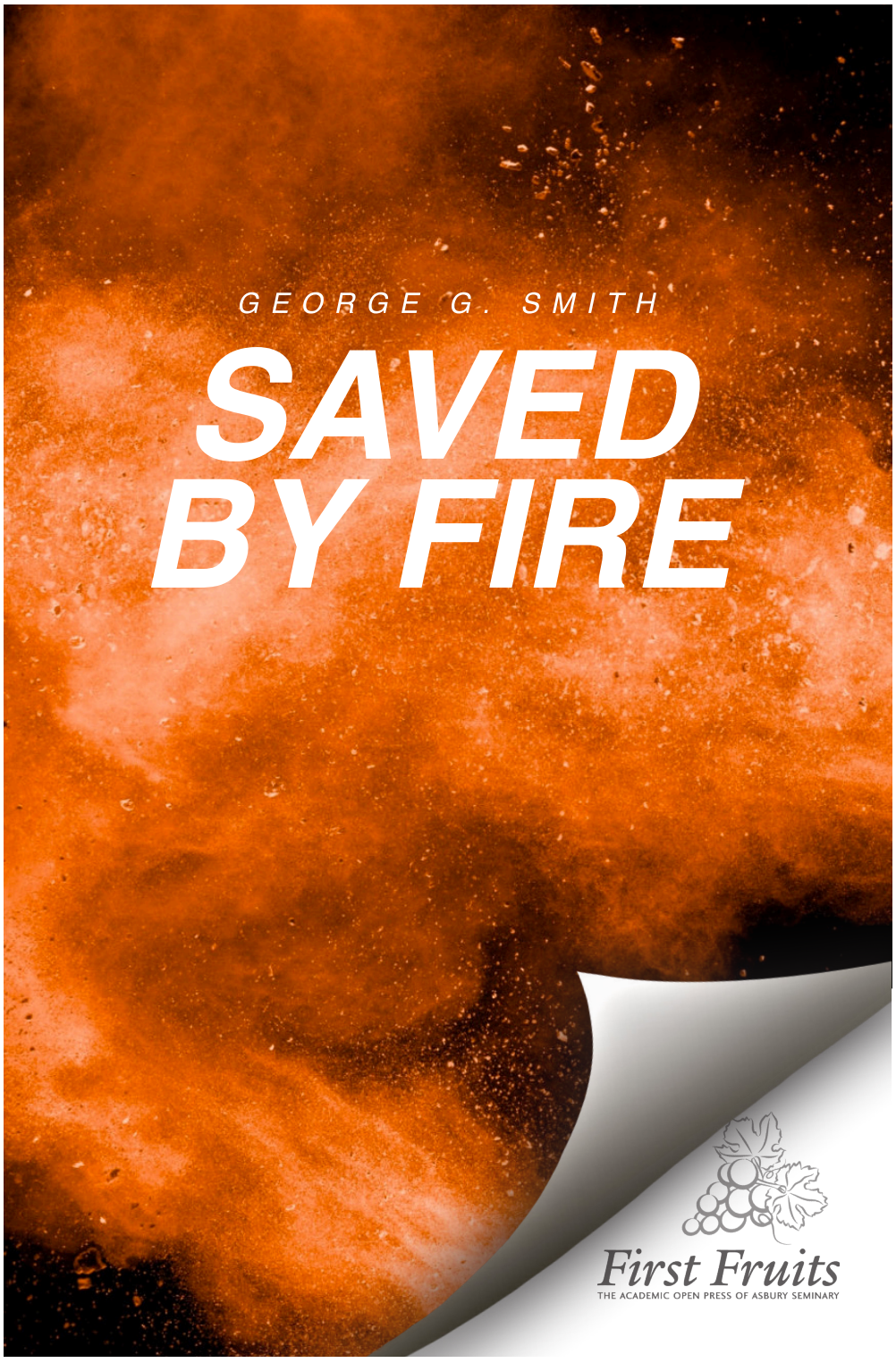
GEORGE G. SMITH
SAVED BY FIRE
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Saved By Fire

The Life of John W. Knight, Methodist Preacher

By
Geo. G. Smith

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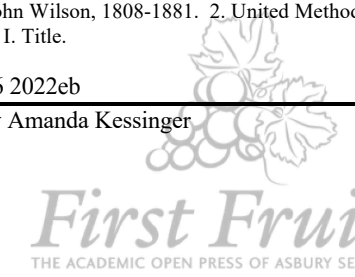

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"SAVED BY FIRE"

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JOHN W. KNIGHT

METHODIST PREACHER

BY

GEO. G. SMITH

NORTH GA. CONFERENCE

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1883.

PREFACE.

This is not a biography proper. I did not have the time nor the material to prepare one, nor did I think the occasion called for it. It is rather a monograph. Thousands of Georgians knew the gifted, eccentric, devoted man here pictured: They will be glad for some memorial of him. A truer hero never lived. He fought a brave fight and conquered.

I had almost a romantic interest in him. He was a wonder to me and a

joy. I am sure he loved me, for he loved all men, and I lay this little sprig of cypress on the grave in which he sleeps.

Two Methodist preachers lay side by side in the cemetery in Milledgeville. I found the forgotten, neglected grave of George Hill while I was pastor there, and had it cared for; and over fifty years after he was laid there, John W. Knight was laid beside him. They differed in everything save that they did the same work and loved the same Master.

I have not sought to draw a perfect likeness. I have not told the entire story. I do not recognize that as the

duty of one who does the work I am attempting. I have not given a wrong view of the man, and have said all that I think it best to say.

I know the readers of this book will be largely his friends and mine, and I have adopted a freedom of style which is only to be justified by this fact.

GEORGE G. SMITH.

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CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

JOHN W. KNIGHT was to me a wonderful man. He presented some of the most striking features of any man I have ever known.

He had a mind of peculiar cast and of remarkable power. He was peculiar to eccentricity. He had an emotional nature of intense delicacy, which was strung always to its highest tension. He had a child's heart and a child's faith. He was lowly, unam-

bitious, and exceedingly tender. His eloquence was weird and unearthly. His piety was saintly. His life was filled with lessons, and because it was, I attempt this short memoir of him. I am unable, however, to give more than an outline of his life.

His parentage was obscure. I never heard him speak of his father, and I think his mother was early a widow. She married afterward, and in her old age her burdened son never failed to write to her, and send her relief from his own scant funds.

He was born in Augusta, Ga., in 1808. The family were poor. The boy was reserved, morose, and fearless, and was just such a child as was likely to be the sport of those in better condition. He repaid their jeers with bit-

ter hate and sturdy blows, and fought his way toward young manhood. No religious influences were brought to bear upon him; no one cared for his soul. The wonder was that so much of the man was left in him, and so little of the tiger was developed. He went to the old free school in Augusta, and learned to read, and while but a boy became an apprentice to a tailor. This was not far from 1820. In those days Augusta was a showy, dashing, prosperous town, and the tailor's shop was an important establishment. The boss who had the shop employed journeymen from far and near. These were nearly all of them heavy drinkers, and the boy of all work was sent out often to get the quare, which was to be brewed into toddy or punch. He soon

fell into the habit of drinking with his older companions, and was a drunkard ere he was a man. Augusta, the town in which he lived, was a little city of some four or five thousand inhabitants, but it was the largest of the upper Georgia towns, and commanded the trade from all the upper and western state, as well as large trade from South and North Carolina, and from Tennessee. There was a Methodist church and a Presbyterian, and before he was twelve years old an Episcopal and Baptist. The old St. Paul's church, which had been founded fifty years before, still stood, but was in his youth without a rector. He sometimes dropped into the old Methodist church. It stood on Green Street, where St. John's now stands, and in those

days was a two-story building, the upper being a gallery for colored people. Here there was for a little while a union Sunday-school, and I think he told me he went to it a few times. His life was a hard one. He was kicked, and cuffed, and cursed. He grew up defiant and bitter. He had learned to read, and was possessed of a most voracious appetite for reading. He read everything he could find, especially poetry: Shakespeare, Burns, Byron, and Scott he knew by heart. One day he found Paine's "Age of Reason." Ah! here was the book. Its easy style, its coarse invectives, its bitter spirit, its ribaldry, and its sophistry, alike fitted into the grooves of his mind, and it became his bible. He had little reason to love anybody, and

this book gave him just what he wished for—a reason to live as he listed, and hate as he hated. He was, though only just a man, an infidel and a drunkard.

What he was, *he was*, he feared nothing and no one. He was no sneaking unbeliever, who sought the favor of the Christians, feared their hate, and concealed his unbelief. He was a bold, blatant blasphemer. With a temper quick as tinder, a lion's heart, and with these set on fire by the fires of hell, in drink, he was in truth, when drunk, a desperado. He was then the terror of the city when crazed by drinking. There have been many worse men than he was, for he was neither a liar, nor a coward, nor a thief. He did not like to speak of his former life, nor could he be induced to enter into any particulars about it. He

told me many of the stories related of his excesses in those days were untrue. Bad as he was, he was not as bad as they made him, and to the last it pained him to hear of them. His apprenticeship was over, and he started out into the world to make his way as a journeyman tailor. He had but a poor outfit for life. He had been drinking hard, and he now took an oath that he would not drink whiskey any more, and went to Clinton, in Jones County. Here he was when he found Jesus Christ. He was now twenty-six years old.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT CHANGE.

