

# GROSS ALEXANDER

STEVE P. HOLCOMBE,  
THE CONVERTED  
GAMBLER: HIS LIFE AND  
WORK

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# **Rev. Gross Alexander**

## **Steve P. Holcombe, the Converted Gambler: His Life and Work**

### **PREFACE**

It has been thought and suggested by some of those having knowledge of Mr. Holcombe's history, that an account of his life and work in book-form would multiply his usefulness and do good. And since the narration of his experiences by himself has been of such great benefit to those who have been privileged to hear him, why may not others also be benefited by reading some account of his uncommon career?

It is hoped that it will be of interest to the general reader as a revelation and record of the workings and struggles of some human hearts and the wretchedness and blessedness of some human lives. It is a sort of luxury to read about and sympathize with wretchedness, as it is a joy to see that wretchedness turned to blessedness. It will show to those who are unwillingly the slaves of sin what God has done for such as they. It will possibly interest and encourage those who are engaged in Christian work. It may furnish suggestions as to practical methods to be pursued in working among poor and needy classes, whether in towns or cities. Even ministers of the Gospel may find encouragement and instruction in the experience of Mr. Holcombe's life and the methods and successes of his work.

What few letters of Mr. Holcombe's could be found are put in as showing phases of this interesting character that could be shown as well no other way, and some letters written *to* him are selected out of several hundred of like character to show how he touches all classes of people.

The "Testimonies" are from men who have been rescued under Mr. Holcombe's ministry, and will give some idea of the work that is being done. These are only a few of the men who have been brought to a better and happier life through Mr. Holcombe's efforts. If any should feel that there is a sameness in these testimonies, which it is believed very few will do, perhaps others will feel the cumulative effect of line upon line, example upon example.

The sermons or addresses are inserted because they have been the means of awakening and guiding many to salvation, and they may be of interest and possibly of benefit to some who have not heard Mr. Holcombe. They contain much of the history of his inner life in statements of experience introduced by way of illustration. They are given in outline only, as will be seen.

The book lays no claim to literary excellence. The position and work of the man make his life worth writing and reading apart from the style of the book.

The accounts here given of Mr. Holcombe's character and work are not written for the purpose of glorifying him. Many of these pages are profoundly painful and humiliating to him. But they are written that those who read them may know from what depths he has been brought, and to what blessedness he has been raised, through Jesus Christ, to whose name the glory is given and to whose blessing the book is commended.

August, 1888.

## INTRODUCTION

**BY REV. SAM P. JONES**

The author of this volume, the Rev. Gross Alexander, Professor of Theology in Vanderbilt University, was surely the man to give to the world the Life of Steve Holcombe. The warm heart and clear head of the author, and the consecrated, self-denying life of the subject of the volume, assure the reader ample compensation for the time given to the book.

Mr. Alexander has known Brother Holcombe from the beginning of his Christian life, and tells the story of his fidelity to Christ and loyalty to duty as no other could.

I first met Brother Holcombe at Louisville, in the year 1882, when I was preaching in the church of his pastor, Rev. J. C. Morris. It was from Brother Morris that I learned of this consecrated layman. He often told me with joy of many incidents connected with the conversion and work of Brother Holcombe. My acquaintance with him soon grew into a warm friendship. It has always been an inspiration to me to talk with him, and a source of gratitude to me to know that I have his affection and prayers.

The work he is doing now in the city of Louisville, Kentucky, is very much like Jerry Macauley's work in New York City years ago. No man has experienced more vividly the power of Christ to save, and no man has a stronger faith in Christ's ability to save. Brother Holcombe's humility and fidelity have made him a power in the work of rescuing the perishing and saving the fallen. I have been charmed by the purity of soul manifested by him on all occasions, and his continual efforts to bring back those who have been overtaken in a fault. Hundreds of men who have felt his sympathizing arms about them and listened to his brotherly words have grown strong, because they had a friend and brother in Steve Holcombe, who, in spite of their failures and faults, has clung to them with a love like that which Christ Himself manifested toward those who were as bruised reeds and smoking flax.

Brother Holcombe, rescued himself by the loving hand of Christ, has extended the hand from a heart full of love for Christ and men, and has done his best to save all who have come under his influence.

This volume will be especially instructive to those who are interested in the salvation of the non-churchgoers of the great cities. For surely Brother Holcombe's Mission is a place where the worst sinners hear of Christ's power to save, and where they see, in Brother Holcombe himself, with his rich experience, one of the greatest triumphs of the Gospel.

I heartily commend this volume to all Christian people, because it tells of the life of a saved man. It tells also what a saved man can do for others, and it will inspire many hearts with sympathy for such work and prepare many hands to help in it. I heartily commend this book because it is the biography of one whom I love and whom all men would love, if they knew him in his devotion to God and duty. Brother Holcombe has frequently been with me in my meetings and in my private room; I have frequently been with him in his Mission, in his family circle, on the streets of the great cities, and he is one man of whom it may be said: "His conversation is in heaven." I frequently feel that my own life would have been more successful with such a fervent consecration to my work as Brother Steve Holcombe exemplifies.

The sermons contained in this volume will be read with interest. They are his sermons. They come from his heart, and they have reached the hearts of hundreds and thousands who have heard him gladly.

I bespeak for the book a circulation which will put it into the library of all pastors and into thousands of homes.

*Sam P. Jones.*

Cartersville, Ga., October 18, 1888.

## LETTER FROM DR. JOHN A. BROADUS

I have read with very great interest the "Life of Steve Holcombe," and have carefully looked through the letters, testimonies and sermons to be included in the proposed volume, and I rejoice that it is to be published. Professor Alexander, who was Mr. Holcombe's first pastor, has written the life with the best use of his fine literary gifts, and with sound judgment and good taste. It is a wonderful story. I have long felt interest in Mr. Holcombe and his work, for after beginning his Mission he attended my seminary lessons in the New Testament through a session and more; but this record of his life warms my heart still more toward him and his remarkable labors of love. I think the book will be very widely read. It will stir Christians to more hopeful efforts to save the most wicked. It will encourage many a desperate wanderer to seek the grace of God in the Gospel. Such a book makes a real addition to the "evidences of Christianity." No one can read it without feeling that Christian piety is something real and powerful and delightful. Much may be learned from Mr. Holcombe's recorded methods and discourses, and from the testimonies of his converts, as to the best means of carrying on religious work of many kinds. The book will, doubtless, lead to the establishment of like Missions in other cities, and put new heart and hope into the pastors, missionaries and every class of Christian workers. It will show that zeal and love and faith must be supported by ample common sense and force of character, as in Mr. Holcombe's case, if great results are to hoped for. Many persons can be induced to read his brief outline sermons who would never look at more elaborate discourses. As to two or three slight touches of doctrinal statement, some of us might not agree with the speaker, but all must see that his sermons are very practical, pervaded by good sense and true feeling, and adapted to do much good.

*John A. Broadus.*

Louisville, Ky., September 25, 1888.



## CHAPTER I

Steve P. Holcombe, known in former years as a gambler and doer of all evil, no less known in these latter days as a preacher of the Gospel and doer of all good, was born at Shippingsport, Kentucky, in 1835. The place, as well as the man, has an interesting history. An odd, straggling, tired, little old town, it looks as if it had been left behind and had long ago given up all hope of ever catching up. It is in this and other respects in striking contrast with its surroundings. The triangular island, upon which it is situated, lies lazily between the Ohio river, which flows like a torrent around two sides of it, and the Louisville canal, which stretches straight as an arrow along the third. On its northeast side it commands a view of the most picturesque part of La Belle Riviere. This part embraces the rapids, or "Falls," opposite the city of Louisville, which gets its surname of "Falls City" from this circumstance. In the midst of the rapids a lone, little island of bare rocks rises sheer out of the dashing waters to the height of several feet, and across the wide expanse, on the other side of the river, loom up the wooded banks of the Indiana side, indented with many a romantic cove, and sweeping around with a graceful curve, while the chimneys and towers and spires of Jeffersonville and New Albany rise in the distance, with the blue Indiana "Knobs" in the deep background beyond. From this same point on the island, and forming part of the same extensive view, one may see the two majestic bridges, each a mile in length, one of which spans the river directly over the Falls and connects the city of Louisville with Jeffersonville, Indiana, while the other joins the western portion of Louisville with the thriving city of New Albany. Across the canal from the island, on the south, lies the city of Louisville with its near 200,000 population, its broad avenues, its palatial buildings.

In the very midst of all this profusion of beauty and all this hum and buzz and rush of commercial and social life, lies the dingy, sleepy old town of Shippingsport with its three hundred or four hundred people, all unheeded and unheeding, uncared for and uncaring. There are five or six fairly good houses, and all the rest are poor. There is a good brick school-house, built and kept up by the city of Louisville, of which, since 1842, Shippingsport is an incorporated part. There is one dilapidated, sad looking, little old brick church, which seldom suffers any sort of disturbance. On the northeast shore of the island directly over the rushing waters stands the picturesque old mill built by Tarascon in the early part of the century. It utilizes the fine water-power of the "Falls" in making the famous Louisville cement. Part of the inhabitants are employed as laborers in this mill, and part of them derive their support from fishing in the river, for which there are exceptional opportunities all the year around in the shallows, where the rushing waters dash, with eddying whirl, against the rocky shores of their island.

There are, at this time, some excellent people in Shippingsport, who faithfully maintain spiritual life and good moral character amid surrounding apathy and immorality. "For except the Lord had left unto them a very small remnant, they should have been as Sodom, and they should have been like unto Gomorrah."

And yet, Shippingsport was not always what it is now. Time was when it boasted the aristocracy of the Falls. "The house is still standing," says a recent writer in Harper's Monthly Magazine, "where in the early part of the century the Frenchman, Tarascon, offered border hospitality to many distinguished guests, among whom were Aaron Burr and Blennerhasset, and General Wilkinson, then in command of the armies of the United States." He might have added that Shippingsport was once honored with a visit from LaFayette, and later also from President Jackson. But in other respects also Shippingsport was, in former years, far different from what it is to-day. In business importance it rivaled the city of Louisville itself. In that early day, before the building of the canal, steamboats could not, on account of the Falls, pass up the river except during high water, so that for about nine months in the year Shippingsport was the head of navigation. Naturally, it became a place of considerable commercial importance, as the shrewd Frenchman who first settled there saw it was bound to be.

Very soon it attracted a population of some hundreds, and grew into a very busy little mart. "Every day," says one of the old citizens still living, "steamboats were landing with products and passengers from the South, or leaving with products and passengers from Kentucky and the upper country." The freight which was landed at Shippingsport was carried by wagons and drays to Louisville, Lexington and other places in Kentucky and Indiana. This same old citizen, Mr. Alex. Folwell, declares that he has seen as many as five hundred wagons in one day in and around the place. There were three large warehouses and several stores, and what seems hard to believe, land sold in some instances for \$100 per foot.

The canal was begun in 1824, the first spadeful of dirt being taken out by DeWitt Clinton, of New York. During the next six years from five hundred to a thousand men were employed on it. They were, as a general thing, a rough set. Sometimes, while steamboats were lying at the place, the unemployed hands would annoy the workmen on the canal so that gradually there grew up a feeling of enmity between the two classes which broke out occasionally in regular battles.

In 1830, when the canal was finished, the days of Shippingsport's prosperity were numbered. Thenceforth steamboats, independent of obstructions in the river, passed on up through the canal, and Shippingsport found her occupation was gone. The better classes lost no time in removing to other places, and only the poorer and rougher classes remained. Many of the workmen who had been engaged in building the canal settled down there to live; unemployed and broken-down steamboatmen gravitated to the place where they always had such good times; shiftless and thriftless poor people from other places came flocking in as to a poor man's paradise. Within easy reach of Louisville, the place became a resort for the immoral young men, the gamblers and all the rough characters of that growing city.

Such was the place to which Steve Holcombe's parents removed from Central Kentucky in 1835, the year of his birth; and, though coming into the midst of surroundings so full of moral perils, they did not bring that strength of moral character, that fixedness of moral habit and that steadfastness of moral purpose which were necessary to guard against the temptations of every sort which were awaiting them.

The father, though an honest and well disposed sort of man and very kind to his family, was already a drunkard. His son says of him: "My poor father had gotten to be a confirmed drunkard before I was born, and after he had settled at Shippingsport, my mother would not let him stay about the house, so that most of his time was spent in lying around bar-rooms or out on the commons, where he usually slept all times of the year." It is not surprising that as a consequence of such dissipation and such exposure he died at the early age of thirty-three, when his son Steve was eleven years old. Dead, he sleeps in an unmarked grave on the commons where formerly he slept when drunk and shut out by his wife from his home.

Mrs. Holcombe, the mother of Steve, a woman five feet ten inches in height and one hundred and ninety pounds in weight, was as strong in passion as in physical power. "When aroused," says her son, "she was as fierce as a tigress and fearless of God, man or devil, although she was a woman of quick sympathy and impulsive kindheartedness toward those who were in distress, and would go further to help such than almost any one I have ever known." She was a woman of more than ordinary mind, though entirely without education. In the government of her children she was extremely severe. "Though my father," says Mr. Holcombe, "never whipped me but once in my life, and that slightly, my mother has whipped me hundreds of times, I suppose, and with as great severity as frequency. She has, at times, almost beaten me to death. She would use a switch, a cane, a broom-stick or a club, whichever happened to be at hand when she became provoked. She whipped me oftener for going swimming than for anything else, I believe. If I told her a lie about it she would whip me, and if I told her the truth, she would whip me."

