Editor's note.

The following winter was an open one and game was plentiful. The oldest boy was fifteen, old enough to use a rifle which somehow had been secured, and by its use the family was generally well supplied with game. The logging and clearing of the land were kept up but there was little for the oxen to eat except as they “browsed” the tops of trees cut down to burn into ashes for “black salts,” the only commodity that could bring in a little ready money.

Provisions were running low. Flour and meat were nearly gone. There had been a few warm days which thawed out the maples so that sap could run. Some of these had been tapped and the sap gathered into troughs hewed out of basswood logs. This had been boiled in the house and made into molasses, and this was all we had left. The trees out of which the troughs were made were felled near the house. My father and my eldest brother were away working to earn corn, for which they worked two days for a bushel. Corn was a dollar a bushel and labor fifty cents a day. They had worked four days, father earning two bushels and my brother one, and, on the night of the fourth day, had brought it home on a hand sled. By taking a short cut through the woods, the Mill where they could get it ground was only fifteen miles away. They could make the journey with the load on the hand sled in one day, if no accident befell them, and get back late in the night.

My Father and my oldest brother had gone to this mill. The next one at home was eleven and I was six. The gun was always kept loaded in the house.

CHAPTER 2

It was a warm spring day in March. I had been looking at the sap as it fell in great drops from the spouts to the clean white basswood troughs, when, happening to glance down the slope where the oxen were browsing, I saw two large deer picking off the tender twigs with the cattle. I crept carefully back to the house and told my brother what I had seen, and, though he had never before fired the rifle, the opportunity was too important to be lost, and we stealthily approached them under cover of the log stable, and, getting out of range of the cattle, he fired and the largest deer dropped, but soon jumped up and ran, only a short distance, however, when he dropped dead. We hastened back to the house and Mother reloaded the rifle. Then my brother crept down again beside a log near which the dead deer was lying, where he had not long to wait before its mate came and stood beside its dead companion. This is their custom and it seldom fails. My brother fired again and good luck or an overruling providence gave him success this time also.

We sat up very late that night waiting the return from the mill. We were too timid to go near the pretty creatures, but Mother, equal to any necessary emergency, took a knife and bled them while they were yet warm. After a long time, Father and Brother came, the corn meal was unloaded and, one at a time, the game we had secured was brought up on the hand sled and dressed before we cared to go to bed. This supply of meat was as truly providential as the manna in the wilderness or the feeding of Elijah by the brook. The corn meal, the venison, and the maple syrup met our need for some time, but the supply of one article created a demand for another. We had little if any salt and it was with the greatest difficulty it could be obtained. One

neighbor, nearly twenty miles away, had secured a barrel and we gladly gave him the skins of the two deer for a half bushel of salt. From this time the struggle was less severe.

The boys could be spared for three months' schooling in winter, but the school was three miles away and each one had his allotted chores night and morning to do. It fell to my lot, in addition to getting in the wood at night, to take care of the sheep, a little flock from which the wool came that my Mother carded, spun, and wove into cloth to clothe her family. It was managed, somehow, that a bolt of muslin was bought every fall to make sheets, shirts, and other underwear, but our outer clothing was made in the way I have described. Our Mother was a willing slave to her family. She put her whole life into her children. I cannot remember her as being ever in bed. She was getting breakfast when I awoke in the morning and sat by a chair filled with garments needing mending and upon which hung an iron candlestick with a lighted tallow candle, mending our clothes when I went to bed. God bless her dear old face and faded eyes and slender form. As memory brings her back to me, I feel like John on the Isle of Patmos, that I could fall down and worship the saintly image I behold.

But those days of sturdy industry were not without their compensations. My father, though a hard-working man, was not wanting in intelligence and interest in the world's thought and action. When the day's work was done, he liked to read or to have one of his children read aloud until we got sleepy. Our secular paper was the *New York Tribune*. It was in the palmy and vigorous days of Horace Greeley. Great and vital questions were before the nation and we had, in my boyhood days, I verily believed, giants in Congress. The Missouri Compromise, the annexation of Texas, and other causes leading up to the Mexican War; the war itself and the debates in Congress of such men as Clay, Webster, Seward, and others. Then the final triumph and ceding of nearly all our western domain to us by Mexico, which territory has been nearly all cut up into states which, one by one, have come into the Union. The flight of Brigham Young to Utah and the settlement of that country which, admitted to statehood, adds the forty-fifth star which has, since the formation of our government, grown from the original thirteenth.

Kossuth, the great Hungarian exile, had come to our shores to protest against tyranny and to plead for his down-trodden country. Jennie Lind had also come, engaged by P. T. Barnum for a tour of the country lasting less than a year and netting the Swedish song bird over \$300,000. All these things were in the public mind. The speeches of that mighty orator, Louis Kossuth, are ringing still in my memory: "Freedom and home, what heavenly music in these two words. Alas, I have no home and the freedom of my people is down trodden." With these words he began one of his masterly orations. He remained in this country about six months, delivering three hundred speeches, of which a hundred or more were among the finest that the human ear ever heard. There was pathos in his voice and sadness in his heart. People were attracted and hung upon his words, but he failed to secure that immediate relief which he desired for his suffering country.

Of the Swedish Nightingale, one who heard her said:

She sings like one inspired,
So soft, so clear, so sweet a note
That music melted in her throat,

A treat to last until we go to heaven,
And where alone, such music can be heard.

How vividly Kossuth compared his own afflicted country with ours when, in its colonial history, it struggled to break the yoke of tyranny and to secure its freedom. He seemed to be conversant with every page of our history: Lexington, Bunker Hill, the “Tea Party” in Boston Harbor, the surrender of Cornwallis, the triumph of our cause, and our Fourth of July independence. How his speeches thrilled us as we sat by the fireside during those long winter evenings and listened while Father read from the *New York Tribune*.

CHAPTER 3

We were three miles from school by an unfrequented road that, much of the time in winter, was drifted full of snow so that it was only with the greatest difficulty we could go or come, and yet I do not remember the time when we were not all fairly good readers. It seemed to come to us naturally. Our books were our delight and furnished us companionship when we could not go to school. Among the many things of childhood that I look back upon with pleasure are these happy, instructive winter evenings spent with the family, reading or hearing read incidents of current events which are now indelibly impressed upon my memory.

One little circumstance will illustrate the tone and quality of my Mother’s teaching. The forest had been cleared away and the country had become more thickly settled. A neighbor who owned land near us had removed to a neighboring county and, returning for a short visit, stopped at our house. Holding my little sisters on his lap, he gave them, among other things to play with, a silver dollar. Some weeks after this, I found, imbedded in the dried mud in the road, a silver dollar. I brushed the dust away and was happy in the possession of so much wealth. Hurrying home, I told my Mother, eagerly, what I had found and how glad I was to have a whole dollar for my own.

“My son,” said the dear Mother, “It is not simply by the right of discovery yours, until you have done all you can do to find the owner, and have failed.”

“Mother,” I said, “How can I tell who lost that dollar? And if I tell that I have found so much money, a good many will claim it and I shall be robbed of what belongs to me because I found it where it was doing nobody any good.”

“Do you remember,” she said, “that when Mr. Manning³ was here some weeks ago he gave the children a dollar to play with? I remember it had a hole in it and I happened to notice that date, too. It was 1824, like this one. You may go and see him about it, at least, before you claim it as yours.”

So I trudged away, five miles, reaching Mr. Manning’s at about noon. I saw him going toward the barn with two full buckets, one in each hand.

I shouted to him in my eager, boyish way: “Mr. Manning, have you lost a dollar?” He stopped, put down his buckets, and answered: “Yes, Edwin, I have; and I lost it somewhere when I was over in your neighborhood.”

³ Lyman Manning (1819-1892)—Editor’s Note.

“Did it have a hole in it and was it dated 1824?”

He replied that it had a hole in it but as to the date he could not remember. I pulled it out of my pocket at once and handed it to him, satisfied that I had found the true owner. Mr. Manning was so sure that it was his that he kept it, but he gave me ten cents for bringing it to him and insisted that I should stay to dinner, after which I went back home to tell Mother that, though I had not so much money as I had before, yet what I had was surely my own.