JONES COUNTY was one of the richest of the middle counties of the State. Clinton was the county-site. Large fortunes had been made in the fifty years of its first settlement, and they were now being freely spent. Griswold and Pratt, with their great gin-shops were here, and Macon, a little town of three years old, was twelve miles away, and although it was a threatening rival of Clinton, it had not as yet swallowed it up. It was a good place for a tailor, and here Thomas Bray, a Methodist, had his shop, and to him came John Knight, as journeyman. As we

have said, he had left off drinking whiskey, and drank only cider, but he carried with him to Clinton his bitter hate to men, and his infidel views. When called into a court-room, he would not swear on the bible without declaring that he believed it false. There seemed little hope of his conversion to Christian faith, but this very year it came.

Among the citizens of Clinton was General William Flewellen. He was a wealthy planter, and a devout Methodist. He was frequently about the tailor shop, which in small towns was in those days a kind of rallying point, and he had often seen Bray's journeyman; but there was little in a bitter, reckless, profane, young infidel to attract him, and Knight thought

that Flewellen was, like all the rich men and the Christians, his enemy; and he paid back in scorn what he thought he received in contempt. But he was mistaken: Flewellen did not contemn him; he valued him.

Knight was a young man of athletic frame and fearless heart. One day there was a terrible difficulty imminent, and as there was no police in those times, it was needful that some brave man should interfere to prevent it. Flewellen was in Bray's shop. Turning to Knight he said: "Knight, can you stop that?" "Yes, sir." "Well, I wish you would." The brave young tailor walked into the midst of the rioters, commanded order, and was obeyed. This little incident made Flewellen his fast friend.

The preacher on the Clinton circuit that year was James B. Payne. He had known the bitterness of a life like Knight's. A few years before he had been found by Jesus Christ in the depths of dissipation and misery, and rescued. He had now begun a travelling ministry, and his heart yearned over the gifted, noble-souled, but lost young tailor. He used to visit him, and talk with him, not to argue, but to invite. Knight had all of Thomas Paine's sophistries in his head, and was more than a match for the young preacher; but the young preacher had the love of Jesus in his heart, and was the better armed. Knight was prepared for argument, and scorn, and abuse, but not for love; and love at last conquered him. One day Flew-

ellen was taken sick. He sent for Knight to come and see him He refused to go. He sent again, but he refused again. Flewellen neared his dying hour. "Tell Jack Knight," he said, "I want to meet him in heaven; give him my love." The message came, and the man's heart melted. Payne urged him to go to church, and at least to hear, so one day he went. It was a strange place to him. He never told me of what the preacher preached, nor what convinced him, but said to me:

"Then, George, right there I became convinced that the bible was true, and that Jesus Christ was the Saviour, and right there I said: 'I surrender,' and God converted my soul." Never was there a fuller surrender nor a more en-

tire conversion. Saul of Tarsus never more fully gave up all, when he said, "What wilt thou have me do?" The light had come, but soon the night came on. "After this," said he, "George, I saw my own heart; *such a sight*, oh, it was awful; I thought I would have died. It plunged me in despair. I went to my room, I shut to and locked the door, and all night I wrestled with God." The morning came—faith came to stay. John Knight, the infidel tailor, the young desperado, was a Christian. He at once joined the church, and desired to be baptized in what he believed was a scriptural way. He would go down into the water, and come up out of the water, and not go under the water. The request he made was complied with, and going to a creek near

Clinton, James B. Payne led him into the water; and it was poured upon his head. He became a Methodist, and began at once to work. There was no middle ground with him. He was a decided, determined man. *He had surrendered.* Jesus had received him, and he gave him all his heart. We know it was not without a struggle that he emerged from such darkness to such light, nor that without conflict he lived the new life. He never told of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, nor of the combat with Apollyon, but all his life long he carried the scars. He won the fight. This was in 1835. He remained in Clinton a little while, then returned to his old home in Augusta. Here he found a pastor after his own heart. George F. Pierce, just

now an elder, in his twenty-fifth year, full of ardor, strength, and joyousness, was in charge. The church was in a glow. Sunday after Sunday it was crowded to its lowest seat, with whites below and negroes above, and young Pierce preached, as men say man never preached in that pulpit. One day he saw a slouchily dressed man, apparently utterly lost to all around him, come into church, fall on his knees, blow and puff and ejaculate half audibly, rub his hands, and at length arise from his knees. He drank in then every word which was uttered. The young pastor decided he was a half-witted, earnest young convert, with zeal not according to knowledge, and at that time the timid young tailor did not take pains to cultivate closer relations. He

found his class, and went to it. He kept away from all evil influences, and was always found where the good were gathered. To one who had entered a new life as he had, it was as much a continued surprise as a joy. Everything to him was new. The man who has travelled the borderland of the kingdom of heaven cannot know how he feels who has come from a far country. He had been in the wilderness: he now entered the land of corn and wine and oil.

CHAPTER III.

THE PREACHER.

KNIGHT had but one idea of religion. It was service. He was entirely God's. He began to work as they who were in authority bade him. Then it began to dawn upon his mind that *he must preach. He preach!* Poor, ignorant, awkward, timid, unsuited to the world; surely it was a delusion—but the conviction grew. He must preach. Few men truly called to the ministry enter it without reluctance, and they require very positive proof that God has called them before they will yield. At last the conviction came. He must preach. It was a cup all bitter to him, but God

placed it to his lips. Since that long night in Tom Bray's tailor shop he never debated, and now he applied to his young pastor for license. Let him tell the story.

"He surprised and embarrassed me by telling me that he wanted license to preach. I advised him to wait and pray for divine direction, promising him another interview upon the subject. During the spring I got up a meeting at the Old Richmond camp-ground. But few preachers were present. Knight was there. I put him up one day to conclude the service with an exhortation. He had never spoken in public before. It was his *début*, and in my mind his license hung upon the outcome. He astonished me, and all his hearers. It was the unstudied outburst

of a full mind and a glowing heart. His sentences were well constructed, his language fine, well chosen, not a blemish in his grammar. His thoughts showed he was well read; he enforced a heavy assault upon infidelity by the relation of his own experience. The effect was wonderful. No. more trouble about license now." He received license to exhort, and began to officiate in meetings in 1835. For several years he was making preparation to enter into his life-work. In 1838, Isaac Boring and Walter R. Branham, two young men, were sent to Augusta, and here they found John Knight. Young Branham became much attached to him, and when he was licensed to preach and recommended to the Annual Conference, he had Knight to go with him to

his father's house in Eatonton, where the Conference met. With them went recommended also for admission Augustus B. Longstreet. The two applicants had been boys together, though Knight was the younger. While Knight was a tailor's apprentice, Longstreet was at Yale College; and while he was on the tailor's bench, Longstreet was a judge. They had, however, passed through the same experiences in some respects. Each had been an unbeliever, and each had come to the full light of assurance, but not the same road. It would have been difficult to have found two men more unlike. Judge Longstreet, as he was always called, was tall, graceful, self-possessed, with a sweet smile, and a delicate jest for all his friends; he was cool, logical, unemotional. Knight had

an athletic frame, shaggy eyebrows, a face that was leonine; he never jested, save with those very near to him; his heart was full of deep, burning thoughts, and he had come to do a work for which he was, as he felt, the least fitted. These two from Augusta were admitted the same day in 1838, and Knight was sent to Sandersville Circuit with Francis M. Smith. He was now thirty years old. He had read his bible carefully and prayerfully, and had read many other books, but he came to this, one of the hardest fields in the Conference as he felt, poorly equipped for the work before him. A young preacher is nearly always greatly influenced and aided by his presiding elder, and it was a good thing for such a man as Knight,

that there was such a man as Samuel Anthony.

He was now on his first district as Knight was on his first circuit. He had none of the poetic delicacy of mind which belonged to Knight. He had never known those fierce, mysterious agonies which such a nature knows, and he was all the better guide for that. He was deeply experienced in religion, and was fervid, earnest, fearless. His heart was tender and true, and he could understand and sympathize with the young preacher. He was the Hopeful to this Christian Pilgrim.

The circuit which Knight travelled began in Hancock County, and included Washington, Wilkinson, and Laurens. The rides were long, and the homes most of them humble, and Methodism

was no popular form of religion in a great part of the circuit. His preaching was always unique, and attracted attention from the first. The year ended, and he was returned to the same field.

From the wire-grass country he came, in the year 1841, to Lincoln County. Samuel Anthony was still his presiding elder, and he was now in charge of the circuit.

Here he married Miss Eliza Curry. A handsome young fellow he was then. Poetic, chivalrous, ardent, eloquent. She was a very sunbeam, a country girl of good family, full of life, good sense, and cheeriness, and withal of genuine piety. She was the very woman to brighten up the skies of a man naturally prone to melancholy, and even in those early days in the grasp of the demon

who slew him at last—dyspepsia. Great success attended the preacher, and for years after, even to his closing days, Lincoln County was a bright spot to him.