From neglect and other causes little Steve was very sickly and puny in his babyhood, so that he did not walk till he was four years old; but from the beginning his temper was as violent as his body

was weak, and from his earliest recollection, he says, he loved to fight. At the same time he had his mother's tenderheartedness for those who were in distress. Once a stranger stopped for a few days at the tavern in Shippingsport, and the roughs of the place caught him out on one occasion and beat him so severely that he was left for dead; but he crawled afterward into an old shed where little Holcombe, between five and six years old, found him and took him food every day for about two weeks.

The boys with whom he associated in childhood were addicted to petty stealing, and he learned from them to practice the same. When about seven years old his mother, on account of their poverty, provided him with a supply of cakes, pies and fruits to peddle out on the steamers while they were detained in passing the locks of the canal. Instead of returning the money to his mother, however, he would often lose it in gambling with the bad boys of the place, and sometimes even with his half-brothers, so that he seldom got home with his money, but always got his beating.

At eight years of age he played cards for money in bar-rooms with grown men. At ten he began to explore those parts of the river about the falls, in a skiff alone looking for articles of various kinds lost in wrecks, that he might get means for gambling. This, together with the fact that his hair was very light in color, gained for him the distinction of the "Little White-headed Pirate."

In 1842 Shippingsport was taken into the city of Louisville, and a school was established, which he attended about three months during this period of his life, and he never attended school afterward. The brown-haired, black-eyed little girl who afterward became his wife, attended this school at the same time. Her parents had lately removed to Shippingsport from Jeffersonville, Indiana. They were people of excellent character and were so careful of their children that they would not allow them to associate with the children of Shippingsport any farther than was necessary and unavoidable. But, notwithstanding these restrictions, their little Mary saw just enough of Steve Holcombe in school to form a strange liking for him, as he did also for her – an attachment which has lasted through many and varying experiences up to the present. At that time he had grown to be "a heavy set little boy," as Mrs. Holcombe describes him, and was "very good looking," indeed, "very handsome," as she goes on to say, "with his deep blue eyes and his golden hair." She did not know that she was in love with a boy who was to become one of the worst of men in all forms of wickedness, and as little did she know that she was in love with a boy who was to become one of the best of men in all forms of goodness and usefulness. Nor did he foresee that he was forming an attachment then and there for one who was to love him devotedly and serve him patiently through all phases of infidelity and wickedness, and through years of almost unexampled trials and sufferings, who was to cling to him amid numberless perils and scandals, who was to train and restrain his children so as to lead them in ways of purity and goodness in spite of the father's bad example, who was to endure for his sake forms of ill treatment that have killed many a woman, and who was in long distant years to be his most patient encourager and helper in a singularly blessed and successful work for God and the most abandoned and hopeless class of sinful men, and to develop, amid all and in spite of all and by means of all, one of the truest and strongest and most devoted of female characters. A singular thing it seems, indeed, that an attachment begun so early and tested so severely should have lasted so late. And yet it is perhaps at this moment stronger than ever it was before.

Notwithstanding young Holcombe's lack of religious instruction and his extraordinary maturity in wickedness, he declares that at times he had, even before his tenth year, very serious thoughts. He says:

"I always believed there was a God and that the Bible was from God, but for the most part my belief was very vague and took hold of nothing definite. Hence, nearly all my thoughts were evil, only evil and evil continually. I am sure, however, that I believed there was a hell. When a child, I used to dream, it seems to me, almost every night, that the devil had me, and sometimes my dreams were so real that I would say to myself while dreaming, 'Now this is no dream; he has got me this time, sure enough.' I remember that one text which I heard a preacher read troubled me more than anything else, when I thought about dying and going to judgment. It was this: 'And they hid themselves in the dens

and rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne.' I always had a fear of death and a dread of the future. The rattling of clods on a coffin filled me with awe and dread. When I thought about my soul, I would always say to myself, 'I am going to get good before I go into the presence of God; but now I want to keep these thoughts out of mind so I can do as I please and not have to suffer and struggle and fight against sin – till I get consumption. When I get consumption I will have plenty of warning as to death's approach and plenty of time to prepare for it.' But I had gotten such an admiration for gamblers and such a passion for gambling that I had a consuming ambition to become a regular blackleg, as gamblers were called in those days. I made up my mind that this was to be my business, and I began to look about for some way to get loose from everything else, so I could do nothing but gamble, with nobody to molest or make me afraid."

It is hard enough for a boy to keep from doing wrong and to do right always, even when he has inherited a good disposition, enjoyed good advantages and had the best of training. But our little friend, Steve Holcombe, poor fellow, inherited from his father an appetite for drink and from his mother a savage temper. To balance these, he had none of the safeguards of a careful, moral or religious education, and none of those sweet and helpful home associations which follow a man through life and hold him back from wrong doing.

Thus unprepared, unshielded, unguarded, at the tender age of eleven years he left home to work his own way in the world. No mother's prayers had hitherto helped him, and no mother's prayers from henceforth followed him. No hallowed home influences had blessed and sweetened his miserable childhood and no tender recollections of sanctified home life were to follow him into the great wicked world. On the contrary, he was fleeing from his home to find some refuge, he knew not what, he knew not where. He was going out, boy as he was, loaded down with the vices and hungry with the passions of a man. He did not seek employment among people that were good or in circumstances encouraging to goodness, but just where of all places he would find most vice and learn most wickedness – on a steamboat. One knowing his antecedents and looking out into his future could easily have foreseen his career in vice and crime, but would hardly have predicted for him that life of goodness and usefulness which now for eleven wonderful years he has been leading.

He was employed on a steamboat which ran on the Tennessee river, and his first trip was to Florence, Alabama. His mother did not know what had become of him. He was employed in some service about the kitchen. He slept on deck with the hands and ate with the servants. Hungry as he was for some word or look of sympathy which, given him and followed up, might have made him a different character, nobody showed him any kindness. The steward of the boat on the contrary showed him some unkindness, and was in the act of kicking him on one occasion for something, when young Holcombe jumped at him like an enraged animal and frightened him so badly that he was glad to drop the matter for the present and to respect the boy for the future. On this trip he found five dollars in money on the boat, and was honest enough to take it to the steward for the owner.

When he returned home from this trip, strange to say, his mother so far from giving him a severer beating than usual, as might have been expected, did not punish him at all. She was probably too glad to get him back and too afraid of driving him away again. But nothing could restrain him now that he had once seen the world and made the successful experiment of getting on in the world without anybody's help. So that he soon went on another trip and so continued, going on four or five long steamboat runs before he was fourteen years of age, and spending his unoccupied time in gambling with either white men or negroes, as he found opportunity.

After he was fourteen years old he went on the upper Mississippi river and traveled to and from St. Louis. On the Mississippi steamers of those days gambling was common, not only among the servants and deck-hands, it was the pastime or the business of some of the first-class passengers also. Sometimes when a rich planter had lost all his ready money in gambling, he would put up a slave, male or female, that he might happen to have with him, and after losing, would borrow money

to win or buy again the slave. Professional gamblers, luxuriously dressed and living like princes, frequented the steamers of those days for the purpose of entrapping and fleecing the passengers. All this only increased the fascination of gambling for young Holcombe, and he studied and practiced it with increasing zeal.

About this time, when he was in the neighborhood of fourteen years of age, his mother, awaking all too late to his peril and to her duty, got him a situation as office-boy in the office of Dr. Mandeville Thum, of Louisville, hoping to keep him at home and rescue him from the perilous life he had entered upon. Dr. Thum was much pleased with him, took great interest in him, and treated him with unusual kindness. He even began himself to teach him algebra, with the intention of making a civil engineer of the boy. And he was making encouraging progress in his studies and would, doubtless, have done well, had he continued.

During the time he spent in the service of Dr. Thum, he attended a revival meeting held by the Rev. Mr. Crenshaw, at Shippingsport, and was much impressed by what he heard. He became so awakened and interested that he responded to the appeals that were made by this devoted and zealous preacher and sought interviews with him. He tried his level best, as he expresses it, to work himself up to a point where he could feel that he was converted, a not rare, but very wrong, view of this solemn matter. But he could not *feel* it. While, however, he could not get the feeling, he *determined* to be a Christian, anyhow, a rarer and better, but not altogether correct, view of the subject either. For a week or ten days he succeeded in overcoming evil impulses, and in living right, but he was led away by evil companions. Soon after this he tried it again, and this time he succeeded for a longer time than before in resisting temptations and following his sense of right, but was one day persuaded to go on a Sunday steamboat-excursion to New Albany, with some young folks from Shippingsport, which proved the occasion of his fall. On returning home he and two other boys went part of the way on foot. They heard a man, not far away, crying for water, and Holcombe's quick impulse of sympathy led him to propose to go to the relief of the sufferer. When they found he was not so bad off as they thought, the two other boys began to abuse and mistreat the stranger. He was an unequal match for the two, however, and as he was about to get the best of them, young Holcombe knocked the poor man down, and they all kicked him so severely over the head and face that when they left him he was nearly dead. Holcombe went back the next day, and half a mile away he found the coroner holding an inquest over the man. He was preparing to flee to Indiana when he heard that the verdict of the jury was: "Death from exposure to the sun."

This cowardly and wicked deed wrought in him such shame, such self-loathing and such discouragement that he abandoned all hope and purpose of living a better life. With a sort of feeling of desperation and of revenge against his better nature for allowing him to yield and stoop to such meanness, he left his position in Louisville and shipped on a steamboat again for St. Louis. While the boat was lying at the wharf at St. Louis he got into a difficulty with one of the deck-hands who applied to him a very disgraceful name. Instantly young Holcombe seized a heavy meat-cleaver and would have split the man's head in two if the cook had not caught his arm as he swung it back for the stroke. From St. Louis he went up the Missouri river to Omaha, engaging, as usual, in gambling and other nameless vices.

On his second trip from Omaha to St. Louis he innocently provoked the anger of the steward of the boat, who abused him in such a way that Holcombe ran at him with an ice-pick, when the terrified man rushed into the office and took refuge behind the captain. It was decided that Holcombe should be discharged and put ashore. When the clerk called him up to pay him off, he volunteered some reproof and abuse of the seventeen-year-old boy. But, upon finding he was dealing with one who, when aroused, knew neither fear nor self-control, he was glad to quiet down and pay him his dues, as Holcombe remarked: "You may discharge me and put me ashore, but you shall not abuse me." And they put him ashore at Kansas City, then a small village. While waiting at Kansas City for the next boat to St. Louis (all traveling being done in those days and regions by water), he spent his time around

bar-rooms and gambling-houses. There he saw a different and more extensive kind of gaming than he had ever seen before. Great quantities of money were on the tables before the players, greater than he had ever seen, and he saw it change hands and pass from one to another. Such a sight increased his desire to follow such a life. So he put up his money, the wages of his labor on the boat, and lost it – all. He spent the remainder of his stay in Kansas City wandering around, destitute, hungry, lonely, with various reflections on the fortunes and misfortunes of a gambler's life, till at last he got deck-passage on a boat to St. Louis, and paid his fare by sawing wood. During this trip his violent and revengeful temper led him to commit an act that nearly resulted in murder. One of the deck-hands threw down some wood which he had piled up, and Holcombe protested, whereupon the deck-hand cursed him and said: "You little rat, I will throw you overboard!" Mr. Holcombe replied: "I guess you won't," and said nothing more at the time. After the man had lain down and gone to sleep, Mr. Holcombe got a cord-stick, slipped upon him, and hit him on the skull with all his might, completely stunning the man. "Now," says Mr. Holcombe, speaking of this incident, "I can not understand how a man could do so cruel a thing, but *then* I felt I must have revenge some way, and *I could not keep from it.*"

At St. Louis he got a position on a boat for New Orleans, and soon after arriving in that city he shipped on board a steamship for Galveston, Texas, but returned immediately to New Orleans. Here, however, he soon lost, in gambling, all the money he had made on the trip, and was so entirely without friends or acquaintances that he could find no place to sleep, and wandered about on the levee until one or two o'clock in the morning. To add to the loneliness and dismalness of his situation, it was during an epidemic of yellow fever in the city, and people were dying so fast they could not bury them, but had to plow trenches and throw the corpses in, as they bury soldiers on a battle-field. About one or two o'clock, a colored man, on a steamboat seeing him walking around alone, called him, and finding out his condition, took him on board the steamer and gave him a bed. But Holcombe was so afraid the negro had some design upon him, as there were no others on board, that he stole away from the boat and wandered around, alone, all the rest of the night.