CHAPTER 4

Some years later than this, another home incident powerfully impressed me. It was in 1846 when I was eleven years old. My father had left, back in the county from which we had removed, an unpaid doctor's bill. It had lost its legal force, having become outlawed. It now amounted, with accumulated interest, to thirty-seven dollars. We then owned, in addition to the oxen, three cows and some young stock.

An agent of the Drs. came to see if the bill could not be paid. “We have no legal claim,” he said to my father. “The note has no legal value, but I know your people and your wife's people and with them moral obligation is law.”

“Yes,” said my father. “I have often thought of it and as often wished it could be paid. I have no money, but if you will take two of our cows, the debt shall be paid.”

This was agreed to if a boy would drive them to an adjoining county where he lived. He was to take the cows himself and pay the note.

It fell to my lot to drive those cows. It was a moral lesson twenty miles long, a family largely dependent on those three cows giving up two of them to pay a note that was already outlawed. It was a long, lonesome, tiresome walk. No boy in those days had a horse and saddle to do herding or driving. It was always done on foot.

At noon I stopped about two hours to let the cows graze by the roadside, and afterwards lie down to rest while I ate a biscuit I had taken the precaution to bring with me and picked blackberries by way of dessert, for it was August.

CHAPTER 5

Our home was located on the ‘Underground Railway’ and our house was a station on that road. My father was a Garrisonian abolitionist. That whole country was alive and at fever heat over the injustice and cruelty of slavery. Sometimes as many as five were secreted in a little excavation about eight feet square and four feet deep under the bay in the barn.

They came to us at all hours of the night and early morning, a trusty guide bringing them ten miles to us. And when the hours were safe for us to do so, after they had been fed and warmed if the weather was cold, we took them on ten miles further. Many a time I have heard them sigh softly, “I'm on my way to Canada, where colored men are free.”

Our table was scantily supplied and poverty ever waited at the door, but no fugitive slave, seeking that freedom for himself to which he had a God-given right, and which our country at that time could not or would not give him, was turned away hungry from my Mother's table.

At the station below us, they received simply a piece of pasteboard with an X marked on it. That was the sign for our house. On a large elm stump near our door, a smooth place was

hewn off and a large X cut into it. It was cut in deeply and, on many a dark, stormy night, they found the stump and felt out the X before they dared come to the door, where they softly tapped. When my father responded, "Come in," they answered, "X" and waited to be admitted. Father never waited for ceremony. If the weather was cold, he brought them to the fire at once and, having warmed and fed them, they were hidden away in the shelter provided under the bay in the barn for rest and sleep.

The poor fugitives felt very secure along the line of this road. I never knew of one being betrayed or recaptured, surely none that we had thus aided, and between 1842 and 1855, more than one hundred ate at my mother's table or of food that we took to them as we led them on their way. I have walked with four or five on many a dark night to the next station. When we heard a team coming or feared discovery, we silently climbed the fence or hid in bushes by the wayside until danger was past.

Slaves were recognized by law as personal property. By Act of Congress, September 18, 1850, it was the duty of all U.S. Marshalls, mayors, and constables, to arrest or to cause to be arrested, all fugitive slaves and remand them back to slavery. When any fugitive slave escaped into another State or Territory, the owner or his deputy might pursue and personally arrest said fugitive, or might demand a warrant and arrest from an officer having due authority. The fugitive was then to be taken before a Commissioner or Judge whose duty it was to determine the complaint in a summary manner. If he was satisfied of the validity of the claim and of the identity of the slave, he was to be delivered forthwith to the Claimant. The fugitive's own testimony was not admissible. All citizens of the United States were required to give officers personal assistance when called on to do so. It was also declared unlawful to harbor, feed, clothe, or in any way assist a fugitive slave.

In some slave-holding States it was held that if a slave went lawfully into a non-slaveholding State and acquired a domicile there with his master, or was emancipated there, he ceased to be a slave upon his return. But if he were carried there for a temporary purpose and returned, his state of slavery was resumed. It was under this technicality that the Dred Scott decision was enacted in 1856 (sic).⁴

I would go with the fugitives seven or ten miles as the case required and turn them over to the next trusty guide. Then I would go home and to bed and get up with the family and nobody was missed. It could not be shown that anybody had given assistance to another man's property.

The slave hunters were frequently on their track, but their slaves were hard to find, for every man, woman, and child in our country was in sympathy with the slave. Every U. S. Marshall, Mayor, and Constable or owner soon felt that he was on dangerous ground. Any law, however good and wholesome, depends for its execution upon the sympathy and co-operation of the people, and the Fugitive Slave Law, without the aid of U. S. troops, never could have been enforced in that part of the country where I lived.

I have seen the poor fugitives with backs sore and bleeding from recent whippings, and in those midnight journeys I have heard such awful stories of wrong and suffering that in my heart I vowed, with a solemn oath before God, that I would do all in my power to hasten the time of their emancipation.

At one time, when we had five secreted in the barn, a very important-appearing Southerner rode up to the house accompanied by another whom he called a U. S. Marshall, and demanded of my father that he bring out immediately the five fugitive slaves he had secreted. His mouth was full of tobacco and profanity and he was insufferably overbearing and dictatorial.

⁴ *Dred Scott v. Sandford* was handed down on March 6, 1857—Editor's Note.

Running through our land, in the woods, was a creek and under its bank, near our northern line under the beam of the hill, was a cave which, without exciting curiosity, we had explored till we found a nice, dry room with a clean, smooth stone floor. When we had reason to expect the officers or the blood hounds were coming, the oxen were hitched to the cart and the fugitives taken to the creek. The oxen were unhitched and left to browse while we led our charges up the stream, while being careful that they, every one, kept in the water until we reached the overhanging bank where we crawled silently into the cave. This was done so adroitly that we were absolutely safe from detection.

On this occasion they had been put in the hole in the barn but, my father becoming uneasy, had afterwards told my oldest brother to “yoke up the team and take the negroes away.” This slaveholder was very high and mighty. He announced that they had been traced to our house and—using an ugly oath—“we will have them.” He had one inexperienced bloodhound with him. Two others, good ones, he said, had been shot by those “. . . abolitionist cowards.” But this one went sniffing down to the barn but seemed to be at a loss what to do next.

At that time we owned a rifle and a shot gun. My brother, Byron, and I were in the chamber whose window overlooked the barn with these two loaded guns. We supposed the fugitives were still in the barn.

The two men had dismounted, tied their horses, and gone down to the barn. We supposed, of course, they would find their prey and resolved that, if they brought them back, bound, through the gate, we would each select our man and he would shoot one and I the other. But they did not find them and we, two foolish, impetuous, hot-headed, inconsiderate boys, were kept from the awful crime of murder.

The dog was declared to be of no use and, filled with rage and disappointment, they mounted their horses and rode away.

Perhaps you can imagine the intensity of a feeling that would produce such resolves in the minds of two young boys. Our parents never knew how near we had come to tragedy.

A few years after this, in 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared. It could add little to the intensity of the feeling already existing, for it had been for years at a still, white heat. I worked two days in haying for a dollar and a half with which to purchase it and sat up all night to read it from beginning to end before I stopped. I had seen and felt much that it described, and, of my father, might well have been written the verse that John G. Whittier wrote of another:

For his steadfast strength and courage
In a dark and evil time;
When the Golden Rule was treason,
And to feed the hungry, crime.

For the poor slave's hope and refuge,
When the hound was on his track;
And saint and sinner, state and church,
Joined hands to bring him back.

Blessings upon him! What he did
For each sad, suffering one,
Chained, hunted, scourged and bleeding,
Unto our Lord was done.

From none of the fugitives we assisted ever heard we a profane or indelicate word, nor did they manifest any hatred or ill will toward their masters. They spoke often of kindly treatment and of love for their southern homes. They fled to the cold, rigorous climate of Canada only because of their love of freedom and in the hope that sometime they would be joined by their loved ones, where a husband could claim his wife and the parent his child. But more than once the prophecy was uttered: “My dear chile”—they always called me “dear chile”—“the ole flag will suffer, some day, for de crying sin of slavery.” And who shall say that he who hides his message from the wise and prudent and reveals it unto babes did not reveal to those suffering ones some shadow of the struggle of a house divided against itself.