The next year he was in Wilkes. Washington was a station, but all that beautiful and rich country now included in Broad River and Little River circuits was then in the Wilkes circuit on which he was. His presiding elder was now James E. Evans. James E. Evans has perhaps had few equals in this land in the great work of an evangelist, and he and Knight were kindred spirits. The dry details of the work of the ministry never suited Knight. To visit, to discipline, to raise collections—work so important, so indispensable—was always to him beyond

his strength; but to preach, to exhort, to help in meetings, to pray with the sick and needy, this was his joy, and this work he did incessantly and with good success. There is, however, but little in each succeeding year of a travelling preacher's life to mark it specially from the one which went before. The same round of appointments, one nearly every day. The same class-meeting, love-feasts, and quarterly meetings. For years Knight's appointments were all in the near together. The best people of Middle Georgia were his parishioners; the old churches, surrounded by the plantations, his places of worship. Now and then, in some old and still small country village, like Watkinsville, or Appling, or Louisville, he had an appointment. On Sundays great

crowds came from far and near in carriages and buggies, and wagons, and on week days a small group of faithful ones. There was preaching, and class-meeting, and a cordial welcome afterward at the country home. There was, too, the camp-meeting once a year at White Oak, or Fountain, or Mt. Moriah, or Bethany. Such was the life of a circuit preacher then. From Washington he went to Louisville, and from Louisville to the Watkinsville circuit, with George H. Hancock as his junior.

John W. Glenn was his presiding elder. He was the incarnation of strong common sense, with an enormous head, a short, compact, stout body, a rich, rolling, somewhat tremulous voice, with the strongest logic, the richest flow of homely English words, and the sense

which knew what to say, and the courage to say it, with a will indomitable, and with all a remarkable ability to manage the work he had in hand. He was a model as a presiding elder.

Young Hancock, the colleague of Knight, was black-haired, black-eyed, sprightly, active, poetic, and one of the few men of college-training then in the conference.

The Watkinsville circuit was one of the strongest and largest in the conference. Beginning at the corner of Morgan County, embracing all of Clarke and Jackson, it called for much travel and much service. While he was on the circuit, he was riding one day reading a newspaper, when his horse took fright and ran away, throwing him out of the buggy and breaking his leg. When he

recovered from the injury he was lame, and went halting to the grave.

While he was on this circuit he made his home at times with Greene B. Haygood, Esq., father of Dr. Haygood, President of Emory College. He had one day left the house, and was riding thoughtfully along the road, when suddenly, with a loud cackle, a faithful hen came rushing from under the buggy seat where she had made her nest. What could he do? *He stopped his horse and ran after her and carried her home.*

Then he was in Lincoln again, and again in Columbia. He had now travelled for thirteen years, and had been all the time within sixty miles of his native city. He had been over the same ground time and again, and

it was necessary for him to move across the State. He was sent to Thomaston. The circuit was one of the best; the people among the kindest and most devoted, and he was just entering upon the work with an earnest heart, when the saddest of all calamities fell upon him; his gentle Eliza died. She left him with four little children. He was at least ten years her senior. She had given him her young life; she had cheerfully gone with him wherever he went; she had brightened up his ofttimes gloomy sky; she had gently calmed his fiery spirit; she, with her sweet, cheerful ways, led him back from the dark shades toward which he was so prone to go, and now she was gone. Perhaps no one had a heart more capable of the wildest love than his, and when he was left alone,

he was alone. It was not long before he married again. What else could he do? Why the silly sentiment which forbids? The poor little children with no kinswoman on earth to look after them—the wifeless, desolate home called for it, and though John Knight loved his young wife with a knightly love, he sought to find one to fill her place. He found a Miss Brown, who still lives, and of whom Rev. David Holmes, once his colleague, says: "Her good name was in all the churches near by. She was noted for her piety." The man whose wedded life has been torture, who has found no love or light in the family, may refuse to wed again. The man who is self-poised and strong in himself may stand alone, but to the man like John Knight, a loving, ten

der wife is a necessity. He sought one, and found her and lost her, and sought another, and who shall blame him?

The next year he was on the Fort Valley circuit.

Josiah Lewis was his Presiding Elder. He was at this time in the vigor of his ministry. He was short, thick-set, a man of few words, but a *man* in every fibre of his being. He had no poetry in his make-up; he had little fancy: but for sharp, ringing sentences few men went beyond him. He feared no frown, he asked no favor.

The Fort Valley circuit was one of the strongholds of Methodism. At that time it was one of the wealthiest and most populous, and most intelligent of the charges in the Georgia Conference. Perry and Fort Valley divided between

them the county of Houston. The negroes formed a separate charge, and Charles L. Hayes was missionary. The next year he was in Putnam County and mission. This, too, was in the heart of old Georgia. His colleague was Thomas H. Jordan. Thomas H. Jordan was one of the most promising young men of the church, and was now in his first year. His presiding elder was Samuel Anthony. Here he remained two years. Next he was sent to Hancock, adjoining Putnam, and was again on one of the best of the circuits. Sparta itself was a station, but all the fine country around it was in the Hancock circuit, and to this same appointment he was returned.

The next year he was sent to the Elberton circuit. This was almost the

cradle of Methodism in Georgia, and was one of the strongest and most important of the circuits. It was worked on the eight weeks' plan, and John W. McGhee was Knight's colleague. McGhee had a great soul in a great body. Possessed of considerable estate, he had not taken the priest's office for a piece of bread, and was an efficient colleague of the eccentric preacher in charge. Here he remained two years, and had for his second year's colleague young Moss, who is now a preacher in the East Texas conference.

He had now passed beyond middle life. He was fifty years old. He had been travelling near twenty years, and had a large and growing family. He had gone over the circuits in Middle Georgia, some of them more than once,

and it became more difficult to provide for him. It was now necessary for him to take a long move, and he went nearly across the State, to the Coweta circuit, the next year to Whitesville, and then to Zebulon. No man who did not know John Knight intimately, knew how entirely the world was too much for him. He had no practical sense. He lived in a higher realm; and with every desire to do, he did not know how. He could preach—he did preach; he could think and reason, he could give his people the best he had in him, but beyond this he had no skill in managing a circuit. He was of very delicate nervous organism, often sleepless and strangely restless. His health now gave way, and it was evident that the little property he had would be

wasted, and his health entirely ruined if he did not rest, and for four years he took the relation of superannuate. The trials of a travelling preacher of thirty years ago were much greater than they are now; much greater than they need to have been, and much greater to John Knight than to most men; but there was one trial greater than these to him, and that was to be in enforced retirement. The man who has entered the travelling ministry, and remained in it for twenty years, is unfitted for any other life. Let churches remember this when they are disposed to cast off those who have ceased to be as efficient as in earlier days.

The impatience which some charges show to old and worn servants would disgrace a political party, and would

not be even tolerated among the more enlightened heathen. He was not happy in these four years, but the war was raging, and he remained at home, preaching to the negroes of the mission in Hancock and Putnam when he could preach at all. These years of partial retirement were, we may be sure, trying years to him. He was no farmer, and life on a farm, especially in the dark days of war, was a trying life, but it was his only chance for bread, and here he remained until the war was over, and then he returned again to the regular work, and was the second man on the Sandersville circuit, where he began his ministry thirty years before. He then spent three years in Putnam, and then again spent two in Watkinsville with J. V. M. Morris as

his junior. The man was now old and weary. He was unfitted longer for taking charge of a circuit; he had a dependent family; he was very poor; he had spent all he had in the work; and his ministerial income was his all. The amount from the conference collections at the most would be small; but there was no alternative, *he must retire.* The old soldier must give way to younger muscle. He saw it, and without a murmur he submitted. Bishop Pierce was in the chair. He rose and told his brethren that brother Knight must needs retire. He had a little farm. His brethren must help him to stock it. The response was prompt and generous, for never appeal like that fell vainly upon the ear of a Methodist conference, and when the

old preacher limped back into the conference-room, there was a purse ready for him. It was possible, however, at the close of the Conference to give him a work, and he was sent as a supply to *Clinton*. Here, quite forty years before, he had been converted. Here was the old shop of Tom Bray, where he wrestled till the break of day, and came from the struggle a new man. His old friends were all gone. Some of their children were still there, and had heard the story of his wonderful conversion.

With this year in Clinton ended his active ministry. It had gone over a period of nearly forty years. He had entered his work from a stern conviction of duty. He never left it until his reason fled; nor did he leave the

pastorate until his strength gave way. Poverty, toil, and suffering never drove him from it. Desire for rest, or wealth, or ease, never seduced him. All he could do he did. The church never had a more faithful son than he. And God blessed him with abundant fruit to his labors. Few men have been more successful in winning souls.

This is the simple outline of his active life. There were, after he entered his ministry, the days of preparation, then the days of active, efficient work, and then the decline, when he was on the farther side of the hill, getting every day more and more inefficient, and moving steadily toward the inevitable, when he must surrender his charge and retire.

The story of the trials and the pri-

vations of these years—the long, weary rides; the exposure to cold, and heat, and rain; the absence oftentime of all physical comfort; then the growing family; the scantily supplied parsonage; the battle with debt and poverty; then, sadder than all, the lonely home and the motherless babes; and after that the sick and over-burdened wife, worn with the care of the household, while he was at his work; the times when no one seemed to care for him but God, and those darker hours when over the moody soul came the dreadful thought that even God did not—these trials we know he endured, though he never told us. He began his work tall, athletic, majestic in step, with massive black hair, and bright, searching eyes, and a quick, loving,

impulsive heart. He passed into the ranks of the fathers, a grizzled, silent old man, with halting step and weary heart — meek, lowly, shrinking, only strong in a determination to do God's will as he knew it, and to conquer at last; in love toward all men and in faith in a God who was ruler over all.