On that awful night the great deep of his heart was broken up and he felt a sense of loneliness that he had never felt before in his life. He was in a strange city among a strange people. He had no friends, he had no means. He had not where to lay his head. The darkness of the night shut off the sight of those objects which in the day would have diverted his mind and relieved his painful reflections; and the awful stillness, broken only by the rattling of wheels that bore away the dead, made it seem to him as if his thoughts were spoken to him by some audible voice. His past life came up before him, but there was in it nothing pleasant for him to remember. It had been from his earliest recollection one constant experience of pain and sin. He was uneasy about himself. He was frightened at the past, and the recollection of his hard, but vain, struggle to get his evil nature changed and bettered, cast a dark cloud over his future. What could he do? Where could he go? Who was there could help him? Who was there that loved him? At his own home, if home it could be called, there was nothing but strife and cruelty and sin. Father, he had none. He that was his father had lived a drunkard's life, had died a drunkard's death and was buried in a drunkard's grave. And his mother – she had no power to help him or even love him as most mothers love their children, and as on that lone dismal night he would have given the world to be loved. Of God's mercy and love he did not know, he thought only of his wrath, nor had he learned how to approach him in prayer. Alone, alone, he felt himself to be shut up between a past that was full of sin and crime and a future that promised nothing better. But he did think of one who had loved him and who had said she would always love him and he felt there was truth in her soul and in her words. It was the brown-haired, sweet-faced, strong-hearted little girl he had left in Shippingsport. He would go back to her. She alone of all people in the world seemed able to help him and this seemed his last, his only hope. If she had remained true to him, and if she would love him, the world would not seem so dreary and the future would not seem so dark, and maybe she could help him to be a better man. "On the next day," says Mr. Holcombe, "an acquaintance of

mine from Louisville ran across me as I was strolling about the streets, took me aboard a steamer and made me go home with him."

## CHAPTER II

As has already been said, Mr. and Mrs. Evans, the parents of Mrs. Holcombe, were people of excellent moral character and were so careful of their children that as long as they could prevent it, they did not allow them to associate freely with the Shippingsport children. But of Steve Holcombe, the worst of them all, they had a special dread. Mr. Evans could not endure to see him or to hear his name called. And yet, this same Steve Holcombe was in love with their own precious child, and had now come home to ask her to marry him. Of course, he did not visit her at her own home but he managed to see her elsewhere. He found that she had not wavered during his absence, but that the bond of their childhood had grown with her womanhood. And yet she knew full well his past career and his present character. She went into it "with her eyes open," to quote her own words. Against the will of her parents and against the advice of her friends she adhered to her purpose to marry Steve Holcombe when the time should come. Even his own mother, moved with pity at the thought of the sufferings and wretchedness which this marriage would bring the poor girl, tried to dissuade her from it and warned her that she was going to marry "the very devil." She replied that she knew all about it, and when asked why she then did it, her simple answer was "because I love him."

He promised her that he would try to be a better man and *she*, as well as *he*, *believed it*, though not because she expected he would some time become a Christian and not because she had the Christian's faith and hope. Her simple belief was that the outcome of her love would be his reformation and return to a better life. It was not thus definitely stated to herself by herself. It was an unconscious process of reasoning or rather it was the deep instinct of her strong and deeply-rooted love.

Mrs. Holcombe was recently asked if, during all the years of her husband's recklessness and disgraceful dissipation, his sins and crimes, his cruel neglect and heartless mistreatment of herself, her love ever faltered? She answered: "No; never. There never was a time, even when Mr. Holcombe was at his worst, that I did not love him. It pained me, of course, that some things should come *through* him, but I never loved *him* any less." A rare and wonderful love it surely was. When she was asked if during those dark and bitter years she ever gave up her belief that her husband would change his life and become a good man, she answered, "No; I never gave it up." A woman of deep insight, of large reading and wide observation, on hearing these replies of Mrs. Holcombe, said: "It is the most wonderful case of love and patience and faith I have ever known."

He had come home then to marry Mary Evans. He met her at the house of a mutual friend and proposed an elopement. She was frightened and refused. But he pleaded and besought her, and, wounded and vexed at what seemed a disregard of his feelings and rights, he ended by saying, "It must be to-night or never." Whereupon she consented, though with great reluctance, and they went together to the house of his mother, in the city of Louisville. But his own mother would not consent to their marriage under such circumstances until she could first go and see if she could get the consent of the girl's parents. Accordingly, she went at once to Shippingsport, night as it was, and laid the case before them. They did not consent, but saw it would do no good to undertake to put a stop to it. So that, at the house of his mother in Louisville, they were married, Steve Holcombe and Mary Evans, the hardened gambler and the timid girl.

After his marriage he quit running on the river, settled down at Shippingsport and went to fishing for a living. And it did seem for a time that his hope was to be realized and that through the helpful influences of his young wife he was to become a better man. He grew steadily toward better purposes and toward a higher standard of character, and within two or three months after their marriage they joined the church together. Mrs. Holcombe says, however, that she does not now believe that she was a Christian at the time. They thought in a general way that it was right to join the church, and that it would do them good and somehow help them to be good. If they had had



some one, wise and patient and faithful, to teach them and advise them and sympathize with them at this time of awakening and of honest endeavor after a spiritual life, they would probably have gone on happily and helpfully together in it. But alas! as is true in so many, many cases to-day, nobody understood or seemed to understand them, nobody tried or cared to understand them; nobody cared for their souls. It was taken for granted, then as now, that when people are gotten into the church, nothing special is to be done for them any further, though, in fact, the most difficult and delicate part of training a soul and developing Christian character comes after conversion and after joining the church. Mr. Holcombe attributes his present success in the helping and guidance of inquiring and struggling souls to his lack on the one hand of careful and sympathetic training in his earlier efforts to be a Christian and on the other hand to the great benefit of such training in his later efforts. In such a nature as his, especially, no mere form of religion and no external bond of union with the church was sufficient. The strength of his will, the tenacity of his old habits, the intensity of his nature and the violence of his passions were such that only an extraordinary power would suffice to bring him under control. It was not long, therefore, before he was overcome by his evil nature, and he soon gave over the ineffectual struggle and fell back into his old ways. His poor wife soon found to her sorrow that reforming a bad man was a greater undertaking than she had dreamed of, and was often reminded of her mother-in-law's remark that she had married "the very devil." And Mr. Holcombe found out, too, that his wife, good as she was, could not make him good. Some men there are so hungry-hearted and so dependent, that they can not endure life without the supreme and faithful and submissive affection of a wife, but who know not how to appreciate or treat a wife and soon lose that consideration and love for her which are her due. Then marriage becomes tyranny on the one side and slavery on the other.

Perhaps the reader will conclude later that this description applies all too well to the married life of Steve Holcombe and his faithful and brave-hearted young wife; for it was not long before he returned, in spite of all his solemn vows and his earnest resolutions, to his old habit of gambling and to all his evil ways. On a certain occasion not long after he married, in company with a friend, who is at this moment lying in the jail in Louisville for the violation of the law against gambling, he went on a fishing excursion to Mound City, Illinois. Having returned to the landing one night about midnight they found a fierce-looking man sitting on the wharf-boat who said to them on entering, "I understand there are some gamblers here and I have come to play them, and I can whip any two men on the Ohio river," at the same time exposing a large knife which he carried in his boot. He was evidently a bully who thought he could intimidate these strangers and in some underhanded way get from them their money. Mr. Holcombe did not reply but waited till the next morning when he "sized up the man" and determined to play against him. After they had been playing some time Mr. Holcombe discovered that the man was "holding cards out of the pack" on him. He said nothing, however, till the man had gotten out all the cards he wanted, when Mr. Holcombe made a bet. The other man "raised him," that is, offered to increase the amount. Mr. Holcombe raised him back and so on till each one had put up all the money he had. Then the man "showed down his hand" as the saying is, and he had the four aces. Mr. Holcombe replied "That is a good hand, but here is a better one;" and with that struck him a quick heavy blow that sent the man to the floor, Mr. Holcombe took all the money and the other man began to cry like a child and beg for it. Mr. Holcombe was instantly touched with pity and wanted to give him back his money but his partner objected. He did, however, give the man enough for his immediate wants and left him some the wiser for his loss of the rest.

At the same place the owner of the storeboat left a young man in charge, who, during the absence of his proprietor, offered to play against Mr. Holcombe and lost all the money he had. Then he insisted on Mr. Holcombe's playing for the clothing which he had in the store and Mr. Holcombe won all that from him, leaving him a sadder, but it is to be hoped a wiser, man.

Having thus once again felt the fascination of gambling and the intoxication of success, Mr. Holcombe was impelled by these and by his naturally restless disposition to give up altogether his

legitimate business and to return to the old life. So without returning to visit his wife and child or even informing them of his whereabouts, he shipped on a steamer for Memphis and thence to New Orleans.

On his return trip from New Orleans he played poker and won several hundred dollars. On landing in Louisville, his half-brother, Mr. Wm. Sowders, the largest fish and oyster dealer in Louisville, gave him a partnership in his business, but they soon fell out and he quit the firm.

He removed to Nashville, Tennessee, and opened a business of the same kind there in connection with his brother's house in Louisville, Mr. Holcombe shipping his vegetables and produce in return for fish and oysters. This was early in 1860. It was a great trial for his young wife to be taken from among her relatives and friends and put down among people who were entire strangers, especially that she had found out in four or five years of married life that her husband had grown away from her, that his heart and life were in other people than his family, in other places than his home and in others pleasures than his duty. She knew that she could not now count on having his companionship day or night, in sickness or in health, in poverty or in wealth. And to make the outlook all the more gloomy for her, she had just passed through one of the severest trials that had come into her life.

When an intense woman finds that she is deceived and disappointed in her husband, and the hopes of married bliss are brought to naught, she finds some compensation and relief in the love of her children. So it was with Mrs. Holcombe. But just before the time came for them to remove to Nashville, death came and took from her arms her second-born child. This made it all the harder to leave her home to go among strangers. But already, as a wife, she had learned that charity which suffereth long and is kind, which seeketh not her own and which endureth all things.

Mr. Holcombe's business in Nashville was very profitable and he made sometimes as much as fifty dollars a day, so that in a short time he had accumulated a considerable amount of money. But his passion for gambling remained. His wife had hoped that the sufferings and death of their little child might soften his heart and lead him to a better life. But it seemed to have no effect on him whatever. Though he did not follow gambling as a profession, he engaged in it at night and in a private way with business men.

When the active hostilities of the war came on, his communication with Louisville was cut off and so his business was at an end. Leaving his wife and only remaining child alone in Nashville he went to Clarksville and engaged in the ice business. While he was there, the Kentucky troops, who were encamped near that place, moved up to Bowling Green, Kentucky. The sound of fife and drum and the sight of moving columns of soldiers stirred either his patriotism or his enthusiasm so that he got rid of his business and followed them on up to Green river in Kentucky, and went into camp with them where he spent some time, without, however, being sworn into service. But this short time sufficed for him and he became satisfied that "lugging knap-sack, box and gun was harder work than" gambling.

He quit the camp, settled down at Bowling Green, and opened a grocery and restaurant, doing a very prosperous business. While there, he had a severe spell of sickness and came near dying, but did not send for his wife and child, who were still alone in Nashville. Just before the Federal troops took possession of Bowling Green, he sold his grocery for a large claim on the Confederate Government which a party held for some guns sold to the Confederacy. He then rode horseback from Bowling Green to Nashville, where he rejoined his wife and child. After another severe spell of sickness through which his wife nursed him, he left his family again in those trying and fearful times and went South to collect his claim on the Confederate Government. Having succeeded in getting it he returned to Nashville with a large sum of money.

As he had no legitimate business to occupy his time and his mind, he returned to gambling and this is his own account of it: "Then I began playing poker with business men in private rooms; and one of those business men being familiar with faro banks, roped us around to a faro room to play poker; and while we were playing, the faro dealer, who had cappers around, opened up a brace game, and the game of poker broke up, and I drifted over to the faro table, and did not look on long

until I began to bet, and soon lost two or three hundred dollars which I had in my pockets, and lost a little on credit, which I paid the next morning. I lost what I had the next day, and kept up that same racket until I was broke. During this time I had been very liberal with the gamblers, treated them to oyster stews and other good things; and when I got broke I got to sitting around the gambling-house, and heard them say to each other, 'We will have to make Steve one of the boys,' and thus it was I became familiar with faro."

## CHAPTER III

The initiation of Mr. Holcombe into the game of faro was an epoch in his life. He was so fascinated with it, and saw so much money in it, that he now finally and deliberately gave up all attempts at any other business or occupation, and, removing again to Louisville, in partnership with a gambling friend he "opened up a game" or established a house of his own for playing faro in that city. He sent for his family thinking he was settled for life. Alas! how little he knew of that heart of his that knew so little of God. He found out later what St. Augustine has so beautifully said for all humanity: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts find no repose till they repose in Thee." It was not long before he had lost all his money and was "dead broke" again. It was about this time and during this residence at Louisville, that, uncontrolled by the grace and power of God, and untouched by the love that can forgive as it hopes to be forgiven, he committed the greatest crime of his life.

A young man was visiting and courting a half-sister of his at Shippingsport, and, under promise of marriage, had deceived her. When Mr. Holcombe found it out, he felt enraged, and thought it his duty to compel him to marry her. But knowing himself so well, and being afraid to trust himself to speak to the young man about it, he asked his two older half-brothers to see him and get the affair settled. They refused to do so. Mr. Holcombe then got a pistol and looked the man up with the deliberate intention of having the affair settled according to his notion of what was right, or killing him. He met him at Shippingsport, near the bank of the canal, and told him who he was – for they scarcely knew each other. Then he reminded him of what had occurred, and said that the only thing to be done was to marry the girl. This the man declined to do, saying: "We are as good as married now." He had scarcely uttered the words when Mr. Holcombe drew his derringer and shot him. When he fell, Mr. Holcombe put his hand under the poor man's neck, raised him up and held him until a doctor could be called. He was touched with a great feeling of pity for his victim, and would have done anything in his power for him. But all his pity and repentance could not bring back the dying man. He went into a neighboring house and washed the blood from his hands, but he could not wash the blood from his conscience. In after years the cry of another murderer, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O, God!" was to burst from his lips, and faith in the blood of a murdered Christ was to bring the answer of peace to his long troubled soul. But alas! alas! he was to add crime to crime and multiply guilt manifold before that time should come.