CHAPTER 6

But I am far ahead of my humble story. At least by seven years, and seven years in a boy’s life is more than three times seven at a later period in his history. I remember hearing Schuyler Colfax say, once, in a lecture: “We seem to live more than half our lives before we are twenty one, and it may be questioned whether the first twenty years of a human life does not exceed in its influence upon destiny all that remains, ‘tho’ they may exceed three score and ten.”

Let us go back to the autumn of 1846. The Mexican war was agitating the nation and I followed with great interest General Taylor, that ignorant frontiers-man who had not cast a ballot for forty years, but who, with five thousand men, displayed such knowledge and bravery as to defeat General Santa Anna at Buena Vista with twenty-one thousand men and turned the tide of the war. I was deeply interested in him because, although he was an untutored, unscholarly man, he had won success. “Old Rough and Ready” had become the nation’s idol. General Scott, on the contrary, was a finished scholar and Taylor’s superior officer. He was a major General as far back as 1814, in his twenty-fourth year. Immediately after his promotion, he compiled the general regulations of the army and translated and adopted from the French their system of infantry tactics which is, today, a text book of the U.S. troops. But he was never a general favorite, and in 1848 had the mortification of seeing one far inferior in learning and in mental ability elected to the presidency over him. Again, in 1852, another of his subordinates, Franklin Pierce, was chosen to fill the position he so ardently coveted. Always successful in the field but thrice defeated in politics, he became sour and morose, and when the rebellion of 1861 came on, though still high in the counsels of the army, his feelings were so much in harmony with the South that he thought it best and even advocated, “That our erring sisters of the South had better depart in peace.” In November of 1861, at the age of seventy-five, he returned from active command. He lived to see the rebellion put down and peace restored and, having outlived all his friends and relatives, he died in May, 1866. His last words were, “John, take good care of the horse.”

When I was in my early teens, a circulating library found its way into our school district. The books were leather bound, interesting and instructive. Among them were Weems’ Life of William Penn – of Benjamin Franklin – and of General Marion. There were no religious services in our neighborhood, no village or meeting house near. No manual labor was performed on Sunday, but the children were allowed, within the limits of reasonably good behavior, to enjoy the day about as they saw fit. My chief ambition and gratification was to get off by myself with

one of these books. I literally devoured their contents. The most attractive, to me, of these three was the *Life of William Penn*. I read that book to such purpose that many of its chapters are still lodged in my memory.

On one memorable autumn day, a colporteur of our American Baptist Publication Society came through our neighborhood with a horse and wagon and a box of books, papers, and tracts. Our society was organized in 1824, but during the first twenty years of its existence it did but little work aside from the publication and circulation of religious tracts. It was now just beginning to branch out into the printing and distributing of books and general religious literature. This colporteur of whom I speak was among the first in the service of the society. I shall never forget the interest I felt in this man. How pious and saintly he seemed. He gathered the children about him and talked to them; then he read from the Bible and prayed and, on his departure, left some tracts, papers, and one book, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” with a request that all who could should read it. We never saw or heard of him after that, but the book he left was a living witness of the power and efficiency of divine truth. It was read and reread. We never grew tired of it. What an influence that book has exerted in the world. Next to the Bible in extent of circulation, it is found everywhere. If our publication society had never done anything but print and put it in circulation, it would have accomplished a great and lasting work. When we take into consideration the great good it has done, the innumerable company of souls that have been quickened into new life and saved by its agency, it would almost seem as if the poor Bedford tinker was inspired to write it. The inspiration of those hours of my young life when in the woods on a pleasant Sabbath day surrounded by the music of the birds and the voices of nature among the trees. I read what I today can readily recall; “They talked with the shining ones about the glory of the place, who told them that the beauty and the glory of it was inexpressible. “There,” said they, “is Mount Zion the Heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels and spirits of the just made perfect. They were assured that they were going to the paradise of God, where you shall see the Tree of Life and eat of its never withering fruits, and when you come there you shall have white robes given you and your talk and your walk shall be every day with the King even all the days of eternity. There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were upon the earth, sorrow, anger, and death, for the former things are done away. You are going, now, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to the prophets. There you, with them, shall wear a crown of gold and behold the King in his beauty, for you shall see him as he is. Then you shall be delighted with seeing and your ears with hearing the pleasant voices of the Mighty One. Then you shall be clothed with glory and majesty and put in an equipage fit to ride out with the King of Glory. And when he shall come with sound of trumpet in the clouds as upon the wings of the wind you shall come with him, and when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, you shall sit with him and when he returns, to the city, you shall go to with sound of trumpet and be ever with him.”⁵ With such imagery as this was my young soul filled as I drank it in from this book, and to this day as I hunger for companionship with Lord—next to the divine word itself, I turn to Bunyan’s “*Pilgrim’s Progress*.”

CHAPTER 7

⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Garden City, NY: International Collectors Library, n.d.), pp. 140-41. Possibly quoted from memory, for there are numerous misquotations.—Editor’s Note.

When I was twelve years old, my father hired me to a farmer to work six months for thirty dollars. My employer was an invalid, an exceedingly peevish old man so hard to please that it was difficult to find anyone that would stay with him. I worked for him two summers and my father invested my earnings in calves and young stock. During those years and while I was working for him, two or three little incidents occurred which, though small in themselves, had much to do with my future.

One day a circus was coming to town, "Sands, Lent & Co. American Circus." How well I remember the name. In the morning, Mr. Fish said: "Edmund." He always called me Edmund. "You have been a good boy and I will give you an extra dollar and you may go to the circus; only get back in time to do the chores." It was a new dollar bill and it made me very happy as I started for town three miles away. I took it out of my pocket and looked it carefully over a great many times on the way. I read every word on it and made a mental note of its every inscription. It had been given to me by my employer to spend as I might see fit that day at the circus, and how best could I spend it? Notwithstanding all the hard work my mother did, she had for a number of years been an invalid. She had a stricture in her throat which, for a number of years had been gradually getting smaller til at times it was with great difficulty she could eat at all. Often her only nourishment for the day would be an egg beaten up in a little wine. I had frequently worked two days for half a dollar and walked five miles on the evening of the second day to the village to buy her the fifty cents worth of wine. May I pause to say that that little investment has been paying me ever since a hundred fold annually. I would gladly do it again if I could have her with me.

And now, with my new dollar in my pocket, my thoughts naturally turned toward my mother and her needs. I knew she wanted a new dress, and seven yards of calico would make it. It came to me like an inspiration what a comfort and blessing that would be to her. I was learning how to be happy.

I went at once to the store, selected the pattern and lining, a paper of pins, and two darning needles. It all came to eighty cents, and, with the package under my arm I went down into the field where the performance was to be, saw the circus on parade, waited until it was about time to begin the sale of tickets, then went and purchased a card of gingerbread to eat by the way and made a bee line through the woods for my mother's home, which by this route was only three miles away. I got back to my employer in ample time for the chores. He never knew that I had not spent my dollar on the circus. This is the only circus experience of my life.

Another incident, which, at the time, seemed of little consequence, was turned, seemingly by divine providence, to great importance to me.

My employer was very eccentric. He had his own way of amusing himself. I did not understand at the time why he was sometimes so hard with me. About the first work to be done in the spring on the farm was to relay the fences, gathering up the broken rails and hauling them to the woodshed to be sawed up into wood during the rainy days later on. There had been an unusual amount of stormy weather and I had finished all this kind of work when, one morning after breakfast, he said, "Edmund, you may go to the barn and get the half bushel." I brought it

and he said, “Now go up into the chamber and bring down the measure full of beans,” telling me where I could find them and cautioning me to “strict” the measure and bring down an exact half bushel. I obeyed him promptly, as I had always done, without the shadow of an idea what he wanted next. “Now,” he said, “pour them down on the floor and be careful not to scatter them, and sit down and pick them all up, one at a time.” My first impulse was not to yield to such an unreasonable whim. Then the thought came that he controlled my time and it really was none of my business what he wanted done. I began my task at once, he looking on and occasionally cautioning me not to pick up more than one at a time. He did not ask me to count them and it must have been merely as a means of amusement. When the task was completed it was nearly noon. He simply said, “You may take the beans back where you found them and put up the half bushel.”

At another time I had finished a piece of hoeing and came to the house to tell him it was done. “Edmund,” he said, “Do you see that white oak stump?” It was on the side hill in the pasture in front of the house. “Yes, sir,” I replied. “You may go and sit on top of it until it is time to bring the cows.”