CHAPTER IV.

SUPERANNUATED.

THERE are few things in the world sadder to see than that of a man who has work in him, and yet who is forbidden to do it; whose mind is bright and whose heart is brave, but whose poor worn body can no longer obey their behests. To men like statesmen, or soldiers, or preachers, this position is specially painful. Their lives have been so active, that when they know they are no longer able to work, it is like death for them to retire; but it is one of the saddest sights in the world when they do not know it, and are forced to retire from a place they

fain would still hold. With John Knight, sad as was the hour when he gave up his work, it was surrendered without a murmur.

He went without complaint to his little home in Putnam County, but he did not go to stay. He could not rest. He would go home and see after his family, and then go where he was invited to preach, and pray, and work. I doubt whether he ever did better work than in these last years of his life. Relieved from the burdens of the pastorate, he could preach with greater freedom. He preached with especial fervor and unction, and his presence was a joy everywhere. There was no community so cultivated, no people so fastidious, that they were not glad to see a man so full of faith and the Holy Ghost. He

was now nearly seventy years old. His forehead was of imperial mould, and a great mass of iron-gray hair overhung it; shaggy, iron-gray eyebrows overhung an eye of unusual brilliance. His voice was clear and loud and musical, and he threw his whole soul into what he said. Bright, clear cut, sparkling sentences, which would have done credit to Mellville, fell often from his lips, and strange, unthought of, but apt and beautiful images delighted his hearers.

How glad we were to see the dear old form come limping up to the parsonage door; how the best people contended for the privilege of giving him shelter. If he entered the house, he did it with a prayer, and in it he prayed for every inmate. One day my wife asked him some question; perhaps, "Why

there should be so much sorrow in the world?" "Well, sister," said he, "I cannot tell; let's pray about it;" and he knelt and offered one of his most touching prayers. This last year was one of great trial, but one of great joy. The foe of his life was now preparing for his last assault. He found himself unable to work, and left Captain Newell's to go to his home in Putnam, and to return to the pulpit no more. He never preached again after he preached for me in the April of 1879. He was conscious that his bodily strength, and, alas! that his mental strength, were both giving way. He went home with the vain hope that he would recruit, and return to his beloved work again. He never did so. Of his last days we have no bright pic-

ture; they were days of great sadness. He had all his life been a dyspeptic, and this disease grew with his age, and became complicated with other physical derangements. His nights were sleepless. Bromides and opiates were prescribed to give him rest, and his nerves became more and more affected. Shut out from all his friends, except his family, in a rather obscure part of Putnam, he had little to help him to his feet again. He was always moody, and he had fought the battle with gloom all his life long. But for religion, he would, long before he was seventy, have been a suicide, a drunkard, or a maniac; and now, in his weakness unable to resist, he felt the grip of the monster on his brain. Oh! how he prayed, and how he trusted. But in vain. There

are no two gods. The God of grace and the God of nature, the God who gave the ten commands of Moses, gave the laws of health, and while the violating of them may not and will not ruin the soul, yet the poor body suffers the penalty, and the soul feels the pain. So he found it. I went up to Eatonton specially to see him. The Rev. John D. Gray and I rode out to his humble home. He was confined to his bed. He was able, however, to talk freely, and in the course of the morning he said: "George, my mind is giving way. I know it; but I want you to tell my brethren I am all right. Jesus is mine, I am his, and his religion is true. Whatever I say, then, tell them I say that now."

Sure enough, as we feared, and as he feared, the insidious work went on. His

mind gave way. He grew more and more despondent and deluded, and at last it became necessary to take him to the lunatic hospital. He was never a maniac, never wild or violent, never profane, never forgetful of God, but simply deluded, as was Cowper, and as for a time was Thomas Walsh. He supposed himself the worst man in the world. He was an unwashed villain, he said. He was justly condemned by God's wrath. He deserved it all, however. God was good and just in damning him. The clouds grew darker. He would not see his friends if he could avoid it. At last, one bright April day, the clouds were rifted, but it was as the angels bore him above them to the home he had longed for. "He dreamed he was in hell—and woke in heaven."

The presence of suffering in this world is one of the enigmas of God, and why a good man should ever suffer is one which has never been answered save in God's word. There are some kinds of bodily suffering, however, so mitigated by spiritual joys, that we can scarcely regard them as an evil; but when it is all dark, when the body is in pain, and the mind deranged, and the soul despairing, what then? Why? Who shall say why it was thus with John Knight?

Perhaps for long years some one of God's good laws of health had not been kept. Perhaps it had not been intentionally, nor rebelliously, but persistently violated. Perhaps the seeds of lunacy had been planted in his brain at his birth, and but for religion had long

before burst out. Perhaps God had a lesson of faith to teach us. One thing we know, God did not desert him. He was tenderly cared for in the asylum and his family cared for out of it. The officers were especially tender to him. He had all his life brooded too much over himself. He had abused and condemned and depreciated himself persistently, until now in his weakness he thought he was too vile for even God's mercy to reach him. *Perhaps if he had done less of this* when he was in health he would not have suffered so much at the last. It was, after all, well; and when the glories of the world beyond burst upon him that spring morning in 1881, he was paid for it all.

Here, then, ends the story of John

Knight's outer life. The world will call it a sad story.

His first memory was hardship—a poor child, badly treated, toiling for his daily bread, kicked, and insulted, and cruelly tyrannized over by those who were stronger. Then there were days of wild dissipation; an insane appetite, driving him to desperate deeds—the days of tigerhood. Then a new life, and days of fierce battle with evil, when it seemed that Apollyon must conquer. There was toil, and poverty, and sickness, and at last death in a lunatic hospital. *Yet this life was in the main a happy one.* This man had hours of holy triumph, when he hardly knew whether he was in the body or out of the body—of rapture which was heavenly. Such is the power of grace.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN.

I HAVE passed somewhat hastily over the outward events of his life. They were few and not specially remarkable. Mere incidents do not make biography, nor outward circumstances the man. If the external in John Knight's life had been all, it would have been a fruitless work to have written of it; for his life was outwardly the life of many.

Biography is not only a story of passing events; it has not answered its end when an hour has been given to their detail, however thrilling. We study men that we may know how to

live, and we study events that they may show us men.

Each man has his own distinctive marks, and there is something oftentimes in their very peculiarities to teach us who study them our own dangers.

It is acknowledged, and I feel it sensibly, that in this case there is much which is almost abnormal, and it requires a skill in discriminating and in delineating which I do not possess, to give a clear view of a man so peculiar and eccentric as John Knight. His eccentricities were so marked that for long years he walked on the verge of derangement. There are those like him of such peculiar nervous structure, and of such mental make-up, and so affected often by deranged physical functions, that, unless these factors are

taken into account, we shall judge too hastily and condemn too unjustly.

He was tall, well-proportioned, and up to the time of his being lamed, very imposing in appearance; really a handsome man, but so indifferent to his apparel as to mar the effect of real personal comeliness.

He was intensely nervous. The roll of his restless gray eye, the quick, impatient step, the earnest, rapid speech, told of what a bundle of nerves he was. He had combined, in his early days, a woman's nerves with a strong man's muscles.

He was absolutely fearless. In youth, when he was addicted to drink, he was the terror of Augusta, for with an intrepidity which was unbounded, he had a very considerable degree of strength.

His temper was like tinder, quick, fiery, maddening; he could rage like a lion. In nothing did God's grace manifest itself more than in curbing and softening this temper. I did not know him till somewhat late in life, but I do not remember ever to have seen any manifestation of temper, and yet no one could doubt that the fire was there.

He was an intense and very sincere man. At no time in his life was there a savor of deception about him. In his later life he was thoughtful and decided and positive, but never dogmatic.

Mentally his structure was very peculiar. He was a profound reasoner. I shall excite some astonishment among those who heard him in the pulpit merely, and heard him proclaim, and

not establish; but I appeal to those who sat with him around the fireside, and talked with him on the deep things of God, as to the truth of the asseveration. I never knew a man who thought more deeply and reasoned more strongly. He was a man of most brilliant imagination. I think he had more imagination than fancy. He brought before himself, and before his hearers, that which had been and that which was unseen. He had a poet's soul. The poets of nature were his favorites. Bishop Pierce says he knew Burns and Shakespeare by heart. He read much more extensively than any man thought who did not know him well. After his conversion his reading was almost entirely theological, and he often censured himself for his love for the

great dramatist, and felt very bitter remorse sometimes for revelling in the rich imagery of his creations.

He was perhaps one of the most unpractical men who ever lived. He did not care about the world or anything in it. He may have been a good tailor, but he never showed any worldly thrift or wisdom after he left the bench.

He was one of the most child-like men, when I knew him, that I have ever seen. He would sit in silence in any circle, until something would set him off, and then, with a retiring modesty which was almost painful, he would say something which would reveal a deeper acquaintance with the subject than any had. He was a man of moods. Before he found Christ he was a miserable misanthrope; afterward

these moods were sadly in the way of his peaceful progress.

He was a remarkable man, and would have impressed men anywhere. Had he been ruined, he would have been a majestic ruin, but he was not ruined, and so he was a grand man. He was more—he was a Christian man.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHRISTIAN.