He was soon arrested and taken to jail, where, after some hours, he was informed that the man was dead. Some time afterward he was tried by a jury and acquitted, though the Commonwealth's Attorney, assisted by paid counsel, did all he could to procure his conviction. But no human sentence or approval of public opinion can quiet a guilty human conscience when awakened by the God whose sole prerogative of executing justice is guarded by His own solemn and awful words, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," saith the Lord. When the conscience is pressed with a great sense of guilt, it seeks relief by the way of contrition and repentance, or it seeks relief by a deeper plunge into sin and guilt, as if the antidote to a poison were a larger dose of poison. There is no middle ground unless it be insanity. Nor did Mr. Holcombe find any middle ground, though he declares that he never allowed himself to think about the killing of Martin Mohler, and could not bear to hear his name. He had to *keep very busy* in a career of sin, however, to *keep from* thinking about it, and that is exactly the second alternative of the two described above.

"After this," says Mr. Holcombe, "I continued gambling, traveling around from place to place, and at last I settled down at Nashville and dealt faro there. I took my family with me to Nashville. I gambled there for awhile, and then came back to Louisville, where I opened a game for working men. But when I looked at their hard hands and thought of their suffering families, I could not bear to take their money. Then I turned my steps toward the South and landed in Augusta, Georgia. I went to Augusta in 1869 in connection with a man named Dennis McCarty. We opened there a big game of

faro, where I did some of the biggest gambling I ever did in my life. On one occasion I played seven-up with a man and beat him out of five thousand dollars, which broke him up entirely."

Let us now take a peep into his home-life: Mrs. Holcombe says that in Augusta he was in the habit of staying out for several days and nights at a time, a thing which he had never done before. They lived in Augusta something over two years, and during all that time she had not one day of peace. He was more reckless than he had ever been before. She suffered most from his drunkenness and his ungovernable temper. Sometimes he would come into the house in a bad humor and proceed to vent his wrath on her and the furniture; for he was never harsh to his children, but on the contrary, excessively indulgent, especially to his sons. During his outbursts of anger, Mrs. Holcombe always sat perfectly still, not in fear, but in grief; for she knew as little of fear as he. Many a time he has come into the house in a bad humor and proceeded to upset the dining-table, emptying all the food onto the floor and breaking all the dishes. On one occasion he came home angry and found his wife sitting on a sofa in the parlor. He began to complain of her and to find fault with her, and as her silence seemed to provoke him, he began to curse her; and as she sat and wept in silence, he grew worse and worse, using the most dreadful oaths she ever heard. When he had fully vented his passion, he walked out and stood awhile at the front gate as if in a study. Then he walked back into the house where she sat, still weeping, and said, in a mild and gentle tone: "Well, Mary, I was pretty mad awhile ago, wasn't I?" Then he began to apologize and to tell her how sorry he was for having talked to her so harshly, and wound up by petting her. He was at times almost insanely jealous of his wife, and if he saw her even talking with a man, no matter whom, it put him in a rage which ended only when he had vented it in the most abusive language to her.

On another occasion, while they were living in Augusta, an incident occurred which illustrates at once her unexampled devotion and his unexampled depravity. On the night in question she had gone to bed, but not to sleep. About midnight he came staggering in and fell full length on the floor at the foot of the stairway. She tried to help him up, but he was so dead drunk she could not lift him. She left him lying at the foot of the stairway and went back to bed. But, though she was very tired, she could not endure the thought of lying in a comfortable bed while her husband was on the floor. She got up, therefore, and went down stairs again and sat on the floor beside him in her night-dress till morning. Then she left him and went up stairs to dress, that she might be prepared for the duties of the day. When, some time afterward, she came back to where he was lying, he abused and cursed her for leaving him alone, and, before his tirade was ended he was sorry, and tried to smooth it over by saying: "I did not think *you* would leave me."

Mrs. Holcombe says concerning her life at this period: "I usually walked the floor, after the children were in bed, till past midnight waiting for him to come home. One night in particular, between eleven and twelve o'clock, I heard a shot fired and I heard a man cry out not far from the house. I thought it was Mr. Holcombe, and my agony was almost more than I could bear while waiting for day to come, for I was sure somebody had shot him. But between three and four o'clock in the morning he came in, and his coming brought me great relief." "Then another time," she goes on to say, "I was sitting by the window when an express wagon drove up with a coffin in it. The driver said to me, 'Does this coffin belong here?' I understood him to say, 'Does Mr. Holcombe live here?' I thought it was Mr. Holcombe and that he had been killed and sent home to me in his coffin. The driver repeated his question twice, but I was so paralyzed I could not answer him a word."

From Augusta Mr. Holcombe removed with his family to Atlanta, where he made a good deal of money. Mrs. Holcombe says concerning their stay in Atlanta, "My life at Atlanta was no better than it had been at Augusta. Much of my time was spent in walking the floor and grieving. Often in my loneliness and sorrow my lips would cry out, 'How can I endure this life any longer?' I had not then become a Christian and did not know what I do now about taking troubles and burdens to God. And yet I believe that it was God who comforted my heart more than once when my sorrow was more than I could bear. I cried to Him without knowing Him. All these years I tried to raise my children right,

and I taught them to respect their father. I hid his sins from them when I could, and when I could not, I always excused him to them the best I could." But Mr. Holcombe instead of aiding his wife's efforts to bring up their children in the right path, often perversely put obstacles in her way and increased her difficulties, though he did try to conceal his drinking from them, and would never allow his boys to have or handle cards. So in many things he was a combination of contradictions. He could not endure, however, for his wife to punish the children, and especially the boys. On one occasion he came home and the younger son was still crying from the punishment inflicted by his mother for wading in a pond of water with his shoes on. Mr. Holcombe asked him what was the matter, and when he found out, he was so angry he made the boy go and wade in the pond again with his shoes on. And yet Mrs. Holcombe's love for her husband "never wavered," and she loved him "when he was at his worst."

While Mr. Holcombe was living in Atlanta he attended the races in Nashville, and while there, two men came along that had a new thing on cards, and they beat him out of five or six thousand dollars – broke him, in fact. After he was broke, he went to one of the men by the name of Buchanan and said, "I see that you have got a new trick on cards, and as I am well acquainted through the South, if you will give it away to me, we can go together and make money." The man, after some hesitation, agreed to do so. They went in partnership and traveled through the South as far as Key West, Florida, stopping at the principal cities and making money everywhere. At Key West he and his partner had a split and separated. From Key West Mr. Holcombe crossed over to Cuba, and spent some time in Havana. In seeking adventures in that strange city he made some very narrow escapes, and was glad to get away. On landing at New Orleans, though he had a good deal of money, the accumulations of his winnings on his late tour through the South, he got to playing against faro bank and lost all he had. But he fell in with a young man about twenty years of age, from Georgia, on his way to Texas, and became very intimate with him. Finding that this young man had a draft for \$1,050, by the most adroit piece of maneuvering he got another man, a third party, to win it from him for himself, and gave this third party \$50 for doing it. Then he took charge of the young man in his destitution and distress, paid his bill for a day or two at a hotel in New Orleans, and gave him enough to pay his way on to Texas. The young man departed thinking Mr. Holcombe was one of the kindest men he had ever met. The gentle reader, if he be a young man who thinks himself wise enough to be intimate with strangers, might learn a useful little lesson from this young Georgian's experience as herein detailed.

From New Orleans, Mr. Holcombe went by river to Shreveport, Louisiana, where he met again with his former partner, Buchanan. They made up their differences and went into partnership again, and were successful in winning a good deal of money together. But afterward their fortunes changed and they both lost all they had. This soured Buchanan, who had never cordially liked Holcombe since their quarrel and separation at Key West. Mr. Holcombe himself shall narrate what took place afterward: "During this time we had been sleeping in a room together. Buchanan knew that I had two derringer pistols. He got Phil Spangler to borrow one, and I feel satisfied he had snaked the other. A friend of mine, John Norton, asked me to deal faro bank, and I got broke, and the night that I did, I put the box in the drawer pretty roughly, and made some pretty rough remarks. Buchanan was present, but took no exception to what I said that night. The next morning, however, in the bar-room he began to abuse me, and we abused each other backward and forward until I had backed clear across the street. During this time I had my derringer pistol out in my hand. He had a big stick in his hand and a knife in his bosom. When we got across the street I made this remark, 'Mr. Buchanan, I do not want to kill you,' He was then about ten feet from me, and made a step toward me. I took deliberate aim at his heart and pulled the trigger, but the pistol snapped. He walked away from me then. I ran up to the hotel where Aleck Doran was, knowing that his six-shooter was always in good condition. I borrowed it and started to hunt Buchanan up, and when I found him, he came up to me with his hand out. We made up and have been good friends ever since. After we left there, these parties with whom we had been playing, got to quarreling among themselves about the different games, and the

result was that John Norton killed Phil Spangler and another one of the men. And such is the life of the gambler." And such is too often, alas! the death of the gambler.

From Shreveport he went back to Atlanta where his family, consisting now of his wife, two sons and two daughters, had remained. But he could not be contented at any one place. It seemed impossible for him to be quiet, no matter how much money he was making. Indeed, the more he got the more disquieted he seemed, and yet it was his passion to win money. Sometimes he would go to his home with his pockets full of it and would pour it out on the floor and tell the children to take what they wanted. He was so restless when he had won largely that he could not sleep; and his wife says she has known him to get up after having retired late and walk back to the city to his gambling house to find somebody to play with. He seemed to want to lose his money again. In fact, he seemed happier when he was entirely without money than when he had a great deal.

Not contented, then, at Atlanta, he went from there to Beaufort, South Carolina, to gamble with the officers of the navy. He got into a game of poker with some of them and won all the money. Then he was ready to quit and leave the place, but he got into a difficulty with a man there whose diamond pin he had in pawn for money lent him, and though it be at the risk of taxing the reader's patience with these details, yet, in order to show vividly what a gambler's life is, we shall let Mr. Holcombe give his own account of the affair:

"This man was the bully of the place. I had his diamond pin in pawn for seventy-five dollars, and another little fellow owed me eighteen dollars, or something like that, and I wanted him to pay me. Instead of paying me, however, he began to curse and abuse me; and I hit him on the nose, knocked him over and bloodied it, and he was bleeding like everything. He got over into the crowd; and under the excitement of the moment, I drew my pistol and started toward him. This big bully caught me gently by the vest, and asked me quietly to put up my pistol. I did so. Then he said, 'You can't shoot anybody here,' I said 'I do not want to shoot anybody.' I then asked him to turn me loose. He again said 'You can't shoot anybody here.' I then said, 'What is the matter with you? Are we not friends?' And he said 'No,' and made the remark, 'I will take your pistol away from you and beat your brains out.' I struck him and knocked him over on a lounge, but he rose up and came at me, and we had quite a tussle around the room. The others all ran and left the house, and the barkeeper hid.

"When we separated, the big fellow had quite a head on him; was all beaten up. He then went into the other room and sat down, and the barkeeper came in where I was. I was willing to do or say anything to reconcile this man, and I said to the barkeeper that I was sorry of the difficulty, as I liked the man, which was a lie, and a square one, for I hated him from the moment I saw him. When he heard what I said, he came sauntering into the room, and I said to him, 'I am sorry this occurred, but you called me such a name that I was compelled to do as I did. You know that you are a brave man; and if any man had called you such a name, you would have done just as I did.' He called me a liar, and at it we went again. We separated ourselves every time. I got the best of the round. After that he stepped up to the sideboard and got a tumbler; but I looked him in the eye so closely that he could not throw it at me, and he put it down. After a little more conversation, he started to lift up a heavy spittoon of iron. I stepped back a foot or two, drew my pistol, and told him if he did not put that down, I would kill him. He put it down. I then told the barkeeper he must come in there and witness this thing, because I expected to have to kill him. After the barkeeper came in, the man went out, saying, 'You had a gun on me to-night, and I will have one on you to-morrow.' Feeling satisfied if I remained, one of us would have to be killed; and feeling that I did not want to kill him, neither did I want to get killed on a cold collar, I concluded to walk out of the place. I got the barkeeper to promise to ship my trunk to Atlanta, and walked through the swamps to a station fourteen miles away, arriving there some time next day." Other such experiences Mr. Holcombe had enough to fill a volume perhaps, but these are sufficient to give an impression of what a gambler's life is and to show what *was* the life of that same Steve Holcombe who now for eleven years has been a pattern of Christian usefulness and zeal.

After spending a short time at Atlanta, he went to Hot Springs, Arkansas, and then again to Louisville, where he opened a faro bank and once more settled down for life, as he thought. *At any rate for the first time in his life he thought of saving a little money*, and he did so, investing it in some houses in the West End. Poor man! he had wandered *nearly* enough. He had almost found that rest can not be found, at least in the way he was seeking it, and the time was approaching when he would be *prepared* to hear of another sort and source of rest. Until he should be prepared, it would be vain to send him the message. To give the truth to some people to-day would be to cast pearls before swine, to give it to them to-morrow may be re-clothing banished princes with due tokens of welcome and of royalty. To have told Steve Holcombe of Christ yet awhile would probably have excited his wonder and disgust; to tell him a little later will be to welcome a long-lost, long-enslaved and perishing child to his Father's house and to all the liberty of the sons of God.