I went and climbed on top of that stump, for a three hours sitting, under the heat of a July sun, without an umbrella, or even Jonah’s gourd to shelter me. That stump was hot, hot; and my only protection was a pair of thin—I never realized before how thin—blue overalls. When I came home with the cows, not a word was said, but the imprint of that stump was keenly felt.

We always had supper after all the chores were done, at about eight o’clock and by the light of a tallow candle. It was always bread and milk and hasty pudding. I often went to bed too tired to eat and too hungry to sleep. At a quarter past four in the morning the call rang through my chamber: “Edmund.” And out of bed and into my clothes I jumped as if Gabriel’s trump had sounded. But in this way I was earning, though I did not know it, the reputation of being “a good boy to mind.” My old employer did no work himself and so had plenty of leisure to talk with anybody who cared to converse with him, and [to] many of them, whether from far or near, he referred to me as being “a good boy to mind,” and praised my willingness to do everything he commanded—for it was always a command and never a request.

CHAPTER 8

Late in the fall, after this summer work, a gentleman from an adjoining county was in search of a good, faithful boy to come to his home and do chores for his board and go to school. The place was desirable and the work easy. He was a country school teacher but engaged so far from home that he could only see his family about once in four weeks.

His wife was a fine Christian lady, formerly a teacher. He wanted a reliable boy who could be trusted to attend to such work as needed to be done; assist his wife in the care of the children and make good use of his time in school. A grand opportunity for the right boy. The place was offered to me because of the reputation I had gained of being “a good boy to mind.”

With my parents' permission, I cheerfully consented, assuring the gentleman that I would be on hand at the appointed time.

How well I remember the November morning when, with a few school books and an extra shirt tied up in handkerchief I started, while yet the sky was full of star, for a thirty-mile walk to my new home for a winter. My clothes were coarse homespun, my coat a frock, brought together in front with a belt. I had also, in the handkerchief, an extra pair of stockings and a pair of woolen mittens, knitted by the tireless fingers of my mother.

As it would be an all day journey and I would need something to eat on the way, Father gave me a York shilling: twelve and a half cents, with which to buy some crackers and cheese as I passed through a village on the way. This was the first and only money my father ever gave me. There was something I wanted more than crackers and cheese so, when I reached the village, I purchased six sheets of foolscap paper for a writing book, two steel pens, and a tin pen-holder. The entire purchase amounted to eight cents. I had four big, red cents left. These I carried in my pocket and brought them back with me in the spring. It takes but little to make a poor boy happy. I am sure that a thousand dollars in bank, subject to my check, would not today give me the feeling of independence from want and security in case of need that those four big red cents afforded. It may be an indication of undue sentiment, but I would give ten dollars apiece for the four if I could secure the same ones I carried that winter in my trousers pocket.

Late in the afternoon I reached my destination in a little hamlet of a few houses, a store, blacksmith's shop, grist mill, wool carding establishment, and a saw mill. The gentleman with whom I was to live had written his wife to expect me and had assured her that I was a good, trustworthy boy. She looked me over very kindly and gave me a cordial welcome. I shall never cease to be grateful to this lady for her kindness to an untutored boy. My books were few and for the most part unlike those used in that district, but she had the ones I needed and taught me how to use them.

Having known little of refined society, save the influence and bearing of a mother, who in the midst of multiplied cares and anxieties did all she could for me, I was an uneducated, uncultured boy. I was like clay in the hands of the potter. Gradually she corrected my faulty pronunciation and manners and opened up to my young mind the mysteries of elementary grammar and arithmetic. Each evening, when she could do so, we spent an hour together over my lessons for the next day. The teacher seemed to be a good man and a good teacher, but he could not compare with this lady in making the lessons plain and simple and easy of comprehension.

I became so absorbed with my studies that the time was passing very rapidly when her husband came home and we must all go to church on Sunday. I had begun to feel at school that my clothes were not quite right, for none of the other boys was dressed like me. On Sunday morning, I had brought the team to the door and stood holding them when this gentleman called me in to get ready for church. I hitched the team and went in; but what more could I do? I stood in his presence with a painful feeling of embarrassment that rapidly intensified into a great throb of pain as I said, "Mr. Wetherly, these are all the clothes I have." "Oh," said the good man, "I

forgot.” His wife, coming in just in time to hear it, said, “Yes, husband, these are all the clothes he has, but he looks well in them and I am proud of him; he is quite ready to go with us to church.”

The conveyance was a two-seated sleigh. He sat in front with the two children and this dear lady kindly invited me to sit by her side. I sat with them in church and listened to the sermon. When the Sunday school assembled, Mr. Wetherly put me into a class of boys of about my own size. I soon saw that they were giving more attention to me than to their teacher. Some of them were scholars in the day school, but here they looked and appeared like entirely different boys. There was such painful absence of affiliation and sympathy and such evidence of sly ridicule that it soon became too distressing to be endured.

Never before had my homespun clothes seemed so coarse and mean. I began to wonder if my mother’s oft-repeated words were true. “No matter, my boy, if you do have to wear clothes of butternut brown, be industrious, honest, and reliable, and the author of all that is good and true will make an upward path for your feet.” I saw one boy call the attention of another to my pants and, as I looked down upon them, it seemed as if they had never before looked so coarse and the threads so large, Up to this time, it had been a comfort to me that a mother’s loving hands had made them. They were warm and clean and whole. They were respectable, but they were not the style.

And now, under the thoughtless, sneering gaze of those half dozen village boys, I felt that I had no business in such a place, and that a home in the country with my mother was far preferable to this. I stood the strain as long as I could, then picked up my cap and quietly withdrew to the shed where the horses were and stayed with them until the school was dismissed.

This was in a village five miles away from the little hamlet where I was going to school. It was the only time I attended Sunday School that winter. On other occasions the gentleman with whom I lived would get home late in the night of Friday and start back to his school in the afternoon or evening of Sunday. He kept his team with him. Had I been treated with common civility by those boys, I would gladly have walked those five miles every Sabbath for the privilege and advantage of the Sabbath School. When the district school closed in the spring, I was awarded the honor of having made the best progress, from the point where I began, of any in the school.

I bade good bye to the kind woman who had been such a help to me and walked back to my father’s to begin with him the work on the farm.

CHAPTER 9

Nothing of especial note occurred after this until the spring of 1850 when the New York and Erie Railroad was surveyed through our county and I was engaged, first to carry the chain for the surveyor, and afterwards, to superintend a gang of men building track to Dunkirk, the terminus of the road.

The road was completed in the spring of 1852 and, from a dozen or more when I began, I was in charge, during the second year, of eighty or a hundred men. I became greatly attached to them as were they to their “young boss,” as they called me.

Whiskey, at that time, was a common beverage among that class of men. It was cheap and they bought it by the barrel. In the morning, just before breakfast, they took a dram, again before dinner and again at night, when their work was done. When you consider that five gallons of whiskey can be manufactured from one bushel of corn, you can see how cheap it might be were it not for the indemnity put upon it in the way of revenue and tax as protection against the awful evil it is doing. These men were seldom intoxicated, but they drank every day. They often tried to persuade me to drink with them and, only for a mother’s influence and a promise I had made to her that I would “never drink whiskey,” I might have been overcome and ruined.

When a very small boy, Mother had told me, as she told her other children, of the evils of drunkenness, especially of drinking whiskey. The temptation to taste it never came to me that I did not see in imagination that little boy with his hand up promising the dear mother that he would never drink. Years ago she went to Heaven. When I meet her in that home which has been robbed of many a shining one through the agency of this curse, I want to be able to say, “Mother, I have kept the promise made to you in childhood.”

At this time there were no means of education for the children and young people belonging to the families of these men. As soon as the children were old enough to be of service, they were put to any kind of manual labor which might be at hand. They were usually too far away from school and too transient to attend the district school. The priest could make, or at least had made, no provision for their instruction. I saw them growing up in ignorance and spent some serious hours in contemplating the situation.

The shanties and homes had just been removed to a new grade on the line where I was confident they would remain for at least six months. It was in the early spring. Near their homes was an empty hay barn which was used during the fall and winter, but was empty through the spring and summer. The idea occurred to me that we could get the use of this barn and, by putting in seats out of lumber we always had for various purposes, we could fit up a temporary school room. We could get a good woman who would maintain order and teach the children.