The Christian is a man; but there may be the man, and not the Christian. Christianity does not change the man's physical nor his mental nature; the new man is the old one, under new impellings. John Knight the new man was John Knight the old man, with a new love in his heart. His conversion was very thorough; he literally was turned round. He began this new life with a very profound feeling. It was no dawning day with him; it was midnight darkness, turned by a burst of Heaven's light to midday. It was no slow process of recovery to health from long

sickness. It was a sudden healing by him who said, "Arise, and walk." He was eminently a man of feeling, and so his religion was strikingly emotional; but perhaps no man ever had a deeper conviction from which his emotions sprung. He had been an infidel. He had become so by sophistical reasoning. He became a believer by a light like that which fell upon the man of Tarsus, near Damascus; and when he did take the bible for true, he took it all. God and Christ, heaven and hell, were to him realities. He literally walked in their presence. Faith in the sense of spiritual vision he had in a degree which was wonderful. He talked to God as a child to his father. He did not *believe* as the world counts belief; *he saw.* When the poor brain reeled, and I stood

beside him in his chamber in the hospital, he said to me: "George, it is true; the bible is true; there is a hell, and I deserve it."

While he saw he trusted. God was; he could rest in him. He went to God with everything, he relied on him for everything. He went out, not knowing whither he went, and yet was sure he would be well lead. His public prayers evinced the wonderful power of his faith. There was no flippant rhetoric in them, no affected, irreverent familiarity, but there was the most perfect confidence in God. He was here; God would bless. He had promised, we could trust him, we would trust him; we did trust him. He would thus come and thus talk to his Father until his whole soul would get on fire, and he

would end his prayers with a shout of victory. Bishop Pierce says of him: "His prayers were wonderful in their variety, compass, and power. Simple, child-like, face to face talks with God. He prayed more than any man I ever knew. I have known him often to pray all night. When he came out of one of these struggles into the pulpit, his words burned like fire, or fell as the rain upon the tender grass."

His love was universal. He loved sinners with a pitying, tender love which made him even blind to their sins. He pitied the devil, and said he would have prayed for him if he had dared. Once at the conference, called on to pray, in a fervid burst he prayed for Methodists, and Baptists, and Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, and all

Christians and all sinners, and poor heathens, and wound up by saying, "Lord, do bless the whole concern." All men knew that this man, whose face was rugged and whose manner was often wild, was one whose heart overflowed with tenderness for them. His religious life was one of great fluctuations so far as feeling was concerned. Grace does not entirely change one's nature, and a man of moods will continue such, however soundly he may be converted, and although grace can change their character, yet the man who is subject to them should see to it that they do not shake his faith; for that should be independent of them; although the bias will continue and affect the life. He was so conscientious, that his self-reproach was oftentimes undeserved and ex-

treme; and the depression arising from unjust self-reproach was very great. Then again he would get upon the highest mount of religious joy. His face would beam, his eye would flash, and his shout would ring out. At times like this he seemed to be transfigured. He was rarely at a service that he did not get happy, and never so that he did not show it. His life was sadly shadowed. Sickness and poverty pressed him always, and then age came with its weight. In this tabernacle he groaned, being burdened; but he looked not at the things that were seen, but at those which were unseen, and rejoiced at times with exceeding joy. His life was thoroughly consistent. Bishop Pierce says of him: "Left to his own nature, he would have been a very bad

and dangerous man. Renewed by grace, he was a very devout and consecrated one, renouncing all sin, resisting all evil, aspiring after all that was good, holy, and useful." He was an untiring worker. He never let a man pass, if he could wisely approach him, without a word to him on his soul's welfare, and that word was always a cheering one. God was ready, religion was blessing, why should he not turn to Him and secure it. There was no man, no woman, for whom he had lost hope. One day in Milledgeville I took him with me to visit the poor lost women of the city. We went into their homes of sin; he prayed for them, and talked to them. The touching tenderness of those talks and prayers I can never forget, and perhaps they for whom

they were offered may remember them for good; they at least were melted to tears that day.

He was the humblest man I ever knew. "George," he said to me in deepest sincerity, "it *hurts me* for anybody to praise me." Perhaps his humility may have gone too far. He felt that he was so little, and knew so little, and deserved so little, that he thought the world despised the bruised reed; and it required much tenderness to assure him that he was really loved and valued.

His sweet submission to God's will was one of his most striking features. God was good; God loved him, and even when the dark shadow came, he was submissive still. He felt that he would be damned, but even in hell he

intended to defend his Lord. After the wildest hours of his delirium, when he was calm again, he would say, "*Did I say anything wrong?*" and when they told him no, he would fervently say, "Thank God."

And this man, so ethereal, so trusting, so loving, so meek, so gentle, so tender, so God-honoring, Jesus Christ found—a drunken tailor, infidel in heart, wolf-like in temper, hating and hateful. Oh, the power of His grace!

CHAPTER VII.

THE PREACHER.

I HAVE reserved this topic till toward the last, and I would be glad to make it the fullest chapter in the book.

John Knight was called to preach. He was not called, he thought, to conduct services, nor yet to visit the flock primarily. The work which he believed God had for him was to preach his word, and to this work he gave himself unsparingly. He loved it, and while he had the lowest estimate of his abilities, he never failed to do what was demanded of him in the pulpit.

His mental endowments fitted him for his office. He had a remarkable

perception of true things. He did not reason so much as he saw. He did not carry his audience with him by force of argument, but by clearness of statement. He thought deeply, and when he gave the results of his thoughts, they were nearly always recognized as correct. His style of preaching was peculiar. It was rather philosophic than theological. The rough old man was a philosopher of the truest type, Socrates never more so. Beginning a sermon for me, he said: "We are here. We came from somewhere. We are going somewhere." This was his starting point, and these his divisions. His imagination was remarkably brilliant. David, and Paul, and Peter, and above all the Lord Jesus, were to him as really present as

if his eye had been looking into theirs. It was, however, his intense earnestness and his unequalled unction which made him what he was. It is exceedingly difficult to reproduce him, or represent him, for he was so unique that it would be very like capturing a sunbeam to catch his striking sayings. With faultless grammar, with refined and chaste expression, with burning unction he presented himself to us, and we find it impossible to represent him to others.

Bishop Pierce says of him: "His preaching was very unequal, ranging from a cipher to a hundred—poor, middling, fine, extra good. I have heard him in all his moods, and in his poorest as well as his best efforts there were scintillations of his origi-

nality. Like nobody, nobody like him. I have heard three or four sermons from him that would have done credit to any man in the Church. For range of thought, power of expression, pathos, I never heard them excelled. Sometimes bold, daring, even rude in style, he would give out thoughts and images tender, most exquisite, beautiful exceedingly."

I do not think this estimate too high. I never heard him fail, and yet I cannot now recall anything he said. I can only bring him before me as he stood in the pulpit, with his eye flashing and his whole soul aglow, and a congregation all melted before him. He always went to the pulpit from his knees. He prayed long after he entered it, and he preached from a full

heart. I can better recall his prayers than his sermons, and of these I can remember little. The truth was, he magnetized his hearers, and did things that in another would have seemed extravagant and fanatical. After preaching for me one night, he limped into the aisle. "Here," said he, looking toward the door, "is the way to hell. Here," said he, looking toward another, "is the way to heaven. I am in the road of life. I am going toward hell," and he moved steadily toward it. "I hear a voice saying, stop! I heed it. It says turn!" He suddenly turned. "I yield. I am converted, go forward; I am going to heaven;" and he limped back into the pulpit, and sat down. He loved all men, as I have already said, and he believed all men could be

saved. He so pitied men that he rarely rebuked in his later years, but always encouraged. "Come on, now, every one of you, saint and sinner, who wants to go to heaven, come and give me your hand." Thus he would wind up every service everywhere. When he was enthused, he said things which were strikingly his own, and strikingly beautiful. "Oh, brethren, I had rather be the dog of Jesus Christ than to be a king away from him." "I had rather live in a log cabin with my Lord than to have all this world can give."

"Oh woman, woman, God never drove thee out of the garden."

"Hark, brethren, I hear the songs of the angels. They are bearing a spirit home. It is Sister Jones from the log cabin on the hill," he said, as a good

sister was dying in a humble house, near a camp-meeting.

There was a year of cyclones, and the people dug pits to hide in. He said in his prayer, "Lord, they are digging pits to hide in from the storm, but blessed be thy name, *thou hast promised to hide us in the cleft in the rock.*"

Life cares bore heavily upon him, for he realized his own unfitness for its practical details. He tried to work, but he did not know how. He knew but two things—how to preach and to pray; but whatever was his trouble he preached it away. But that he became so feeble he could not leave his room, his reason would no doubt have retained her sway; but inactivity to him was death.

I am compelled to be here more unsatisfactory than I even thought I should be, but I find it is with others as it is with me: they remember the effect, they forget the sermon.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT MEN SAY.

Woe be unto you when all men speak well of you. Popularity is dangerous and often fatal, but he lived too long for it to affect him. Perhaps few men had warmer friends. They were tender and partial, and he loved them all. I have quoted from Bishop Pierce's letter; I give it now entire.

From Bishop G. F. Pierce.