So *he thought* of saving a little money and of investing in some cottages in the west end of Louisville. And God was thinking, too, and He was thinking thoughts of kindness and of love for the poor wicked outcast. He was *more* than thinking, He was getting things ready. But the time was not yet. A few more wanderings and the sinning one, foot-sore, heart-sore and weary will be willing to come to the Father's house and rest. Truth and God are always ready, but man is not always ready. "I have many things to say to you, but you can not bear them now."

His income at Louisville at this time was between five and seven thousand dollars a year. He had a large interest in the bank and some nights he would take in hundreds of dollars. But he could not be contented. The roving passion seized him again, and in company with a young man of fine family in Louisville, who had just inherited five thousand dollars, he set out on a circuit of the races. But in Lexington, the very first place they visited, they lost all they had, including the young man's jewelry, watch and diamond pin. They got more money and other partners and started again on the circuit and they made money. At Kalamazoo, Michigan, Mr. Holcombe withdrew from the party, just for the sake of change, just because he was tired of them; and in playing against the faro banks at Kalamazoo he lost all he had again. Then he traveled around to different places playing against faro banks and "catching on" when he could. He visited Fort Wayne, Cleveland, Utica, Saratoga and New York. At New York he was broke and he had become so disgusted with traveling around and so weary of the world that he determined he *would* go back to Louisville and settle down for life. He did return to Louisville and got an interest in two gambling houses, making for him an income again of five thousand dollars a year.

During all these years his faithful wife, though not professing to be a Christian herself, endeavored in all possible ways to lead her children to become Christians. She taught them to pray the best she could, and sent them to Sunday-school. After her first child was born she gave up those worldly amusements which before she had, to please her husband, participated in with him – a good example for Christian mothers. She was in continual dread lest the children should grow up to follow the father's example. She always tried to conceal from them the fact of his being a gambler. The two daughters, Mamie and Irene, did not, when good-sized girls and going to school, know their father's business. They were asked at school what his occupation was, and could not tell. More than once they asked their mother, but she evaded the question by saying, "He isn't engaged in any work just now," or in some such way. Mrs. Holcombe begged her husband again and again not to continue gambling. She says, "I told him I was willing to live on bread and water, if he would quit it." And she would not lay up any of the money he would give her, nor use any more of it than was necessary for herself and the children, for she felt that it was not rightly gotten. And because she would neither lay it up nor use it lavishly, she had nothing to do but let the children take it to play with and to give away. Under the training of such a mother with such patience, love and faith, it is no great marvel, and yet perhaps it is a great marvel, that Willie, the eldest child, notwithstanding the father's example, grew up to discern good, to desire good and to be good. While he was still a child, when his father came home drunk, the wounded and wondering child would beg him not to drink any more. Mrs.



Holcombe says of him further, "When Willie would see his father on the street drinking, I have seen him, when twelve years old, jump off the car, go to his father and beg him with tears to go home with him. And I never saw Mr. Holcombe refuse to go."

In this way the boy grew up with a disgust and horror of drunkenness and drinking, and when in the year 1877 the great temperance movement was rolling over the country and meetings were held everywhere, and in Louisville also, though the boy had never drunk any intoxicating liquor in his life, he signed the pledge. He took his card home with his name signed to it, and when his father saw it, he was very angry about it. And yet, strange to say, on that very evening the father himself attended the meeting; and on the next evening he went again, in company with his wife. During the progress of the meeting he turned to his wife and said, "Mary, shall I go up and sign the pledge?" Concealing her emotions as best she could, lest the show of it might disgust and repel him, she replied, "Yes, Steve, Willie and I would be very glad if you would," and he did so.

Some time after that, Willie asked his father and mother if they would accompany him to the Broadway Baptist church in the city to see him baptized. While witnessing the baptism of his son, Mr. Holcombe made up his mind that he would quit gambling, and as he went out of the church, he said to his wife, "*I will never play another card.*"

Some friend of his who overheard the remark said to him, "Steve, you had better study about that." He answered, "No, I have made up my mind. I wish you would tell the boys for me that they may count me out. They may stop my interest in the banks. I am done."

His wife, who was hanging on his arm, could no longer now conceal her emotions, nor did she try. She laughed and cried for joy. God was saying to her, "Mary, thy toils and tears, thy sufferings and patience have come up for a memorial before me, and I will send a man who will tell thee what thou oughtest to do, and speak to thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

Mr. Holcombe was as good as his word. He did give up gambling from that time. But he had had so little experience in business that he was at a great loss what to do. Finally, however, he decided to go into the produce and commission business as he had had some experience in that line years before in Nashville, and as that required no great outlay of money for a beginning. All the money he had was tied up in the houses which he had bought in Portland, the western suburb of Louisville. He was living in one of these himself, but he now determined to rent it out and to remove to the city that he might be nearer his business.

One day in October, 1877, a stranger entered his place of business, on Main street, and, calling for Mr. Holcombe, said: "I see you have a house for rent in Portland."

"Yes," said he, "I have."

"Well," said the stranger, "I like your house; but as my income is not large, I should be glad to get it at as low a rent as you can allow."

Mr. Holcombe replied: "I am rather pressed for money now myself, but maybe we can make a trade. What is your business?"

"I am a Methodist minister, and am just sent to the church in Portland, and you know it can not pay very much of a salary."

"That settles it then, sir," said Mr. Holcombe, with that abruptness and positiveness which are so characteristic of him, "I am a notorious gambler, and, of course, you would not want to live in a house of mine."

He expected that would be the end of the matter, and he looked to see the minister shrink from him and leave at once his presence and his house. On the contrary, the minister, though knowing nothing of Mr. Holcombe's recent reformation, yet seeing his sensitiveness, admiring his candor and hoping to be able to do him some good, laid his hand kindly on his shoulder and said:

"Oh no, my brother; I do not object to living in your house; and who knows but that this interview will result in good to us both, in more ways than one?"

Mr. Holcombe's impression was that ministers of the Gospel were, in their own estimation, and in fact, too good for gamblers to touch the hem of their garments, and that ministers had, for this reason, as little use and as great contempt for gamblers as the average gambler has, on the very same account, for ministers. But he found, to his amazement, that he was mistaken, and when the minister invited him to come to his church he said, not to the minister, yet he said:

"Yes, I will go, I never had a good man to call me 'brother' before. And he knows what I am, for I told him. I am so tired; I am so spent. Maybe he can tell me what to do and how to go. If Sunday ever comes, I will go to that man's church."

And when Sunday came the minister and the gambler faced each other again. With a great sense of his responsibility and insufficiency the preacher declared the message of his Lord, not as he wished, but as he could. To the usual invitation to join the church nobody responded. After the benediction, however, Mr. Holcombe walked down the aisle to the pulpit and said to the minister: "How does a man join the church?" He had not attended church for twenty-three years, and had been engaged in such a life that he had forgotten what little he knew. The minister informed him.

"Then," said he, "may I join your church?"

"You are welcome, and more than welcome," replied the minister, and the people wondered.

"From the day I joined his church," says Mr. Holcombe, "that minister seemed to understand me better than I understood myself. He seemed to know and did tell me my own secrets. He led me into an understanding of myself and my situation. I saw now what had been the cause of my restlessness, my wanderings, my weariness and my woe. I saw what it was I needed, and I prayed as earnestly as I knew how from that time. I attended all the services – preaching, Sunday-school, prayer-meeting, class-meeting in any and all kinds of weather, walking frequently all the way from Second street to Portland, a distance of three miles, because I was making too little to allow me to ride on the street-cars. But with all this, I felt something was yet wanting. I began to see that I could not make any advance in goodness and happiness so long as I was burdened with the unforgiven guilt of forty years of sin and crime. It grew worse and heavier until I felt I must have relief, if relief could be had. One day I went in the back office of my business house, after the others had all gone home, and shut myself up and determined to stay there and pray until I should find relief. The room was dark, and I had prayed, I know not how long, when such a great sense of relief and gladness and joy came to me that it seemed to me as if a light had flooded the room, and the only words I could utter or think of were these three: 'Jesus of Nazareth.' It seemed to me they were the sweetest words I had ever heard. Never, till then, did the feeling of blood-guiltiness leave me. It was only the blood of Christ that could wash from my conscience the blood of my fellowman."

As in his case, so always, in proportion as a man is in earnest about forsaking sin, will he desire the assurance of the forgiveness of past sins, and *vice versa*. But Mr. Holcombe did not find this an end of difficulty and trial and conflict – far from it. Indeed, it was the preparation for conflict, and the entrance upon it. Hitherto, in his old life, he had made no resistance to his evil nature, and there was no conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. But such a nature as his was not to be conquered and subjected to entire and easy control in a day. His passions would revive, his old habits would re-assert themselves, poverty pinched him, people misunderstood him, failure after failure in business discouraged him. Hence, he needed constant and careful guidance and an unfailing sympathy. And he thus refers to the help he received from his pastor in those trying days:

"Seeing the great necessity of giving me much attention and making me feel at home in his presence and in the presence of his wife, he spent much time in my company, and with loving patience bore with my ignorance, dullness and slowness. In this way I became so much attached to him that I had no need or desire for my old associations. He led me along till I was entirely weaned from all desire for my old sinful life and habits. I think he gave me this close attention for about two years, when he felt that it was best for me to lean more upon God and less upon him."

Mr. Holcombe received continual kindness and encouragement from the minister's wife also, who not only had for him always a cordial greeting and a kindly word of cheer, but who took great pleasure in entertaining him frequently in their home. It was a perpetual benediction to him to know her, to see the daily beauty of her faithful life, to feel the influence of her heavenly spirit. With quick intuition she recognized the sincerity and intensity of Mr. Holcombe's desires and efforts to be a Christian man; with ready insight she comprehended the situation and saw his difficulties and needs, and with a very Christlike self-forgetfulness and joy she ministered to this struggling soul. Not only Mr. Holcombe, but all who ever knew her, whether in adversity or prosperity, whether in sickness or in health, admired the beauty and felt the quiet unconscious power of her character. As for Mr. Holcombe himself, his mingled feeling of reverence for her saintliness and of gratitude for her sisterliness led him always to speak of her in terms that he did not apply to any other person whom he knew. He could never cease to marvel that one of her education, position and tender womanliness should take such pains and have such pleasure in helping, entertaining and serving such as he. A few years only was he blessed with the helpfulness of her friendship. In 1885, when she was just past the age of thirty-one, her tender feet grew so tired that she could go no further in this rough world, and Christ took her away. Few were more deeply bereaved than the poor converted gambler, and when he was asked if he would serve as one of the pallbearers on the occasion of her funeral, he burst into tears and replied, "I am not worthy, I am not worthy." If those who knew her – little children of tender years, young men and women, perplexed on life's threshold and desiring to enter in at the strait gate, people of rank and wealth, people in poverty and ignorance, worldly-minded people whom she had unconsciously attracted, experienced Christians whom she unconsciously helped, and, most of all, her husband and children who knew her best – if all these should be asked, all these would agree that St. Paul has written her fitting epitaph:

"Well reported of for good works;  
If she have brought up children,  
If she have lodged strangers,  
If she have washed the saints' feet,  
If she have relieved the afflicted,  
If she have diligently followed every good work."

It was not long after Mr. Holcombe's conversion before his entire family became members of the church. Though this was to him cause of unspeakable joy and gratitude, it did not mark the limit of his love and zeal. From the time of his conversion he had a deep and brotherly sympathy for all who were without the knowledge and joy he had come into the possession of, but he felt a special interest in the salvation of the wretched and the outcast, and of the men of his own class and former occupation who were as ignorant as he was of these higher things and as shut out from opportunities of knowing them. So that from the very beginning of his Christian life he undertook to help others, and when they were in need, not stopping to think of any other way, he took them to his own house. This, with the support of his own family, increased the cost of his living to such an extent that he was soon surprised and pained to find that he could not carry on his business. He had taken to his home, also, the father of his wife, whom he cared for till his death. And in a short time he was so pressed for means that he had to mortgage his property for money to go into another kind of business.

When it was first reported that Steve Holcombe, one of the most successful, daring and famous gamblers in the South, had been converted and had joined the church, the usual predictions were made that in less than three months, etc., he would see his mistake or yield to discouragements and return to his old life of self-indulgence and ease. But when men passed and repassed the corner where this man had a little fruit store and was trying to make an honest living for his family, their thoughts became more serious and their questions deepen Steve had got something or something had got him.

He was not the man of former times. And most of his friends, the gamblers included, when they saw this, were glad, and while they wondered wished him well. But there was one man engaged in business just across the street from the little fruit store, who with a patronizing air bought little fruits from Mr. Holcombe, and then spent his leisure in discussions and arguments to prove not only that he had made a big blunder in becoming a Christian, but that religion was all a sham, the Bible a not very cunningly devised fable and that Mr. Ingersoll was the greatest man of the day, because he had shattered these delusions. Mr. Holcombe patiently heard it all, and perhaps did not frame as cogent or logical an answer to this man's sophistries as he could do now, but he felt in his own heart and he saw in his own life that he was a new man. He felt a profound pity for his friend who knew not nor cared for any of these things, and he lived on his humble, patient, uncomplaining Christian life. It may not be out of place to add as the sequel of this little episode that the testimony of this man across the way, who was such an unbeliever and scoffer, is given elsewhere in this volume, and doubtless will be recognized by the reader. Mr. Holcombe's life was too much for his logic.