I called the attention of our super intendant to my plan, which he at once approved as he did everything I suggested for the benefit of our men or their families, closing with the remark, “I greatly fear a good prospective railroad man is going, some day, to sink into a third-rate preacher.” I replied, “Mr. Paul, if I have the ability to become a good railroad man, does that argue that if I ever become a preacher I shall necessarily be a third rate one?” “Oh,” he amended, “I can’t rate you, but I know if you will stick to the railroad you will make a success; but I am afraid you will switch off on to some other track and I suspect it will be preaching.” I looked at him in astonishment. “Why, Mr. Paul, one cannot be a preacher without being a Christian and I am not a Christian.” “As far as that is concerned,” he said, “you are a better Christian than half the preachers.” I thanked him for his good opinion and assured him that as long as I continued in railroad work he would not find me neglecting my business for preaching. But I confess to you

that his remark set again in motion a train of ideas that had lain for years half dormant in my mind and led me to grapple once more with the all-important question of a divine call to the ministry, its nature and in what it consists.

All around me were poor, ignorant men, conscious of sin and feeling the necessity of some kind of a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. They brought their offerings to the priest not only willingly but with a sort of gladness, but it seemed to me, even then that the true work of the gospel minister was to tell the world of the great offering which God himself had made, once for all. Boy that I was, it seemed to me, as it does now, that the preacher and the preacher's Bible were the two great instrumentalities for the awakening and salvation of this world, that they must go together, the living voice, proclaiming divine and living truth, and that, as John the Baptist was a chosen vessel even before his birth, not to take the place of his father who was a priest, but to become a preacher of the gospel. And I wondered whether God did not still call his servants, from their birth, and by natural processes which they could not comprehend, lead them through a preparatory school for the after work of their lives.

Such thoughts as these grew out of the casual remark of my superintendent and I went back as I had many a time before, over the beaten pathway of my solitary intercourse with God. Through this pathway of a humble, individual experience, I was coming to feel more and more that a divine hand was leading me toward preparation for future work and it occurred to me that, in addition to having the children taught, we might call all the families together on Sundays and hold some kind of a religious service.

The thought grew in my mind. A teacher had been secured and set to work in the barn with the children. I sent away and bought thirty six copies of Webster's elementary Spelling book and a dozen copies each of Numbers One, Two and Three of Sanders' Readers. With this outfit our school was begun, adding soon to our curriculum writing and arithmetic. For the little expense attending the enterprise, including three dollars a week for the teacher, I chipped in with my men and the amount was easily raised. Indeed, there was never any difficulty in raising any needed funds for similar undertakings.

CHAPTER 10

The school was moving on nicely, the only drawback being the need of a fire on chilly mornings. The owner of the barn stipulated that we should not put a stove in it. It soon began to be whispered about, "Why can't we get the young boss to hold a meeting for us on Sunday?" The idea had been suggested to their minds by the funeral of one of our men at which, in the absence of a priest, I had assisted in arranging the candles at the head and foot of the coffin and had read a prayer from one of their Catholic prayer books and made a few remarks upon the good qualities of the deceased. In a deep cut, a few weeks before, he was accidentally injured by a stone falling upon his head and, while in no way to blame for his death, I felt peculiarly sad and expressed my interest in him and sorrow for his loss.

After this, I was often called upon to bury their dead, which service I always rendered when it did not conflict with my work. For these services they always insisted upon paying me. At first I declined to receive it, but they always managed to force it upon me. I came finally to accept it and use it either for the benefit of the family from whom it came or for the general good.

I was much more familiar with my men and their families than is the ordinary railroad overseer. I went often into their humble homes, saying a cheerful word to wife and children or shaking hands with the aged grandmother who was sometimes found there. Aged men were seldom seen among them, a fact I cannot explain, but it was no unusual thing to find one of these old mothers, neat and prim, with a clean, white line cap with its border of fine needlework and clad in the fashion of the peasantry of the Emerald Isle. The rude shanties always looked prettier and more homelike that sheltered one of these tidy old women, and the little flower bed in front of the humble home with its fragrant flowers seemed better tended. It was always pleasant to see them out in the sweet spring mornings sowing their flower seeds; and later I have seen many a bunch of bright blossoms adorning the table where their frugal meals were spread.

It was not long before the request came to me that I would “hold Mass” at the barn on Sundays. “And would ye read the Mass in English so we can understand it?” said one who had been chosen spokesman by his fellows. I assured them it would be read in English if read at all, for I could not read it in Latin. “And, why, father excuse me, Mr. Overseer – is the Mass read in Latin at all, at all?” I explained as well as I could in my boyish inexperience that it was because the Catholic Church claimed to be infallible and it must therefore be unchangeable, that it had first been read in Latin so it must always be read in Latin because change would indicate fallibility. “Well, won’t ye hold some kind of a meeting at the barn these pleasant Sundays?” they asked.

My sympathies were awakened and I agree, scarcely realizing how much I was promising. But I had told them they might all assemble at the barn on the following Sabbath.

Now that I was committed to something outside of any previous experience, I began to cast about for somebody to divide the responsibility with. Should I send for the priest? I could not do it. The priest had an insatiable appetite for money. Whenever he came, he left their pockets drained. There was a young Methodist circuit rider, with whom I was acquainted. Perhaps I could get him to come. But I did not know where to find him in time for the approaching Sabbath and very likely he would be otherwise engaged. What should I do? The teacher of our school was a Christian, member of a Baptist church; I would advise with her. She had asked me at the commencement of her school if she might be allowed to read a few verses in the Bible and sing and pray each morning at the opening of the day’s work. “Certainly,” I answered, “but in place of the prayer, why not teach the children the Lord’s Prayer and have them repeat it with you?” She blushed deeply as she answered, “Oh, Mr. Russell, you may not understand me, but I feel so weak in attempting such a work as this that I want to ask the Lord from my heart, in the presence of the scholars, to help me to preserve order and to instruct the children right and live a Christian life before them.”

It is true I did not then quite understand her meaning, but she was raised to a higher place in my estimation and I felt that she had high purposes and honest motives, and so I turned to her now for help. I said, "Will you lead the singing and do the praying?" I was sorry in a moment that I had been so blunt and inconsiderate. Her eyes filled with tears as she said, "I will do anything in my power to help you. I will give up my own church meetings and come here to the barn and lead the singing but—oh, Mr. Russell, can't you pray?" I said, "My dear woman, if I were alone in Rock City, where many a time I have held imaginary meetings, under one of those great shelving rocks, I could pray, but I have never opened my mouth to God in public." "Oh," she said. "It don't seem to me that I can pray in such a meeting as we shall have next Sunday and I do wish you would consent to lead in prayer. I have never made a profession of religion, and I am only a woman. How can I pray?" "It may be you have never made a profession of religion, but I am sure you have it; we all have implicit faith in you. If I ever become a Christian, I hope to have a religion just like yours, but at that meeting you must pray or there will be no prayer offered."

I was sure she would yield to this argument, for if she felt that she could not properly conduct her school and live before her pupils without prayer, she certainly would not consent to take part in a prayerless Sunday meeting. So the promise was given to do, to the best of her ability, anything that would help forward a good enterprise.

At the appointed hour every seat in the barn was filled and standing room was at a premium. Word had gone out among the farmers in the neighborhood and many of their young people were present. I reserved the seats in the barn for the railroad men and their families, explaining to the visitors that the meeting was called in their interest and that when they were seated we would do the best we could for the accommodation of all others. I had procured two hymn books and had a pocket Bible my mother had given me some years before. I explained the object of the meeting and requested perfect quiet and attention throughout the service, for upon that would largely depend their continuance through the summer. Then I lined a hymn and the teacher led the singing, her book and mine being the only ones in the house. I then read as distinctly and impressively as I could the first psalm. Blessed is the man that walketh not, that standeth not, that sitteth not.

The large doors of the barn were swung open and many were on the outside who could not get in. I said, "You may all arise and the men and boys on the outside will keep perfectly still while our sister, the teacher, leads in prayer."