I saw John W. Knight for the first time in 1835. I was stationed that year in Augusta, and found him then a member of the church. He had been recently converted. Previously he had been

wild, dissipated, desperately wicked. He was intense by nature; his passions strong. All the elements of character in him were under high pressure. Left to his own nature, he would have been a very bad and dangerous man. Renewed by grace, he was a very devout and consecrated man, renouncing all sin, resisting all evil, aspiring after all that was good, holy, and useful. My first observations of him impressed me very unfavorably. He was gawky, awkward, slouchy; the only tailor I ever knew who was not inclined to be dressy—advertising his business by his own well-fitting apparel. John was a sloven; he never reformed. Indeed this defect barred his rising in the conference, by his indifference to the proprieties of person, manner, and dress.

Before I had ever spoken to him I noticed him at every service. He would come into the pew, fall down on his knees in a sort of limber, irreverent way, and then he would whisper or puff and blow, and rub his hands for a long time; rising at last, he seemed ready for the work of the occasion. He was a good listener. I set him down in my mind as a simple-hearted, half-witted young convert, full of zeal, but lacking in knowledge. After a month or two he surprised and embarrassed me by telling me that he wanted license to preach. I advised to wait and pray for Divine direction, promising him another interview upon the subject. During the spring I got up a meeting at the old Richmond camp-ground. But few preachers were present. Knight was

there. I put him up one day to conclude the service with an exhortation. He had never spoken in public before. It was his *début*, and in my mind his license hung upon the outcome. He astonished me and all his hearers. It was the unstudied outburst of a full mind and a glowing heart. His sentences were well-constructed, his language fine, well-chosen. Not a blemish in his grammar; his thoughts showed that he was well-read. He enforced a heavy assault upon infidelity by the relation of his own experience. The effect was wonderful. No more trouble about license now. I hurried him up as fast as the law allowed.

John Knight was a real genius; his native mind of a high order, if not of the highest. If the surroundings of his

boyhood had been favorable to right development, and his training and education equal to his capacity, he would have stood in the front rank of preachers; but his early associations were bad, his schooling meagre, and his taste for reading without instructor or guide. He read much, but not judiciously; Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, and Burns were his favorites; he knew them by heart. The life of Napoleon and his marshals he could recite from memory. After he entered upon the ministry his reading was all theological; his mind was active, inquisitive, and independent. He read much, but he called no man master; he thought for himself, and he spoke what he thought. His preaching was very unequal. He ranged from a cipher to a hundred—poor,

middling, fine, extra good. I have heard him in all his moods, and in his poorest and his best efforts there were scintillations of his originality. Like nobody, nobody like him. I have heard three or four sermons from him that would have done credit to any man in the Church. For range of thought, power of expression, pathos, I never heard them excelled. Sometimes bold, daring, even rude in his style, he would give out thoughts and images, tender, the most exquisite, beautiful exceedingly.

His prayers were wonderful in their variety, compass, and power. Simple, child-like, face to face talks with God. He prayed more than any man I ever knew. I have known him often to pray all night. When he came out of

one of these struggles into the pulpit, he burned like fire, or fell as the rain upon the tender grass.

Always moody, swinging like a pendulum between gloom and sunshine, never long in any one mental condition, his last days were very sad. His nervous organization wrecked, broken down by age, and disease, and sorrow, his mind was unhinged, and a pall of darkness settled upon his soul. He was haunted with the idea that his friends had forsaken him, that God had cast him off, and that he was a ruined sinner, hopelessly lost. This shadow, deep and dark, rested upon him to the last. Who can conceive of his surprise and rapture when he passed out of a lunatic asylum into the celestial city. I have often, since his death,

imagined I could see him re-enacting, among the angels and the redeemed, the scenes in which I have often seen him when he was in his raptures here below. Putting everything together, I doubt if there is a happier man in heaven than John W. Knight.

From Rev. W. R. Branham, Sr.

My acquaintance with Rev. John W. Knight began January, 1838. Of his character before, and of his remarkable conversion in Clinton, Ga., in 1835, under the ministry of Rev. James B. Payne, you will learn from other sources. I found him at Augusta, a journeyman tailor, holding either an exhorter's license or that of a local preacher of very recent date. He was

frequently in my room at the parsonage, and my companion when the claims of daily business justified. His relations with me were more intimate than with any other man at that time, and yet I rarely saw him except at church, or during calls which he would make going and returning. I think that he preferred to give every spare moment to the companionship of the parsonage. His tendency to gloominess and extreme self-abnegation was not so manifest during this year, as he had but his daily secular business to employ him, and such preparation for his expected ministry as opportunity served; and he was, no doubt, sustained by the hope, so frequently indulged, that when once "separated unto the Gospel," he would have nothing to vex or disturb,

and enjoy, without intermission, the luxury of doing good. This end of care and end of painful toils, to which so many of the uninitiated of our preachers look, is seldom realized. During this year I may say that Brother Knight was emphatically a man of one aim and of one book. To know and obtain grace to do, was his single, constant, steady purpose.

I never met a man who literally came so near to never-ceasing prayer. He would never leave the room without, if practicable, kneeling in prayer, and never without evident fervency, frequently with the wrestling spirit of the patriarch.

His mind seemed ever on the doctrines and experiences of grace; he seemed to have but little thought or

care, and but few words for anything else. He lived with his mother, who had for him the deep affection usually felt for an only child, and his love for her was tender and thoughtful. Occasionally his appreciation for the humorous would crop out, but his aspect was generally that of profound thoughtfulness, if not of rather disquieted abstraction.

At the close of the year he went with me to Eatonton, was a guest (together with Bishops Soule and Andrews) of my father's, at which time he was admitted on trial to the travelling connection, and was returned with Brother Day to Sandersville circuit. The fact that Day and Knight were upon the same circuit was the source of considerable amusement, especially when

Brother K. announced that brother D. would preach in Sandersville on that day two weeks.

I met him regularly at the annual conferences, and frequently at other meetings, and thirty years after our first acquaintance we were associated, he being returned to Zebulon circuit and I to Griffin district.

When I met him on the circuit he was full of troubles, having buried his first wife, and fallen into very poor health. Although frequently too feeble to preach, he visited his churches, and would substitute one of his inimitable prayers for the sermon, and few prayers were so rich, so simple, so comprehensive, so edifying. I heard him once pray for all his stewards, one after another, and as he named them, the

petition was strikingly characteristic of each, referring to some trait for which each was particularly noted.

During the war I heard him pray that the Federal army might be baffled in their attempts to subdue us—"that their powder might not burn, their bullets not hit."

I have been present when that extraordinary spiritual power seemed to rest upon him of which you will hear from others.

As he grew older he furnished a striking and pleasing contrast with his former self. By nature he had a proud and fierce spirit. Any allusion to his habits in his wild days was most painful and trying to his feelings. If anything could rouse the old Adam and his former power over him, it was this.

I sometimes hear brethren who, like him, had been extremely wild and wicked before conversion, allude to the "things of which they ought to be ashamed" in a manner quite painful to me. Not so with Brother Knight; he was sick and sore of them—so sorry for them that the mention of them was repellant to his feelings extremely, if not morbidly so. I have often seen him chafe and go beyond the limits of ministerial propriety, especially when his former doings and sayings were mentioned in exaggerated terms.

But for years before his mind became clouded, he manifested a meekness, humility, and subduedness of spirit which was a marvel to those who knew him before.

The Christian life is a warfare. His

was a signal, brilliant victory realized at the end of his responsible days.

His probation ended on the day when the dark curtain shrouded his intellect. On that day he was victor. But if any soldier ever fought his way to triumph—day by day, hour by hour maintaining a continuous fierce combat against spiritual foes of every kind, besetting, besieging, assailing on every side, in front, in rear, within, without—that man was John W. Knight. But he fought well, fought bravely and successfully. He enjoyed temporary triumphs that placed him frequently upon the mountain top. But anon he was in the valley of humiliation, fighting his way inch by inch with Satan and all his direful forces.

Some have had troubled thoughts

about his end—that one so laborious, so prayerful, so consecrated, should have closed his life in a lunatic asylum. My theory is, that his life had levied such a heavy contribution upon his nervous system—his manner of life before his conversion, combined with the disadvantages which accrued from all the past—that when his natural force abated, the accumulated load, which he bore with difficulty before, became too heavy for his weakened strength. And hence the physical system, becoming shattered, could no longer be the instrument of sound mental functions.

Place a heavy weight upon the roof of a house; when new and strong it can bear it. But when the roof becomes decayed and weakened, the same it

had so long sustained comes crashing through.

From Rev. H. McCorkle.

Thomson, Ga., August 11, 1881.

Dear Brother Smith — Below I give a skeleton concerning Brother Knight from old grandfather John C. Smith of this place—recollections of over forty years ago.

In the year 1837, Brother Knight attended White Oak camp-meeting, Samuel Anthony, Presiding Elder. He at that time was a stranger among us, and made headquarters at my tent. His mother was with him. In the morning Knight was first to rise, and retired to the woods for prayer, would return, wet to his knees, wading through

the thick underbrush and grass. Frequently during the meeting, at the intervals between service when the crowds of young people about our tent would be full of levity, Brother Knight would unceremoniously propose to me to have prayer, and fall upon his knees and lead in his peculiar style. About the year 1842 or 1843, Knight was sent to the old Columbia circuit.