When Mr. Holcombe had failed in every kind of business that he undertook, his property was forced on the market and nothing was left him from the sale of it. Christian men of means might have helped him and ought to have helped him, but for reasons known to themselves they did not. Perhaps they were afraid to take hold of so tough a case as Steve Holcombe was known to have been, perhaps they saw he was not an experienced business man, perhaps they felt indisposed to help a man who was so incapable of economy and so generous in entertaining his friends and helping the needy. Greatly pressed, he went at last to his half-brother with whom in former years he had been associated as partner in business, and putting his case and condition before him asked for employment. But his half-brother declined on the spot, giving as his short and sole reason that he believed Mr. Holcombe was a hypocrite and was making believe that he was a Christian for some sinister purpose.

This was "the most unkindest cut" of all and for days the poor wounded man felt the iron in his soul. During his former life he would have cared nothing for such treatment. A ruined character is benumbed like a paralyzed limb, but a revived and repentant soul is full of sensitive nerves and feels the slightest slight or the smallest wound. He found out months afterward, however, that his half-brother was already losing his mind and was not responsible for this extraordinary behavior. He tried and his friends tried everywhere and every way to find employment for him, but he could get nothing to do. His money was all gone, his property was all gone, he sold his piano, he sold his Brussels carpets, he removed from place to place, following cheaper rent till at last he took his family to a garret. It was now two years since his conversion. During these two years he had done nothing to bring reproach on his profession or to give ground for a doubt of his sincerity. He had not only lived a consistent life himself, he had striven earnestly to help others to do so. He assisted in holding meetings in Shippingsport, and the people marveled and magnified the grace of God in him. But he was with his family on the point of starvation. When at last everything had been tried and no relief was found, in his desperation he thought of the improbable possibility of finding something, at least something to do, in the West, and he decided to go to Colorado.

In Louisville, where he was suffering and where his family was suffering, he could have returned to gambling and have been independent in a month. He could have been living in a comfortable house; he could have had, as he was wont, the best the market afforded for his table, he could have decked himself with jewelry and diamonds, he could soon have been once more in position to spend, as he had regularly done, from two to ten dollars a day for the mere luxuries of life. He could have done all this and he could do all this even yet; for even yet he is in the prime of life and power. But he did not, and he does not. He did not turn Christian because he had played out as a gambler. He did not turn to Christianity because fortune had turned away from him. But he turned away himself from fortune when he was fortune's pet, in order to turn to a better and worthier life.

When he had decided to go to Colorado, he went to his pastor and told him. The pastor was astonished, alarmed. After two years and more of faithful and self-denying service was his friend and

brother about to give away? Was this a plan to get away into a "far country" where he might turn again to sin? He reasoned with him, he appealed to him, he besought him. He tried to picture the perils of the journey and the perils of the place. He reminded Mr. Holcombe of the condition, as far as he knew it, of his family. But all to no purpose. He committed his friend trustfully to God and gave it up.

"But," said the pastor, "how are you going to get there?"

"I am going to walk from place to place and work my way out. I can not stay here, I can get nothing to do and I must try elsewhere. I am desperate."

"Then," said the pastor, "if your mind is made up and you are going, I can let you have some money. I have about sixty-one dollars in bank which I laid aside when a single man, to use for Christ, and if that will pay your way out, you can have it. Christ has called for his own."

He accepted it with tears, left a few dollars of it with his wife and, with the rest, started for Leadville.

When he first landed at Denver, he met an old friend, John Chisholm, with whom he had gambled in Atlanta. This man had left Atlanta on account of having killed somebody there, and had made a considerable amount of money in California. He had now come to Denver and opened a game of faro. When he saw Mr. Holcombe on the street, he said: "You are just the man I want. I have opened a game of faro here, and I am afraid I can not protect myself. I will give you a good interest if you will go in with me."

Mr. Holcombe replied: "Yes, John; but I am a Christian now, and can not deal faro."

"I know," said the man, "you were a Christian in Louisville, but you are a long ways from there."

"Yes," Mr. Holcombe said, "but a true Christian is a Christian everywhere."

Notwithstanding, he insisted on Mr. Holcombe's going to his room to see another old Atlanta friend. He did so, but felt so much out of place there that he did not remain ten minutes.

From Denver he concluded to go to Silver Cliff instead of Leadville. When he arrived in that strange village, his money was all gone and he lacked fifteen cents of having enough to pay the stage-driver. "It was about sundown," says he, "when I got there. I did not know a living soul. I had not a cent of money. My courage failed me. I broke down and wept like a child."

Having a good trunk he knew he would not be asked to pay in advance, and he went to a hotel and spent the night. In the morning he walked out after breakfast to see what sort of a place he had gotten into. As he stood at the post-office, he saw across the street what he recognized as a gambling-house, "everything wide open," no attempt at concealment or privacy. He asked some one out of curiosity who was the proprietor, and found that two of his old acquaintances were running the house. He could easily, and at once, have gotten a situation with them, and could soon have had money to relieve his own wants and the wants of his family. But he had already stood severe tests, and had now arrived at a point where he had no inclination whatever to gamble and felt no temptation to procure money in that way or from that source. He did not even look for the proprietors of the establishment or let them know he was in the village. But while he was standing there, thinking of his condition and wondering what he should do, he overheard a man say that a dining-room waiter was wanted at the Carbonate hotel, the one at which he had spent the night. He went at once to the hotel, made application for the place, and was accepted at a salary of twenty-five dollars a month and board.

He was filled with thankfulness and joy, and he has declared since, that though, on one night during his gambling life, he had won three thousand dollars in money, the satisfaction which he felt then could not be compared with that which he felt now when the hotel-proprietor gave him this position of dining-room waiter *at a salary of twenty-five dollars a month*. He entered at once upon his duties. To his great surprise he found several Louisville gentlemen stopping at the hotel, some of whom had known him in other days and circumstances, and whom he had boarded with at hotels where he paid five dollars a day, with two to four dollars a day, extra, for wine and cigars. But, notwithstanding that, he was not ashamed of his present position. On the contrary, he was very

thankful for it and happy in it. He did such faithful service there that the proprietor became interested in him and showed him much kindness.

During his stay at Silver Cliff he did not neglect any opportunity of doing good to others.

One day, when he was standing in the door of the post-office, a man, whose name he afterward found to be James Lewis, came in, got a letter and sat down on the step right under Mr. Holcombe to read it. As he read it, he was much affected and tears were running down his hardened face. Mr. Holcombe became so interested that he read the man's letter over his shoulder. It was from his wife, who, with her three children, had left her husband on account of his drunkenness. Mr. Holcombe made up his mind he would see if he could do something for the poor man to better his condition, and, if possible, bring about the reunion of the family. He did not like to approach him then and there. He watched him till he got up and moved away and started down through an alley. As he emerged from the alley, at the farther end, Mr. Holcombe, who had gone around another way, met him. Little did the man suspect that the stranger who accosted him knew his trouble and his family secrets. Mr. Holcombe, with that tact which his knowledge of men had given him, spoke to him kindly, but in a way that would not arouse his suspicions. He told him, after a little while, his own condition in that far-off land away from his family and friends. He found out from the man where he stayed. He went to see him, found that he slept in a stable, provided him with some things he needed, and then got down on his knees there in the stable and prayed for him.

Finally, when the proper time had come, Mr. Holcombe showed him a Murphy pledge and asked him if he would not sign it. He told him what he himself had been before, and what he had become, since signing that pledge. The man gave Mr. Holcombe his confidence, unbosomed himself to him and eagerly sought counsel. He signed the pledge also and said he would, by God's help, give up his sins that had separated him from a loving wife, and would try to live a better life. Mr. Holcombe wrote to the man's wife informing her of the change in her husband and the effort he was making to do right. She came at once to Silver Cliff and Mr. Holcombe had the pleasure of seeing them reunited and ate with them in their humble cabin.

When he had been some time at the Carbonate hotel, he found a position where he could make more money and worked there till he had saved enough to buy an outfit for "prospecting" in the mountains. This outfit consisted of a little donkey, several "agricultural implements for subverting *terra firma*" such as spade, pick, etc., and provisions for two or three weeks. Having procured these and packed his burro, as the donkey is called out West, he and his partner started for the mountains. Mr. Holcombe kept a sort of diary of this part of his Western trip, and we give it here, including the time from his leaving Silver Cliff to his return to Denver.

## DIARY

Tuesday, May 27, 1879. – I entered into partnership with a man by the name of J. E. White from Wisconsin for prospecting in the mountains. He had some blankets at Oak Creek, a distance of thirty miles from Silver Cliff. We walked out there one day and returned the next. The road was very full of dust and gravel. My shoes would get full of it. Every little mountain stream we came to I would stop and wash my feet, which was very refreshing. This made me think of the blessed Son of God and why, when he was a guest at different places, they brought him water for his feet,

"Those blessed feet  
Which, eighteen hundred years ago, were nailed  
For our advantage on the bitter cross."

Wednesday, May 28. – After having bought a burro and a two weeks' grub-stake, J. E. White and myself started for the Sangre de Christo mountain, a wild, high range of the Rockies. We paid

for our burro twenty-one dollars, and for our grub seven dollars. It consisted of flour, coffee, sugar, bacon, salt, pepper, potatoes and baking powder. We had a coffee-pot, frying-pan, tin cups. We used our pocket-knives instead of table-knives. We had a butcher-knife and some teaspoons. With these and some other things we packed our burro and started. It was a funny sight. It all looked like a house on top of the poor little animal which was not much larger than a good sized Newfoundland dog. But it was strong, faithful and sure-footed and could go anywhere in the mountains that a man could. We traveled this first day about ten miles and camped in a gulch at night. Had a hard storm. Our only shelter was a hut made of boughs of trees, Indian fashion.

Thursday, May 29. – We moved up the gulch as far as we could for the snow. Did some little prospecting of which neither of us knew very much, and, of course, we found nothing. Every once in awhile, White would pick up a rock, look at it wisely and say "This is good float. I think there is a paying lode up on this mountain somewhere." Up the mountain we go about 9,000 feet above the sea level. We turned over all the stones and dug up the earth every now and then and toward night we went to work to make our hut which we got about half finished. During the night snow fell about three inches. We were on the side of the mountain. Could hardly keep the fire from rolling down the side of the mountain. Could hardly keep our victuals from upsetting. This and the snow made me weaken considerably, and I did say in my heart I wished I was back home.

Friday, May 30. – We prospected the second ridge, south of Horn's Peak, going up about 300 feet above timber line, or about 12,000 feet above the sea-level. There were no indications of minerals. About five miles off we could see a beautiful lake. I was very anxious to go to it, but White objected. Said it would be dangerous, might be caught in a snow-storm. The sun was shining brightly. Weather was very pleasant. I could not conceive of a snow-storm on the 30th of May. So I persuaded him to go. After we had gone some distance, all of a sudden it began to blow up cold and in a little while to snow. We turned our faces toward camp. Just then we saw one of those beautiful Rocky mountain spotted grouse. We were so hungry for something fresh to eat, we took several shots at it with White's pistol. But the blinding snow made it impossible for us to hit it. We had no grouse for supper.

It grew cold very rapidly and in a very short time it seemed to me as cold as I ever felt it in my life. My moustache froze stiff. At last the storm got so heavy, and, the evening coming on, we could hardly see our way. The side of the mountain was full of dead timber, which was slick like glass and, as everything was covered with snow, we could not always see where to put our feet down, and to have slipped would have been almost certain death. Once White did slip and but for having the pick and sticking it in a soft place, he would have been killed. We got lost and wandered about over the mountain side till late in the evening when we providentially struck on our camp. We were hungry, tired and wet. Our bedding was covered with snow. Before going to bed I read the first chapter of Romans.

Saturday, May 31. – Cloudy morning. Four inches of snow. No wind. Felt very well. We moved our camp. Stopped at a deserted cabin. Found a grindstone and ground our hatchet. We pitched camp about three miles South-east. Built a hut of boughs. We got wet. I had but one pair of pants and one pair of socks. My feet were soaking wet. At bedtime I read Romans, second chapter.

Sunday, June 1, 1879. – Snowed Saturday night. When I awoke our blankets were wet. I had symptoms of rheumatism in knees and wrists. I read Romans, third chapter, and we had prayer together. White sang "Tell Me the Old, Old Story" and "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." It made me think of my family so far away, of my dear pastor, Brother – , and the dear old Portland church, and the tears streamed down my face. Spent the day in camp.

Monday, June 2. – Woke up very cold. Our hut of pine boughs was not sufficient to keep us warm. So much snow on the mountains that we prospected the foot-hills and found what we thought were indications of mineral. At night read Romans, fourth chapter. Much encouraged by Abraham's faith. So cold I had to get my hat in the night and put it on my head to keep warm. Dreamed that I was at home with my precious wife. Tried to wake her up, but she was dead. What awful feelings!

Tuesday, June 3. – A beautiful bright morning. Read Romans v. Partner wanted to go deer hunting with a pistol. Seemed to me so foolish I would not go. I stayed at camp and was very lonesome.