She had never before offered prayer standing, an attitude that seemed very hard for her to assume. But she saw at once that she could not kneel in that vast crowd, and I feared her voice would not be heard in that open building. But the audience was still as death as the petition began to ascend, in a low, tremulous voice, from the heart as well as the life of this Christian woman. Her voice soon increased in volume and earnestness as she presented the wants and needs of that eternity-bound congregation and plead that through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ the Father's blessing might rest upon us, and all be benefitted. "Especially now we pray that our brother's lips may be touched with a live coal from the altar and that speaker and

hearers, each, may realize that the Great Judgment Day awaits the decision that may hang upon this hour.”

It was a wonderful prayer in its spiritual uplift, while its deeper significance was unknown and unfelt except by herself. It so impressed me that at its close I responded with a heartfelt Amen which, as she told me afterward, greatly strengthened and comforted her. Then I lined and we sang another hymn: “Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No. There is a cross for every one and there’s a cross for me.”

When the congregation was seated, I sat for a moment while an overwhelming dread passed over me. I felt so painfully the need of acquaintanceship and communion with Almighty God, but in the midst of all was the conviction that I must proceed at once or I should be unable to get upon my feet. There are times in a human life when strength and wisdom utterly fail and we are thrown back, helplessly, upon the divine arm. When it seemed utterly impossible to proceed without help from some unseen source, but I did not know the pathway wherein we flee for refuge to lay hold upon the divine strength. The prayer for help that had just been offered was my only assurance of the assistance I so much needed. Rising to my feet amid what seemed to me a death-like stillness, I told the audience I had read this psalm from the Bible I held in my hand because it was a mother’s gift to her boy, and, for that reason, anything found in this book seemed better than if found in any other. And, second, I had read it because the Bible is the word of God and we ought to receive it, all of it. Then I took up the first verse, where God’s blessing is pronounced upon a man that *walketh not, standeth not, and sitteth not*, and explained as best I could their meaning. Having been taught since childhood to be honest, truthful, and upright, I understood perfectly that God’s blessing could not be expected to rest upon those who would deliberately choose to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners, or to join in the amusements of the scornful. Second, his delight is in the law of the Lord and in the great principles of right. The law of rightness, justice, and peace. Delight in these things. Indicate that our own hearts are right. Upon these, good men will meditate day and night.

I experienced great liberty in speaking, closing with an earnest exhortation to right living, to kindness everywhere, to love in the home and family, and to seek that happiness which is most surely found in making others happy. We sang another hymn and I said, “You can all come again at ten o’clock next Sabbath and you are now dismissed.” I felt an impulse to raise my hand and say, “The Father’s blessing be upon you all,” but I did not dare do it.

From that time until we moved our quarters, we held a meeting nearly every Sunday forenoon in the barn, and the school through the week was faithfully taught. I am not able to trace the history of many of the boys I induced to attend that summer school, but a number of them went into the service of their country ten years later, some sacrificing their lives while one came out a Captain and another a Brigadier General. Three of those little Irish girls became successful teachers.

All my teaching –preaching if it could be so called—was in the line of morality, honest, upright living. That was as far as I could go. My *experience* went no farther and the real good done was by the earnest, devoted, regenerated Christian teacher, who became a faithful worker in

our meetings and could tell from a real, living experience what the Lord could do for his followers. This is the only way of salvation, and he who has not a living experience of the regenerating power of the gospel in the salvation of his own soul cannot proclaim it worthily to others. He may have hands clean from all outward defilement, there may be in his heart a sincere love of truth and uprightness among men, but this does not save, nor can it save, and he is powerless to rescue others until he is a saved man himself.

I was made painfully conscious of this when a poor girl, who had been allured away to Buffalo to lead a dissolute life, returned to her mother's humble cottage, dying of consumption. Her parent requested me to come and talk with her, thinking I might be able to give her some word of comfort. I found a poor prodigal, weary of her past life, tossing upon her pillow, diseased in mind and body, but seeking to find favor and shelter in the divine savior of sinners. Of what use was my fair-weather gospel now? The beauty of a noble and stainless life, the inestimable worth of goodness, the reward of right doing. That was not what the poor, dying girl needed. As I talked to her, she tossed in agony upon her pillow, and at last I said in my heart, "This will never do." And at one plunge, I grasped at the dear old Bible theology and said to the suffering girl, "Jesus Christ died for you. He died in your stead and if you will only believe in him, accept him as your personal savior, he will forgive you and all your sins will be washed away." She became quiet at once. That was the gospel she needed. It was the only gospel that could bring peace to her anguished heart. She died soon after and we held her funeral in the barn and buried her beside the railroad, a humble slab marking her last resting place, which I saw from the car window the last time I passed over that road.

Nearly all of our men were Irish and, in religion, Roman Catholic. The homes were rough board shanties, put up in such a way that they could be easily taken down and moved along the line as occasion required. Sometimes we were several months in one place, but oftener only six or eight weeks. About once in two months the priest came along to hold a Sunday Mass and to hear confessions. Some one dwelling was cleared of all its occupants and made a confessional. The poor, solemn-looking penitents would go in one at a time to confess their sins and be put right with their maker. For this they always contributed liberally and the "Father" left on Monday morning, assuring them they would be all right until he came around again. On these Sabbaths, my time was spent at my boarding place near the work, and I noticed that after their sins had been pardoned by the priest, the little shanty that contained a barrel of whiskey was visited more frequently and, on these nights especially, there was no little drunkenness.

I began to see that many of the men were drinking more and more heavily and were in danger of becoming unfitted for profitable work. I called the attention of the superintendent to this. He seemed to be unable to recommend a remedy, but said, "You have more influence over them than anyone else; do what you can to keep them sober." The trouble with him was that, though a fine business man and a successful railroad contractor, he was himself a lover of the intoxicating cup, and I have seen him more than once, to my great regret, take a drink out of the cup with my men.

I had kept account of the number of barrels they consumed and the frequency of their arrival. From a barrel every two weeks, they were using a barrel every four days. The men

worked in gangs or sections, and from control of one of these gangs I had been advanced to supervision of from eighty to a hundred men, with one of their own number in charge of each gang and responsible to me.

One Monday noon, after one of these Sunday night carousals, I told the men they might all quit work a half hour earlier than usual and meet me at a certain point, as I had something I wanted to say to them. It was quite a wonder what “the young boss” was going to say, but at the appointed time they were all at the place of meeting with great expectancy as to what was to follow. They all stood as I addressed them, I a little in front and they giving me the most respectful attention. I began, “My men, my own boyhood has been spent among the poor and I have the greatest interest in every wage earner in the land. Honest men who, by the sweat of their brows, earn their daily bread, have it hard enough when their earnings are spent for that which they actually need. Being interested in your welfare and the welfare of your families, the wives and children whose lives are so linked with yours that they are happy when you are happy and suffer when you suffer, I have called you to meet me here that I may point out to you a danger and save you, if I can, from sorrow and shame, degradation and ruin in the future. I have not felt until now that it was my place to call attention to this matter so long as you were faithful and industrious during working hours. And I will say that, with this one exception to which I shall soon refer, you have been all that I could desire. You have been faithful, obedient, and respectful, and I thank you for it. I have made no objection to your custom of drinking that I found when I took charge here, but I have kept account of the number of barrels you are using and find that, from a barrel every two weeks only a few months ago, you are now drinking a barrel every four days. Some of you are becoming unsteady in nerve, unfit for the hard work and exposure to which you are subjected, and the number on our sick list is increasing. Now, before issuing any command, I want to advise with you. Instead of three drinks a day, let us make it two, and only a half gill at a drink. There are 44 gallons in a box, 176 quarts, 352 pints, 1408 gills, 2816 half gills. This divided by 80 gives each man 35 drinks, which at two drinks a day will give each good measure and last sixteen days. Now for your own good and that of your families, Will you do this?” “You’re right we will. You’re right we will,” came the cordial response. “Show me your hand, then. I want to see that all are agreed.” Up went their hands high in the air. “When we open the next barrel, I will see that the man who measures it out shall give to each an exact half gill, and it will be much better for you than more would be.”

When I dismissed them to go to their supper, one of the men said, “Mr. Overseer, may I be permitted to say a word?” and when I had given consent, he said, “Couldn’t ye stop, Mr. Overseer, and take the wee bit, the half gill, with us? Our priest drinks with us and he’s a foine man.”

“No, my men,” I said. “I am under bonds to my mother that I will never drink, even a drop.”

“Ah, me good man. I wish that we had made such a promise to our dear old mothers and kept it too.”