By some means I learned that at his first appointment at White Oak Church, he would be at my house. At the time appointed much rain had fallen, causing the streams to be much swollen. I dreamed, the night that Brother Knight was to be at my house, that he had gotten into a swollen stream and come near being drowned.

I attended church, however, next

day, and Knight came to time. I told him I expected him at my house the evening before, and then related to him my dream. He said that it was literally true, that he was making his way to my house, and when he reached the Big Kiokee Creek, he found it much swollen, and not being familiar with it, missed the ford, plunged his horse into deep, swift water, and came near drowning self and horse. They scrambled, and at last came out on the same side he had entered, found a house and friends, and lodged for the night.

At the White Oak camp-meeting that year there was a great awakening among the people. Pierce, Danelly, Anthony, and other giants of that day were present.

The door of the church was opened, as well as I remember, but once. Ninety-nine came forward and joined. Brother Knight excitedly sprang to his feet upon a bench and inquired anxiously who would make the one hundredth.

Truly yours,

H. McCorkle.

From Rev. Dr. James E. Evans, *of Rome, Ga.*

Rome, Ga., July 20, 1881.

Dear Brother Smith — Yours requesting my recollections of Brother J. W. Knight is at hand. I only write in brief, and that, too, what you and all who knew Brother Knight will testify.

As a man, he had a very humble view of his ability, and also of his piety. He was the most prayerful man I ever knew. He read his bible much upon his knees, and was familiar with its truths from Genesis to Revelation. He was very dependent, as a preacher, upon the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but was divinely grand and overwhelming when baptized with the spirit. He was most conscientious in all things, especially in the pulpit, uncovering sin in all its enormity, and showing the house of Israel their transgressions. It was an expression with him that he loved preaching that was "jagged." He was simple and teachable as a child. No disciplinarian, but little executive talent. No financier. Studied the world only to correct its

sins. He had many seals to his ministry. Despondency, a constitutional trait, gained the ascendency over him when reason failed, and he labored under the hallucination that he was going to hell. But the law of his renewed nature held him true to God, and in all his fits of derangement he was never heard to use an obscene or sinful expression. And often after his fits of wildness, he would ask, "Did I say anything wrong?" And when told he did not, he would seem thankful. He was a good man. What a transition, from expecting to land in hell, to wake up in heaven. Let us meet him there.

Yours affectionately,

J. E. EVANS.

From AN OLD PARISHIONER.

AMERICUS, Ga., August 30, 1881.

REV. G. G. SMITH—*Dear brother:* I learn you invite facts, anecdotes, etc., for a life of that good man deceased, Rev. John W. Knight. He was my much loved pastor at Eatonton, about the year 1856, and I will write you a few anecdotes for use or not, as you prefer.

As you know, Brother Knight was a man of much prayer. At Eatonton, it was his wont to arise early, walk out of town and meditate and pray. There dwelt in Eatonton at the time an unfortunate drunkard, an inveterate wag—of an old, respected family—Washington Rose by name. He used to tell that at daylight one Monday morning he

was sitting on the bench in front of Floyd's grocery, anxious for an early drink, when he saw Mr. Knight coming down the street. Turning his back to him, he sang:

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky."

As Washington finished the stanza, he says he felt himself seized by the shoulders as if in a vice, and heard the preacher say: "Sing another line of it, you blasphemous wretch, and I'll shake every bone out of your body." Washington says he was as silent as the grave, for he knew Mr. Knight would do it.

Brother Knight and Rev. John P. Duncan were at the Putnam camp meeting in 1858. I think Brother

Duncan was leading in prayer. He was praying, after his peculiar manner, for the old fathers of the Church—Rodgers, Glaze, Arnold, Adams, and was culminating on the oldest of them all, Father Thomas Johnson—when Brother Knight exclaimed aloud, with great concern, "Don't forget Bushrod!" Bushrod was the son of Thomas Johnson, and a most lovely and worthy Christian.

You recollect Brother Knight sometimes became very happy on conference or other large occasions, and went around from brother to brother, exhorting. On one occasion in this happy mood, he exclaimed, "I see you, Rosser, hiding your head from me! I will never be satisfied until I see you Governor of the State!" Rosser Adams,

of Eatonton, and himself were as different as you can imagine two men to be. The latter, a diamond in the rough. The former, a diamond showing the highest skill of the lapidary. Of him a writer lately published: "He was a Chesterfield Christian in graces of person, mind, and heart, the peer of any man that ever trod the earth." Yet between these men, so dissimilar, was a love like that of David and Jonathan.

During Brother Knight's pastorate at Eatonton, he preached, perhaps, one of the most remarkable sermons of his life, reconciling the foreknowledge of God with this justice. The local paper, edited by Mr. J. A. Turner, published the next week a most complimentary editorial, pronounced the ser-

mon unanswerable as an argument, and not surpassed as to eloquence by any orator, ancient or modern. This editorial I was reading to the preacher, when he exclaimed, very excitedly, "Stop it, not another word; the devil himself is in it!" And off he hurried to one of his retreats to fight another pitched battle with his daily antagonist, and by faith and prayer to win another victory.

From REV. H. MCCORKLE,

THOMSON, GA., July 26, 1881.

REV. G. G. SMITH:

Dear Brother—I notice in the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, that you purpose writing the life of John W. Knight, and ask for any recollections of him,

from friends, that you might use in said work.

I remember the good man from my childhood. About the year 1842, I think, he was in charge of the Lincolnton circuit. Married his first wife in that county, and often since that time he has visited and preached for that people, especially at camp-meetings; and at one of those camp-meeting visits, since the war, occurred the little story I would relate, showing one of the peculiarities of the man and preacher. Bishop Pierce was at the meeting, and while bishop and preachers were at the preacher's tent, soon after Knight's arrival, his dress seeming much soiled and worn, Brother Tom Pierce presented him a neat, black coat. He put it on, then turning

to Bishop Pierce, he held up the old dilapidated linen coat, of which the black had taken the place, remarking at the same time: "Bishop, I want to tell you that I preached in that old coat last Sunday, and was about half through my sermon, when I found I had it on wrong side out."

At this same meeting, myself, with other friends, took upon us the task to raise some money for him. We soon had a snug sum; almost everybody approached gave something. He had a host of friends in Lincoln. Many thought that he cared so little for things of earth, that likely he would lose any funds that might be given him. I determined to ascertain, if possible, how he was prepared to keep his money. So, inviting him to my

father's tent, after we were done collecting, I took him to a private room, and in the name of his friends presented him with the money. I shall never forget his looks at the time, nor the prayer, the following night, at the stand, for these his Lincoln County friends. It was as if he talked with God face to face. After receiving the money, he loosed his clothing from his body, and around his waist he had securely fastened a strong cloth belt and pocket attached; here he stored the money secure from thieves. When I reported, all seemed to be satisfied on that score.

Very truly,
H. M. McCorkle.

From Rev. George W. Yarborough.

It was at the Elbert camp-meeting, in 1858, that I first met Rev. John W. Knight. One of his exhortations at that meeting is still fresh in my memory, and ranks above all the other efforts that I heard on that occasion.

He was magnifying mercy, and delivered himself on this wise: "I have been a great sufferer; have worked hard in the Master's vineyard; have spent the most of my time, since my conversion, on my knees. Now, if after all I have suffered and done I should have to crawl my way along life's journey to the end, every burden growing heavier all the time, the way growing rougher every inch, my devotion intensifying in every act; if I

get to heaven I shall expect to see the angels throw down their harps, hush their songs, and ask in amazement, 'Are *you* here?' "

PRAYER HABITS.

At this camp-meeting the preacher's tent caught on fire one morning. Brother Knight was on his knees by his bedside, close to me, when the alarm was raised. He turned on his knee to look at Brother A. J. Deavour rush out after water, and then went on with his devotions.

A brother broke down at a certain hour's service at this meeting, was strangely bewildered, and stated to the congregation that he could not tell what was the matter with him, but

that he could not preach. "Yes," said Knight, who was sitting behind him in the pulpit, "you can preach. I know what's the matter with you: the devil is after you." Then he cried out earnestly to the brethren: "Brethren, pray for Brother Dunn;" and down upon his knees he went in the pulpit. The answer did not come at that hour, but the next time the brother preached we were satisfied that Brother Knight had been heard in his behalf, for we had from him a grand sermon on the life of Abraham.

He told me that he once owed a large store account, and had but a small amount of money. He prayed to God that he would so order that what he had on hand would settle the account without any compromise of his honor

as a gentleman (I will say here I never met a gentleman of higher tone than John W. Knight).

He went to the store, called for his account, was ready with what he had. He uttered no hint as to his condition. The merchant stopped his pen at a certain point in the long column of figures, and struck out all from there to the top, remarking: "Pay me, Mr. Knight, what remains below, and that will do." He just had the money to a cent.

A couple of young brethren gave him an elegant overcoat, at the last Griffin Conference. After trying it on, he turned to the brethren and remarked: "I asked God to give me an overcoat at Conference, before I left home, and he has done it."

PLAYFULNESS.

I have seen him when his humor was irresistible. He had to be among those whom he knew well, and who knew him well to uncover this vein. In painting a character or a scene, his strokes were few, but you saw the man and you were there. It was a joy to behold his face all aglow with glee, his teeth in their pearly whiteness, and his gray eyes mirroring his great soul in these moments of innocent exuberance of spirits.