Wednesday, June 4. – Bright, clear morning. Read Romans vi. Had our breakfast, bread, bacon, coffee and potatoes, early, so as to prospect on third mountain south of Horn's Peak. Started for the mountains. Went up above timber line. Ate lunch up there. Too much snow to go any higher. Found what we thought were indications of mineral. Saw a gray eagle sailing around. It looked very grand away up above that lonely mountain. Suppose its nest was near. In evening returned to camp very tired. Read Romans vii., and it did me a great deal of good.

Thursday, June 5. – Clear morning. Prospected some around the foot-hills. Found nothing. Began to get disgusted with prospecting. Struck camp about ten or eleven o'clock a. m. Packed our burro and crossed valley about fifteen miles. Very hot crossing. Pack slipped out of place several times. Very troublesome. White got out of humor. Was inclined to quarrel, but I would not quarrel with him. After getting across the valley we had trouble finding a place to camp convenient to water, but found it at last. While we were unpacking a big rabbit jumped up. White fired three or four shots at him with his revolver. Followed him up the side of the mountain. At last he killed him. He came down the mountain swinging old Brer Rabbit, and I think he was as happy looking a man as I ever saw. No doubt a smile of satisfaction might have been seen on your Uncle Remus' face, too, when I saw that rabbit. That was the first thing in shape of fresh meat we had had for about ten days.

## **SUPPER – BILL OF FARE**

### **Fried Rabbit, Fried Bread, Potatoes, Coffee**

After supper we raised a few poles and threw our blankets over them for shelter. Read Romans viii., and went to sleep, feeling satisfied that if I died before morning, I would wake up in heaven.

Friday, June 6. – Bright morning. Fine appetite. Good breakfast. Read Romans ix. We moved from the foot-hills and went up into the mountain. White went prospecting while I built us a hut for the night. When he came back he said he had found some very good float. Very cold night. Our burro got loose in the night and made considerable noise moving around. We were sure it was a mountain lion, but, of course, we were not afraid. I had my hatchet under my head and he had his pistols. Of course, we were not afraid.

Saturday, June 7. – Very cold morning. Prospected. Found a lode of black rock. Felt sure we had struck it rich. Dug a whole in the ground and staked a claim. Read Romans x, at night. Slept cold. Got to thinking. Thought it was easier to find a needle in a haystack than a paying mine in the Rocky mountains.

Sunday, June 8. – Morning clear and bright. Owing to the disagreeable place in which we were camped, we thought our health justified us in moving even on the Lord's day. Found an old cabin. It was worse than any horse stable, but we cleaned it out. Made a bed of poles, which we cut and carried some distance. This was on the Pueblo and Rosita road.

Monday, June 9. – Bright, cold morning. Ice on the spring branch. After breakfast we started prospecting. Found nothing, except another old deserted cabin of the Arkansaw Traveler's style. Returned to camp in the evening. Read Romans xii. and xiii. and slept like a prince.

Tuesday, June 10 – Another bright, clear, cold morning. We prospected some. Staked off a claim, more in fun than anything else, for we knew it was worth nothing. The locality is called Hardscrabble. And it was the right name. Our provisions had about given out, and it was a hard scrabble for us to get along. Concluded to return to Silver Cliff, go to work, get another grub stake, and take another fresh start. In the afternoon we rested. Read Romans xiv., xv. and xvi.



Wednesday, June 11. – Another beautiful Colorado morning. Read 1 Cor., i. Started for Silver Cliff about 7:00 a. m. I carried White's pistol. On the way I killed two doves. Had them for dinner about 3:00 p. m. How sweet they did taste! Arrived at Silver Cliff about dark.

Thursday, June 12. – Concluded the best thing I could do was to get home as soon as possible. We sold our burro for \$15.00, and with my part (\$7.50) I started with a friend by the name of Hall for home. We got a cheap ride in a freight wagon from Silver Cliff to Pueblo. The country through which we passed is the wildest and grandest I ever saw anywhere in my life. Hardscrabble canon is one of the most picturesque in the world, and then the beautiful mountain stream all the way, winding like a serpent down the valley. We crossed and re-crossed it several times. That night we slept in the wagon. I never neglected praying any day while I was on the prospecting tour.

Friday, June 13. – Arrived at Pueblo about 2:00 p. m. Had a little money. Got a bite to eat. At that time there was a railroad war. Men were killing each other for three dollars a day for corporations. The excitement about this, and the moving bodies of men all anxious for news, kept me from thinking of my condition till night. At night I went out to the commons, on the edge of the city, and, with other tramps, went to sleep on the cold ground.

Saturday, June 14. – Had a little money. Some others of the tramps had a little. We pooled it, bought a little grub, and at 12:00 o'clock started on a tramp to Denver, a distance of about one hundred and twenty-five miles. I felt fresh and strong. We walked about six miles and slept on the ground at night.

Sunday, June 15. – Got up early. Had a little breakfast. Started about 6:00 a. m. Walked about three miles when, two of our party having such sore feet, we stopped. I had a voracious appetite. Went to cooking. We had some canned tomatoes and canned syrup. I cooked some tomatoes and ate them. Then I went to a ranch, bought a nickel's worth of milk, fried some cakes, ate them with the syrup, drank the milk and was – sick. Did not feel strong again all the time. I had had no experience in tramping and tried to carry too much luggage. My feet got sore. Every day's tramp after that was a drag. One of the party left us and went on ahead by himself. We never saw him again. Another was so broken down we had to leave him. Hall and I went on sick and tired. About dark we went up to the house of a ranchman, and I told him my story. He took us in. I found out he was a professing Christian. I read Romans vii., and prayed with the family. His name is John Irvine, El Paso, Colorado.

Monday, June 16. – Left John Irvine's soon after breakfast. Walked five miles to a water-tank where the train had to stop for water. We waited till the train came along, and boarded her. The conductor did not see us till we had passed Colorado Springs some distance. When he did see us, I made the appeal of my life on account of myself and my friend, whose feet were so sore he could, with difficulty, hobble along. I told the conductor my own condition, and of my anxiety to get home to a suffering family. When I saw he would not believe what I said, I offered him my pocket-knife, a very fine and costly one, to let us ride a short distance further, but he was like a stone. At the next stop he put us off without a cent of money or a bite to eat. We walked about six miles, lay down on the ground, with the sky for a covering, and slept like logs.

Tuesday, June 17. – We started about daybreak, without anything to eat. Walked about eight miles to a little place called Sedalia. Saw a German boarding house. Sent Hall in to see if we could get anything to eat. Had no money, but told him to tell her I would give her a butcher-knife and a silver teaspoon, which I had brought from home, for something to eat.

She said to him so I could hear her: "Breakfast is over, but I will give you what I have." That was enough for me. In I went. Sat down to a real German lunch, and never did a breakfast taste sweeter to me than that. God bless that good old German woman, not only for her good breakfast, but for her kind, motherly words to two strangers in want. It taught me a lesson which I have not forgotten yet, and I pray God I never may.

I left Sedalia feeling comfortable. Walked about four miles. Hall was about done. He could go no further. While we were sitting there, a Christian man by the name of Jennings came along, took

pity on us, took us in his wagon, gave us something to eat and brought us to Denver. We arrived there about 6:00 p m., without one cent, nothing to eat, no place to go. Slept that night in a stable-yard under Jennings' wagon.

Wednesday, June 18. – Got up next morning about daybreak. Had a little cold breakfast with Jennings. Knocked about town a little. Had a baker's blackberry pie and a cup of water for dinner.

Here the diary of the prospecting tour and the tramp to Denver ends.

Mr. Holcombe continued the next day to knock about town, not knowing what to do, when his old friend, Frank Jones, by nature one of the kindest-hearted men in the world, chanced to meet him and insisted on sharing his room with him. As his friend Jones, however, was himself broke, he could render Mr. Holcombe no further assistance and it was necessary for Mr. Holcombe to look about for something to do. He spent a week in this occupation, or want of occupation, and at the end of that time found employment in a brickyard. But the work was so hard, at the end of three weeks, he had to give it up. After some time what little money he had was expended and again he was destitute. And at one time he was so pressed that he went into a grocery store and offered his fine pocket-knife again for something to eat, but it was refused. Several times he passed the Young Men's Christian Association rooms. Each time he stopped, looked wistfully in and debated with himself whether they would probably believe him and help him if he ventured to go in and make his condition known. But he had never been used to asking favors, and he did not know how to approach Christian people, and so his heart failed him.

At that time and in that condition he was assailed by a sore temptation. The devil, he says, suggested these thoughts to him: "This is a fine condition for Steve Holcombe to be in. Before you heard of God and this religion, you could stop at first-class hotels, wear fine clothes, live like a gentleman, have a good home and all that money could buy for your family. Now, you say you are serving God. You say He is your father and that He owns everything in the world. Yet here you are without food and clothing and your family is at home in want. You have not enough to buy a meal for them or for yourself. Can you afford to trust and serve such a master as that?"

But he had not been serving God two years and more for naught. He had learned some things in that time. One of them was that trials and privations are a part of the Christian's heritage, and that if any man will live godly in this present world, he must expect to suffer. So his reply was ready and he met the temptation with decision. "Yea, and though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And the sequel will show whether he made a mistake in trusting Him.

When he saw it was useless for him to remain longer away from home, he informed his friend, Mr. Jones, of his purpose to leave at once for Louisville. Mr. Jones got him money enough to buy a ticket to Kansas City, and there the great temperance lecturer, Francis Murphy, having found out his character and condition, gave him enough to get home.

Whether God can or not, at any rate He does not pour wisdom into a man as we pour water into a bottle. He does not so favor even His own children, if favor it could be called. But He gives a man opportunities of self-discipline, and if, aided by His divine help and grace, the man is willing to go through the process, he comes out with larger knowledge and better equipment for life and service and usefulness.

Without the experiences and lessons of this Colorado trip, Mr. Holcombe could not have been the efficient man he is to-day. That season of loneliness and self-searching and severe testing and humiliation was to him, though a painful, yet a helpful, and perhaps necessary, stage in his Christian life.

Indeed, all the trying experiences that had come to him since his conversion were helpful to him in one way or another. He needed to learn patience, he needed to learn economy, he needed to learn self-control. The disposition to practice all these was given him at the time of his conversion, he needed now to be put to the test and to "learn obedience, practically, by the things which he suffered."

Moreover, if he was to serve efficiently the poor and the tempted, he needed to become acquainted with their condition, their sorrows, their conflicts, by passing through them himself.

The endurance of the evils which give occasion for the exercise of self-denial and for the acquisition of self-control is a far less evil than the want of self-denial and of self-control. So Mr. Holcombe was willing to suffer all these things rather than to decline them and be without the blessing which comes through them. This reflection justified his past sufferings and prepared him for any that might come in the future. He knew what he had been and he had learned that he was to be purified by fire. So he felt that if God would be patient with him, he would be patient with God's dealings. When he arrived at home he found his family in a very needy condition. Shortly after his departure for Colorado, his wife had to remove from the house she was occupying, because she could not pay the rent. She had never taken care of herself before or done any sort of work, for he always provided well for his family; but now she saw it was necessary for her to support the family. Accordingly, she took in sewing, and in that way did support them till Mr. Holcombe's return. For six weeks after his return he could find nothing to do, and Mrs. Holcombe, brave, noble woman, continued to support the family with her needle. The time of her full deliverance was coming, but it was not yet. Nor did she know when it would come, or that it would ever come. But all the same she waited, and while she waited, she served, and with a glad heart, too, for had not her husband turned his face heavenward? And poverty seemed now a small thing.

Some time after Mr. Holcombe's return, his friend, Major Ed Hughes, was elected Chief of the Fire Department in Louisville, and he made application to him at once for a position. Major Hughes gave it to him unhesitatingly; but, as Mr. Holcombe was entirely without experience, it had to be a subordinate one, in which the salary was not large, being only a dollar and a half per day. It was impossible for him to support his family on so little, and though Mrs. Holcombe undertook to help him out by keeping boarders and doing all the work herself, they got behind all the time he was in the fire department. Finding that keeping boarders after Mrs. Holcombe's liberal fashion was entirely unprofitable, she gave that up and commenced taking in sewing again. She even learned to make coats for clothing stores in Louisville, and continued that for some time.

Meanwhile, he was having a hard time in his subordinate position in the fire department. In the first place he was required to be at the engine-house night and day and Sundays, with the bare exception of a half hour or such a matter at meal time. For a man of his nature and habits this confinement was almost intolerable, and would have been quite so, if he had not been radically changed. In the second place he was subject to the orders of his superiors, though he had never been obliged to obey anybody, and as a matter of fact never had obeyed anybody since he was a mere infant. In the third place, notwithstanding his experience, his knowledge of the world and his capacity for higher work, he was required to do work which a well-trained idiot might have done just as well. One of his duties was to rub the engine and keep it polished. In order to clean some parts of it, he would have to lie down on the floor under it flat on his back; and in order to clean other more delicate parts of the machinery, he had to work in such places that he was always bruising and skinning his hands.

If repeated failure in business in Louisville was hard, if starving in Colorado was harder, the confinement and drudgery of his position at the engine-house were hardest. It would require some effort to think of a position more thoroughly disagreeable and trying than this one which Mr. Holcombe filled to the satisfaction of his superiors for two mortal years. But he was learning some things he needed to know. He was passing through a necessary apprenticeship, though he did not know it, for something vastly higher. It perhaps should be added that Mr. Holcombe was practically isolated and alone at the engine-house, for none of the men there employed were congenial companions. However, to their credit, be it said, they showed great respect for him and for his Christian profession; they quit gambling, they refrained from using obscene or profane language in his presence, and, in general, were very kind to him.