My motive had been to lessen the drinking and finally to suppress it altogether, but this I found to be impossible. These men would have some whiskey, and to furnish it to them under these restrictions was better than to have them roaming away into the towns to the saloons and becoming intoxicated. A half gill twice a day proved to be the smallest amount that would satisfy them, and it became a settled custom to allow them this amount.

The line was extended to Dunkirk in the fall of 1851, but we kept at work putting inside track and ballast ties till the spring of 1852. A little less than a year later occurred the important event of my life.

I had worshipped God in nature and listened to his voice in the tops of the pine trees upon my native hills. I had worshipped his power in the "City of the Rocks," where immense masses of solid granite, larger than any building made by the hands of man, had been, by some power that I felt must be almighty, turned on end, split through the middle, and pushed apart one, two, three, four, six, ten feet, showing plainly by their indentures that they had once been solid bodies rent in some terrible convulsion of nature. And to my mind it brought the words, "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom and the earth did quake and the rocks were rent." Matt. 27:51. Here I had been wont to go to worship the infinite. Under a great, shelving rock, in my great pulpit, with a congregation of lesser rocks before me, I sang and prayed and preached and worshipped God from a heart as pure and sincere as nature and a mother's love could make it.

A protracted meeting was held in a large school house three miles from our home. It soon deepened into a wonderful display of divine and saving grace and power. Old and young were brought under conviction. I was one of the first to yield to the divine spirit and, on the evening of February 12, 1853, was born into the kingdom of God's dear son. Oh, the supreme happiness and peace of mind that followed. The burden of sin, revealed to me by the Holy Spirit, was rolled away by the power of Christ's redemption. I found him as Andrew did, "The Lamb of God," and finding him, it was impossible to do otherwise than as he did. I "went after" my father and mother and all the loved ones of our family.

The team was hitched up early that night and the whole family went to the school house to meeting. I was converted on Thursday night. The next morning I came down early. Father was building a fire. I told him what wonderful things the Lord had done for me and what I was sure he could do for him. Before we retired on the following Sunday night, my father, mother, three brothers, and one sister were converted. The family altar was set up and we were a household of faith.

Someone has well said that in order to have a good second birth one needs to have been well born the first time. There was but little change in our outward, daily lives, but the work within was radical, wrought by a divine hand. My own anxiety was not confined to my father's family but, in the exuberance of my young love, I went from house to house telling what great things the Lord had done. Oh, how I worked and prayed and strove. Old, hardened sinners who had lived for years on the weaknesses and imperfections of professed Christians yielded under

the Holy Spirit's power to my persuasions, and I went all over that country, telling my simple story of divine love and blessing in the salvation of my father's family.

I am sure I have never preached a more effective gospel than that my boyhood's love proclaimed of Jesus, the friend of sinners. The meeting was held by a Methodist, a Baptist, and a Free Will Baptist minister, and at its close there was a strong sectarian spirit manifested. The converts were not left to follow their own preferences, but were subjected to every sort of influence to win them to different churches. My own inclination was toward the Baptist church. The Baptist minister was Elder Raymond, who died a few years ago in Chicago. One night soon after my conversion, I dreamed that he and I were building a meeting house. We had raised the frame and were putting on the rafters when I became very dizzy and expressed the fear that I should fall. He advised me to go down and rest a few minutes. In my dream I went down but did not return. I related this dream soon after it occurred to a good old Free Will Baptist sister, a deacon's wife, who made me believe that it was a warning from heaven not to join the Baptist church. As a result, I joined the Free Will Baptists and was soon afterward licensed to preach.

My father's conversion was remarkable. I had appointed a little meeting in a school house that had recently been built within a quarter of a mile of our house. This was the Sunday afternoon following my conversion. I persuaded one of the older members to come and lead it, and I went all over the neighborhood inviting everybody to come. We hitched up the sled and took the family and as many more as the sled would hold.

A hymn had been sung and prayers and testimony were asked for. I was on my feet telling how great things the Lord had done and what I believed he would do right there in that meeting. I remember I said that I knew it was not fitting that a son should advise his parents, but I said, "I expect to see my father and mother and many others converted, right here, before we leave this house." Then, raising my heart and eyes to heaven, I prayed: "Oh Lord, God. Let thy converting spirit be displayed right here and now, like the lightning from heaven, and thy soothing power to heal like the balm of Gilead, from the Son of God." Just then, while I was yet on my feet, my father fell to the floor. I went to him and tried to raise him, believing surely that he had been hit by one of the King's arrows. With my assistance he got upon his knees and, with pleadings and strong signings, he wrestled until he found the peace of God.

My mother, too, gave her heart to God in that little meeting together with all the unsaved portion of the family. After we reached home that night, Father brought out the neglected Bible and said, "I want to read and pray." After him, I prayed, then the other children, and last of all mother's voice of tenderness and piety went up to God, the sweetest music I had ever heard.

What a Pentecostal time as that and how my soul loves to linger in its memory, though 43 48 54 55 57 58 61 62 years have passed since that time and all those voices are hushed in the sleep that knows no waking. Of the seven who offered praise and thanksgiving at the altar that night, only ~~two~~ are one is left. The others are with the king in his beauty.

The ministers were obliged to go to other appointments, but the meetings were kept up until late in the spring, when work on the new land became so hard we could not do justice to it

and be up so late at night. By common consent I was made “class leader,” as they called me, and was expected to have general oversight over the newly converted young people.

In an adjoining neighborhood, a young lady resided who, with her parents, often attended our meetings. I was coming to feel a deep interest in this exemplary young Christian girl. She was the daughter of a Methodist local preacher; had been converted the year before, was just blushing into young womanhood, and was pure and sweet as early dew. By urgent invitation, a few meetings had been held in their neighborhood on Sunday afternoons, and I had accompanied her home and taken supper at her father’s house.

They sometimes went to the evening meetings with me, and when trying to arrange my thoughts for the service I often found them interrupted by the modest, unassuming manners of this simple minded, devoted Christian girl. Her education was better than mine and she had enjoyed Christian culture and training at home which I, hitherto, had lacked.

On the Fourth of July we usually had some kind of celebration. We did not feel like engaging in the ordinary sports popular at that time and yet were not willing to let the day pass without indicating our patriotism in some way. About forty miles from our home was a large village on the Alleghany River. My brother, another young convert, and I arranged to each invite a young lady to go with us and drive to the nearest railroad station, put our horses in the livery stable, and take the morning train for this little town, where we could enjoy a pleasant picnic on the banks of that beautiful river, come back on the afternoon train, and reach home in the early evening.

This we did, enjoying it greatly because it was the first ride on the cars any of us had ever taken and because the day and the company were bright and pleasant. From the river we went to the hotel for a little rest while waiting for the train. Feeling, I suppose, that we ought to patronize the proprietor in some way, one of the party ordered some wine brought in. It was placed on a small table near which I happened to be sitting, and I poured out some and offered it to my young lady friend. Her look of surprise and bewilderment I shall never forget. She had never been so far from home before, never before away from home in the company of a young man. Her parents, having implicit confidence in me, had entrusted her to my care. All this my sensitiveness saw mirrored in her face as she responded, “No, I thank you. I don’t drink wine.” “Neither do I, Mary, and I don’t know what we want of it, now it has been ordered,” I answered in some relief. The one who ordered it brought in took it away and it went back untasted. I refer to this to show the influence and stamina of this girl. If she had sipped her wine on that occasion, as a weaker woman might, I am quite certain the other five would have followed her example, for none of the others had enjoyed for any length of time the influence of a Christian home.

In the autumn of 1854, keenly realizing my need of a better education and of theological training, that I might do better service for him whom my young soul loved, I borrowed \$25.00 and started for New Hampton, New Hampshire, between seven and eight hundred miles away (where the only theological school the Free Will Baptists had at that time was located.) As this was eighteen months before I came of age, all my earnings had gone to my father, and I borrowed the \$25.00 of a New England gentleman, a liberal patron of the school.

My course took me through New York City. I had never been on the cars but once before, and the journey was a long one. I took the cars in the morning and it was late at night when we reached New York. Shortly before we reached the city, a young man came in to check the baggage for the various hotels. A gentleman sitting just in front of me handed him his check and named a certain hotel. I caught the name and gave him mine, saying I wished to go to that hotel.