At the Elbert camp-meeting already alluded to, during the Quarterly Conference, Brother A. J. Deavours was receiving his pay as missionary on the Broad River mission. *There was not a great deal of it.* Brother Knight

came along in one of those bright, gleeful moods, while Brother D. was counting it over. Running his hands deep down in his pockets, and clothing his eye with a merry twinkle, he remarked, "Jack, you will die a rich man yet."

He seldom indulged in satire, but when he did it was felt.

I passed him during a conference session sitting on the outskirts of the body, where he was always found. The presiding elders were reporting and eulogizing I had not more than looked into his face before I was ready for a jest of something on this order. Said he, "I want one question in the discipline blotted out." And, drawing his mouth into a knot on one side, he replied, when I asked him what it was,

"*Are there any complaints?*" He had no patience with a farce, and he had found farce enough along there, without making any fuss about it.

For the ludicrous he had a keen sense, but he knew how to govern it.

AS A DOCTRINAL PREACHER

he was unique, but always true to the record. I never saw him affect wisdom in the pulpit, above what was written.

At a district meeting held in Greensboro several years ago he preached the introductory sermon on "Faith." The most intelligent man in that circuit told me that he never listened to a more satisfactory exposition of that subject.

For controversy, his capacity far outwent his disposition. He was a man of peace in the pulpit; but occasionally

he would make a sally into another's territory and fire a shot or two, just about enough to let those from whom he differed in some things know that everybody did not agree with them. On these occasions he moulded his own bullets. The mode of baptism was giving a charge, he served some trouble. The game was not large, but he concluded to draw a bead on it.

On a certain Sunday morning he had a large and mixed congregation—a great many of the Baptist brethren were out. When he reached the part of his sermon that related to immersion as the exclusive mode of baptism enjoined by Jesus Christ, he addressed the congregation as follows: "I am going to tell you to-day more about my baptism than the bible tells you about

John the Baptist's, and when I am through, I want any brother in the house to tell me how I was baptized. I was baptized in a creek (naming it) in Georgia by a Methodist preacher still living and preaching in our conference. He and I walked arm-in-arm down to the river, walked into the river, and when he baptized me we walked together up out of the water to the shore. Now, tell me, any of you, *how* I was baptized?" After pausing a while, a brother spoke to the question on this wise: "I suppose, Brother Knight, as you went to the trouble of going to the river, you were immersed of course." "But, brother, we do not ask you to *suppose* about it—we want you to tell us *how it* was done," said the preacher.

Another brother observed, "Brother Knight, perhaps you knelt down in the water and had it poured on you."

"No *perhaps*, my brother, if you please," said the preacher, "we ask you to tell us how it was done."

He left the subject with them, just here, and went on with his sermon.

Said he to me, after relating this, "George, I never did tell them how I was baptized, and they do not know to this day; and yet they know all about Christ's baptism by John the Baptist."

He preached doctrinally, but not controversially. He never embittered those who differed from him, nor was he ever known to speak cruelly or unkindly of a sister church; yet still he was a thorough-bred Methodist.

In executive matters he made no pre-

tensions whatever. He never once impressed me as ever having given that part of his education as a preacher a thought; and yet he was always at the quarterly conference ready to answer any question relating to his work, and his work did not run down.

The *main-wheel—the gospel, regularly preached with power sent down from heaven*—he kept well-banded. We were together during his last year's work in the Griffin district, he serving the Clinton circuit. He was at his post at the first quarterly meeting. The weather was terrible, but I found him as cheerful as a May morning.

He was there as a supply. A young brother had been moved from another charge since the conference session, and in the adjusting of some matters the

Bishop thought proper to relieve Brother Knight and put the young brother in his place. He was a capital young man, and the people of the circuit could raise no objection to him whatever, but as soon as they found out what his presence there meant, they began to come out very plainly, and say, "*Give us Uncle John in preference to anybody*," and there "Uncle John" remained, notwithstanding a prompt and most cheerful surrender of the charge to the young brother.

BREAD-BATTLES.

Brother Knight's bread-battles were his most prostrating battles. He could not beg, neither could he *whine;* so he *bled.* I have seen him during some of those terrible seasons, when his anxiety

about his family would take the form of paroxysms. The yoke would have pressed less heavily upon the old man's neck; but it is all over now as far as he is concerned.

A love-feast was to Brother Knight almost invariably a mount of transfiguration.

Shall I never see that old white head rise in a love-feast again? Shall I never see that hand reaching out after me, and hear those heavenly benedictions warm from his overflowing soul?

The angels are "looking into" something like this right now, and the glorified are understanding and enjoying it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LESSONS OF THE LIFE.

I HAVE not thought it best to encumber the narrative given in this book with reflections of my own. I have generally myself in biographies read the facts and skipped the reflections; but yet my end would not be secured if I did not draw some of those lessons from Knight's life, lessons which it so abundantly teaches.

The power of Christian love is one which stands prominently on the page. A young desperado, an avowed infidel, a daring blasphemer, is conquered, not by argument, but by love. For hate and scorn, for argument and denuncia-

tion, he was ready. These were the foes he expected to encounter, but for love he did not look, and when love came the man broke down. We despair of men too soon. Jerry M'Auley, the prison convict, and the hosts who have been converted under his teaching, have taught us at least one great lesson, and that is that the most degraded may be saved, and love is the means of salvation.

The happiness and perfectness of Christian life depends upon the completeness of one's surrender to the Lord. This man's leonine temper, this man's wild appetites, were all conquered by the completeness of his surrender to Jesus Christ. The saddest hour in one's life is when one begins to debate about duty; when he hesitates

to do all that God demands; when he turns away sorrowing from any requirement he believes to be God's. If he is not a Christian, he will never become one until there is unconditional submission. If he is a Christian, and he debates as to whether he will submit, he will begin at once to recede, and will end at last in sad and entire apostacy. Whatever sins one may commit, whatever defects one may find in his life, let at least one virtue mark it, that of *perfect* submission to God. From the day that John Knight said "I surrender," to the last, he recognized his great Commander's authority, and stood ready to march, or fight, or work, or suffer, as his Lord said. This spirit is the great need of the Church to-day.

The fact of a sincere and consistent

life does not secure one against alternations and fluctuations of feeling which are oftentimes exceedingly distressing. To learn the true place of feeling in religion; to make sensation our servant, and not submit to it as master; to live with sensibilities more acute, while sensation may be blunted; to live by faith; to walk by principle; to learn how to be cast down and not destroyed—these are the great achievements of a Christian life. John Knight had perhaps greater fluctuations of feeling than most men, because his sensibilities were more acute than most men, and because he allowed himself to distrust whenever his nerves gave back a discordant sound.

I have said elsewhere that his humility was excessive, and his conscience was

oftentime morbid, and he whose feelings often rose to so high a pitch when he felt that God loved him, could not see that his feelings might be depressed and yet God might love him still. The cause which produces a certain effect under one physical condition may not produce it under another. Knight was a man of intense nervousness. He never disciplined his nerves, he excited them constantly—for years he used tobacco excessively—he prayed long and earnestly; he thought with a brain strung up to the highest tension, and so his physical man reacted, and depression followed elevation. I have known no one who resembled Bunyan so much as Knight, and *Christian*, in the "Pilgrim's Progress," was his very counterpart. "I could believe," he said once, "if God should say

to me 'Blow out the sun,' my brethren, I would puff at it." But when the nerves gave way, he who had a faith that would have removed mountains, found himself crying out in deep soul agony for mercy on his poor soul. It is a woful thing for a man when he gets no sweetness from his religious life; when joys come to him from the beauties of the sky and of the fields; from music's sweet tones, and from love's tender caress; but whose heart never glows because of a consciousness of God's love to him, and while filled with the Holy Spirit, to whom there is no joy in prayer, no delight in work; but it is *almost* as woful for a man to be the slave of fitful nerves and of a deranged body. We are to live by faith: a faith that believes when it cannot see,

and a faith that believes when it cannot feel.

His life presents a touching picture of the needlessness of care if the life be right. He had many a trial, many an affliction, but, after all, most of his anxieties were *anxieties*. God had a way for him, and God led him in it. As simple as a child, as unworldly as an angel, he needed to be fed and clothed and sheltered by a good Father, *and he was*. Our cares are largely, after all, imaginary; we have but to trust, and trusting we shall be cared for.

The life of John Knight teaches loudly of the *power* of Divine Grace. He was an unpromising subject to make a saint out of, and he felt it; he felt the fire raging within him; he realized the need of God's grace to keep him. He

walked in fear, but he never stained his robe. For the forty-five years which passed after that night in Tom Bray's shop—years of conflict, years of exposure to temptation, years in which he fought Apollyon, and went through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and was more than once in Doubting Castle—he was victor always; he was not conquered at the last. I have told of his words to me in his lucid moments among his last; and while, after this, his hope of heaven was obscured, his love to God blazed brightly to the end. Such was the life of John Knight, and such are some of the lessons it taught.

Dear old man! Heaven to him was the glowing hope of his weary years. He did not see the city as he neared

it, nor hear the shouts of the redeemed. He did not walk with the shining ones, but we may be sure the angels met him, and that he found at last a world for which he was fitted, and there he abides.

FINIS.

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