When the gentleman left the car, I followed closely at his heels; in my anxiety not to lose sight of him, I came near walking off the boat into the river, glancing down just in time to save myself. He walked to the hotel with me not far behind. When he registered at the desk, I was ready to pick up the pen the moment he put it down. I registered my name and address. The clerk asked the gentleman if he wished for supper, he nodded, and the same question was addressed to me. I duplicated my neighbor's nod, and when the clerk said, "Supper is all ready in the dining room," I followed my silent friend and seated myself as near him as my inborn sense of propriety would permit. I felt intuitively that it would be trespassing upon good manners to get too near, but I wanted to be near enough to hear his order for supper, for I had only the faintest idea how I was to get what I wanted. The supper came in due time, the exact duplicate of his, for I had said to the waiter, "You may bring me the same the other gentleman ordered."

It was not, however, much more embarrassing then than now for, though I have since that day become pretty well acquainted with hotels and hotel life, I am still perplexed and discomposed when giving an order for a meal and almost invariably ask for a duplicate of some order I happen to hear given. In this way I generally get what I need, as in that case I got a good supper and then went back to the office.

I was afraid to go out upon the street for fear of getting lost, so it was not long before I went to the clerk and said, "With your permission, I would like to go to bed." He gave me a pitying look as much to say, "Poor boy. You are right from your mother," and calling a small boy, he said, "Take this gentleman to his room."

Then began the ascent. There were no elevators in hotels in those days, so we climbed flight after flight. Story after story we ascended until at length the boy put a key into a lock and ushered me into a comfortable room. My curiosity was sufficient to lead me to ask, "How high are we?" He replied, "We are on the tenth floor." In these days of elevators and of 18 and 20 story buildings, it matters little how high we go, but I went to bed to meditate upon how I was to find my way out in case of fire in the night and many other startling queries assailed my mind as hour after hour my tired head pressed the sleepless pillow.

I had blown out my light without taking the precaution to see if there were matches in the room, and oh, the utter loneliness of that unfamiliar lodging place. The roar and hum of the great city with its teeming life below me came up into my room to tell me that active humanity was not far away, but I was the lonely occupant of a room that seemed to my young imagination to be a dreary prison. Finally I fell into a troubled sleep and dreamed of the pathway I was pursuing toward an education.

Morning came damp and heavy. A smoke-filled fog had settled over the city. When I arose and looked out of my window, the scene was one of roofs and chimneys. I had no time piece, and no means of knowing whether it was late or early.

I dressed and began the descent. I was fortunate in remembering the beginning of the winding stairway, and, after a walk sufficiently long to give me an appetite, for breakfast, I reached the bottom just in time to meet my friend—with whom I had not exchanged a single word—just going into the dining room. I followed him and again asked to have the same breakfast served to me that he had ordered for himself.

I paid my bill and the porter carried my hand trunk to the station. From my home, I could only purchase a ticket to New York City. From New York, I could only ticket as far as Concord, New Hampshire. I bought my ticket and took a seat in the cars, which were soon moved slowly out of the city by means of heavy draft horses, no engines being allowed at this time to enter the city limits. All engines were wood burners and the danger from sparks was much greater than when coal was used.

As soon as we reached the city limits, an engine was attached and we sped away to Concord, where we arrived late on Saturday night. Here it was necessary to remain until Monday morning. I ate my supper with good appetite, as I had indulged myself in no mid-day meal, and retired for the night to be awakened and alarmed by the cry of Fire, Fire, Fire. It seemed to come from every direction at once.

From the brilliant light shining into my room, I knew there was a terrific conflagration close by. It proved to be a wholesale turpentine store, near which was a livery barn, which also burned with 35 or 40 horses whose piteous cries and neighings sounded above the roar of the flames and the noise of the fire companies. At last their cries ceased and I knew they were past suffering. The sight was awful in the extreme, grand beyond description, and it made a profound impression upon my mind and heart.

Sunday morning found me at the Baptist church for Sunday school. Being a stranger, no notice was taken of me, not even so much as an invitation to a class. I took a seat, however, where I could both hear and see and remained in the same place until after the preaching service, when I returned to my hotel without having exchanged a word with a human being or having been made to feel that there was one in that house bound to me by Christian ties. In the evening I stayed in my room and wrote a letter to my mother.

Monday came at last and I was soon on my way to Bristol, where the cars were exchanged for a Concord stage coach to New Hampton, where I arrived on August 20, 1854, with a scanty wardrobe in a little hand trunk and \$2.50 in my pocket.

I need not inflict pain upon myself by a rehearsal of the experiences of these years of anxiety while “working my way” in school. The realistic can be borne, but we all shrink from vivisection when practiced upon ourselves.

Going to the village post office with the other students I sometimes heard them complain of getting only \$75.00 from home when they wanted \$100.00. To have received five dollars

would have set me wild with joy, but there was no one to send it, and while I had implicit faith in my heavenly father, I never once dreamed that he could honor my petitions through the post office.

The summer before coming to New Hampton, I had preached every Sunday and many times through the week, but it was in a place and among a people who used to pray that “the younger brother” might have “souls for his hire,” and this they deemed quite enough.

An education obtained in this way must of necessity be defective, but it is much better than one that costs the student little effort in the way of study and nothing more. The more a thing costs us in effort, the more we appreciate it, and every persevering young man who hungers for knowledge may, in this way, get not only a good knowledge of facts contained in books, but he may take in along with form of education a degree of practical wisdom that will stand him in good stead. In real life, contact with scholarly men, association with thinkers, is a feature of great value which in future years will be more and more understood.

My first effort after being enrolled and classified was to find a room-mate and with him arrange for suitable self-boarding. In this I was very fortunate for I secured “little Davis,” as he was called, but for many years has been Prof. Davis, Superintendent for Public Instruction for the State of Pennsylvania. We kept an accurate account of expenses. Our room, \$3.00 a term; lights, \$1.50; board, \$16.58; total, \$24.00. For each, \$12.00 or 95 cents a week for the term.

I was a bread-winner from 13 years of age. Going to school as I could get opportunity and working by the month to aid my father in the support of our large family.

For the 20 months on the railroad I received \$40 per month. Half of this I regularly sent to my father. The other half was pretty nearly consumed in board and clothes.

This school was in a New Hampshire village, and connected with it was the New Hampton Literary and Scientific Institution, equal in its curriculum to a western college.

I, of course, began with this and was a “prep” at that. Having always labored with my hands, I knew no other means of support, so I at once coveted every man’s wood-pile, and sawed many a cord of wood twice in two for 50 cents. I took three recitations such as I could have in the forenoon, and worked at anything I could do in the afternoon and studied nights, and thus went through the fall term of 1854.

During the winter term, I took charge of the three hot-air furnaces of our Seminary building, together with three recitations. I engaged to saw, if necessary, five cords of wood twice in two, throw it in the basement, prepare it for the furnaces, and build the fires at four o’clock in the morning, taking care of them through the day and till nine o’clock at night, for which I received 70 cents a day for seven days in the week.

The spring term I secured the care of the church and the Seminary bell to ring, which took me through that term. Then came the two months’ vacation, which found me for the most part in the hay and harvest fields at a dollar a day, and at the close of the fall term of 1855, I was engaged to teach at the (undec.) School at Parker’s Head in Maine.

Twenty years have expired and I bid you good-night.

Editorial Note: This memoir was written by my great-great grandfather, Edwin Alcander Russell. It was reproduced from a typescript that my grandfather, William Russell Howard (1904-1995) had prepared at an unknown date. Indications of crossed-out words and the reference to an indecipherable word on the last page indicates that the typescript was almost certainly prepared from a handwritten manuscript, which has since disappeared. Internal evidence shows that the original document was written sometime between the admission of Utah to the union in 1896 and the admission of Oklahoma to statehood in 1907. More precisely, the reference to the “43 years [that] have passed since that time” (viz. 1853), where the “43” is crossed-out and replaced by seven later dates, indicates that the manuscript was begun in 1896 and updated in subsequent years. I think it likely that the final sentence of the memoir (“Twenty years have expired and I bid you good-night”) refers to the date of original composition (1896), and thus would have been added in 1916. The original typescript is in my possession. A copy may be obtained by contacting me, Gregory Bassham, at gregbassham@aol.com.