Nothing could lessen Mr. Holcombe's sympathy for the outcast and the lost, and nothing destroy his zeal for their salvation. Though he was not allowed to leave his post even on Sunday, without hiring, at his own expense, a substitute, yet he frequently went to Shippingsport and other places to hold services among the poor "with the hope," as he says, "of helping and blessing them." He incurred the expense of a substitute that he might, once in awhile, go out bearing light and blessing to others, and he even took to his own home men who were trying to reform and live better lives. In view of the condition of his family, this was doubtless more than he ought to have done, and in after years he saw it was a mistake, but such was his insatiable longing to help and bless others, he let his zeal, perhaps, go beyond his prudence in that single particular. Most of us err very far on the other side. He did not hesitate to take to his home in some instances men who had gone in their dissipation to the extent of delirium tremens. One such case was that of a fine young fellow who belonged to an excellent family in Louisville, but who through drink had gone down, down, down, until he had struck bottom. During his drinking sprees he was the most forlorn and wretched looking man in Louisville. He was at this time, by Mr. Holcombe's invitation, staying at his house. He ate there, he slept there; it was his home. But on one occasion, some time after midnight, he was attacked with a frightful spell of delirium tremens, or, as he said, the devils got after him. They told him, he said, that if he did not kill Mr. and Mrs. Holcombe and their baby, they would kill him. He heard them. They told him to go and get his razor, and he did it. Then they advanced on him and he backed from them, his razor in hand. As they advanced he retreated. He opened Mr. Holcombe's door (for he had hired a substitute and remained at home on the night in question in order to help his man through his spell). He backed to the bed in which Mr. and Mrs. Holcombe were sleeping. He struck the bed as he retreated from the devils, and Mrs. Holcombe awoke to find a demonized man standing over them with a drawn razor. She woke her husband. He jumped out of bed, caught the man's arm and took the razor from him. After that Mr. Holcombe sat up with him the remainder of the night, and during most of the time the man was talking to imaginary devils. About daylight he snatched up a brickbat out of the hearth and rushed toward the door saying there were three big men out there who had come to kill him. Mr. Holcombe kept him with himself all next day. The next night while they were walking together in the open air, the man imagined that a woman whom he knew to be dead was choking him to death, and he was on the point of dying with suffocation when Mr. Holcombe called a physician to his aid.

Such was the kind of men Mr. Holcombe, even in those days of poverty and discouragement, was trying to help and rescue, and such were his efforts and trials and perils in rescuing them.

When Mr. Holcombe's pastor saw the grace of God that abounded in him, it was plain to him that he might, in future, when a suitable opening should come, make a very useful helper in the work of the church. In order, therefore, that Mr. Holcombe might be prepared for an enlarged sphere, if it should ever come, the pastor proposed to teach him in certain lines and did so, visiting him regularly at the engine house for that purpose. Mr. Holcombe studied very industriously, but it was with extreme difficulty that he could apply himself to books at that time. Later, however, he overcame to a great extent this difficulty and has gotten now to be quite a student. He has attended also, for two years, with great profit, the lectures of Dr. Broadus in the Baptist Seminary in Louisville.

As has been said elsewhere, Mr. Holcombe remained in the fire department for two years, enduring the confinement, performing the drudgery and trying, as best he could, to help and bless others. Four years and more had now elapsed since his conversion. It was a long stretch and at times a heavy strain. But he endured it, and grew strong.

## CHAPTER IV

The time had now come for such an extraordinary career and such an extraordinary man to be recognized, and he was. He had made an impression and his work, humble as it was, had made an impression. Moreover, Mr. Holcombe himself was now growing impatient to get into a position more favorable to his usefulness. It was not the selfish impatience that could not longer endure the humiliation and manifold disagreeablenesses of his position at the engine house. He had overcome all that. It was the noble impatience of love and zeal. Oh, how he did long to get into a place where he could help somebody and serve somebody and love somebody.

He had been very kindly treated by his old friends, the gamblers, during all this time; and though he was loath to allow it and at first declined it, yet fearing lest his refusal might alienate them, he had, more than once, accepted substantial help from one or two particular friends among them. Encouraged by assurances from some of these and by the promise of all the help his pastor could possibly give him, financially and otherwise, he had made up his mind to rent a room in the central part of the city and to open a meeting for the outcast classes. But on the very day when he was engaged in making these arrangements, his remarkable conversion and character and career were the subject of discussion at the Methodist Ministers' meeting. The result was that before the week had passed, the Rev. Jas. C. Morris, pastor of the Walnut-street Methodist church, visited him at the engine-house and informed him that the Official Board of his church had authorized him to take measures for the establishment of a mission in the central part of the city and to employ Mr. Holcombe to take charge of it at an assured salary sufficient to meet the wants of his family. He at once accepted it as a call from God and gave up his position in the fire department, with no great degree of reluctance.

A vacant store in the Tyler Block, on Jefferson street between Third and Fourth, was offered free of rent. Regular noon-day meetings were held there in charge of Rev. Mr. Morris and Mr. Holcombe. It was a phenomenon. Within two blocks of the two faro banks which Steve Holcombe used to own and run, he was now every day at high noon declaring the Gospel of the grace of God. The people came to see and hear. They found it was no mushroom fanatic, but a man who for forty years was a leader in wickedness and for four years had been almost a pattern of righteousness. He spoke no hot words of excitement, but narrated facts with truth and soberness. Many of his old time friends, the gamblers, their timidity overcome by their curiosity, joined the crowd and heard the man. Poor drunkards, too far gone for timidity or curiosity, dragged themselves to the place where the famous gambler was telling about his conversion and his new life. And the power of God was present to heal, and great grace was upon them all. Among those who were saved at that time and place were Mr. Ben Harney, son of the distinguished editor of the old *Louisville Democrat*, who lives again in happiness and prosperity with his beloved family, and Mr. D. C. Chaudoin, at one time a Main-street merchant, who remained faithful until death.

When the supporters of the movement saw that it promised so much, they took steps at once to make larger provision for it and to secure its permanence. They sought a suitable house in a convenient place, and finally decided to take the room at No. 436 Jefferson street, between Fourth and Fifth streets, which had formerly been used as a gambling-house. Mr. Holcombe took possession of it, and found some of the gambling implements still there. A Board of Managers was elected, consisting of John L. Wheat, James G. Carter, P. H. Tapp, C. P. Atmore and George W. Wicks. Some friends from the Walnut-street church and others volunteered as singers; the room was supplied with hymn-books, an organ was secured, and the meetings commenced under the most promising circumstances. At first, meetings were held three nights in the week, and the attendance was large. Soon after, meetings were held every night and on Sundays. People of all classes came. The services consisted of singing, prayers, reading of Scripture, a short, earnest address from Mr. Holcombe, and sometimes testimonies from the men who had been helped and saved – among whom were drunkards, gamblers,

pick-pockets, thieves, burglars, tramps, men who had fallen from high positions in business and social circles, and in short, men of all classes and kinds. Many of these gave unquestionable proofs of conversion, "of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep," faithful unto death. Among those who were converted during that period were Robert Denny, Fred Ropke, Captain B. F. Davidson and Charles Wilson, whose testimonies will be found elsewhere in this book – besides others, some of whom are residents of Louisville and some of other places.

By request, the Rev. James C. Morris, D. D., now of Kansas City, Mo., has written a brief account of Mr. Holcombe's work from the beginning to the point which we have now reached in this narrative. And, as no part of it can well be omitted or changed for the better, it is here introduced entire, with a part of the genial letter which accompanied it:

*"Kansas City, Mo., August 14, 1888.*

*"My Dear Brother:*

"I inclose the notes for which you ask. You see they are in a crude state. But do not judge from that that I have no interest in the work you have in hand. My Father in heaven knows I keep it very near my heart. I felt it would be sufficient for me to furnish you the matter in a crude state, and let you work it into your plan rather than give it any literary shape myself. Besides, I am pressed, pressed to my utmost, and I therefore send you this imperfect sketch with an apology. I am glad you are doing the work. It will surely do good. Brother Holcombe's work ought to be known. I wish in my heart of hearts that every city and town had such a man in it to work for God and souls. Praying God to bless you and your work, I am,

*"Yours affectionately,*

*"James C. Morris."*

"In the year 1881, while I was pastor of the Walnut-street Methodist church, in Louisville, Ky., I heard of Steve Holcombe, the converted gambler; of his remarkable career; of his remarkable conversion, and of his unusual devotion and zeal in the cause of religion. I heard also of his efforts in the line of Christian work and of his desire for better opportunities. I mentioned his case to the Official Board of the Walnut-street church, and suggested that he might be usefully employed by our churches in the city in doing missionary work. The matter was kindly received, but the suggestion took no practical shape. As I walked home from the meeting one of the stewards said to me: 'Why could not we, of the Walnut-street church, employ Brother Holcombe ourselves?' This question put me upon a course of thought about the work we might be able to do, and at the next meeting of the Board I made the suggestion that we organize some work of the kind and employ Brother Holcombe to take charge of it. They unanimously accepted the suggestion and directed me to investigate the case. If anything could be done, they were ready to enter upon the work and support it. I lost no time in seeing Brother Holcombe. He was then employed at the engine-house, on Portland avenue. I found him rubbing the engine. It took but a moment to introduce myself, and in a short time we were upstairs, alone, talking about religion and work for Christ. He told me how his heart was drawn out in solicitude for the classes who never attended church – the gamblers, drunkards and the like. It was easy to see that the movement contemplated was of God. We talked and rejoiced together; we knelt down and prayed together for God's guidance in all our plans and undertakings. I then told him how I came to call on him, and laid before him our plan. His eyes filled with tears – tears of joy – at the thought of having an opportunity to do the work that was on his heart.

"At once I reported to the Board, and recommended that Brother Holcombe be at once employed and the work set on foot without delay. God breathed on them the same spirit that he had breathed on us together at the engine-house. With unanimity and enthusiasm they entered into the plan and pledged their support. They fixed his salary at nine hundred dollars a year and authorized me to do all that was necessary to carry the plan into effect.

"Early the next morning Brother Holcombe gave up his place at the engine-house, and we went out to look for a house in which to domicile our work. I can never forget that day. What joy there was in that heart that had waited so long and prayed so fervently for an open door of opportunity. Now the door was opened wide, and a song was put in his heart and in his mouth. We walked miles to find a suitable place, while we talked much by the way as our hearts burned within us.

"At length we found a vacant storeroom on Jefferson street, between Third and Fourth, and as we looked in the window, we said: 'This would make a grand place to begin in.' We went to see Mr. Isaac Tyler, the owner, and he gave us a favorable answer and the key. The next day we began a meeting which continued through three months. And who can write the history of that work? Only the All-seeing God; and He has the record of it in His book. We had a noon-day service every day, except Sunday, and a Saturday evening service every week.

"The services were advertised and men stationed at the door invited the passer-by to come in. At the meetings all classes of men were represented. There were strong, wise, honorable business-men and there were tramps and drunkards with all the classes that lie between these two. No man was slighted. Many a man was brought in who was too drunk to sit alone in his seat. Many were there who had not slept in a bed for months. There were gamblers and drunkards and outcast men from every quarter of the city. The gathering looked more like that in the police courts of a great city on Monday morning than like a religious meeting. The workers did literally go out into the highways and into the lowways and compel them to come in. And marvelous things took place there.

"Steve Holcombe was known all over the city, and such a work done by such a man who had lately been a noted gambler in the community drew men who, for years, had had no thought of attending church. The old companions of his worldly life came, the worst elements of the city came, good men from all the churches came. Brother Holcombe was in his element. His soul was as free to the work as that of an Apostle. Daily he trod the streets inviting people to come, and daily, as they came, he spoke words of deep feeling to them, urging them to be saved. No man ever had a more respectful hearing than he had. No man ever devoted himself more fully in the spirit of the Master to doing men good than did he. His devotion to the poor outcast who showed any willingness to listen or any wish to be saved was as marvelous as his own conversion. I never saw such in any other worker for Christ.

"In the progress of the work we often spoke of keeping a record of those who professed conversion there. I am sorry it was not done. Hardly a day passed without some case of exceptional interest. Men were saved who had been for years in the very lowest stages of dissipation and vagrancy. Not a few of those who were thus saved were men who had belonged to the very best social, and business circles of the city. Many of them are bright and blessed lights in Christian circles to-day. Many homes were built up out of wrecks where only ashes and tears remained. Many scattered families were brought together after long separation. God only knows the results of that three months' work. I remember some conversions that were as marvelous as that of Saul of Tarsus. I could tell of some of them but perhaps this is not the place.

"This meeting in the Tyler block was a feature of a meeting which was in progress at the Walnut-street church and to this it was tributary. In the evening those who had been reached by the services at the mission were invited to the church. They were largely of a class not often seen in the church but they came, and when they came the church welcomed them.

"Then there was rejoicing in the presence of the angels, for many sinners were repenting and returning. I saw the Gospel net dragged to the shore enclosing fish that no one would have been willing to take out of the net except Steve Holcombe. But it is far different with them to-day. Changed by the power of God, these repulsive creatures are honored members of the various churches, heads of happy families and respected and useful citizens of the community.

"At the end of three months the meetings in the storeroom were discontinued. Mr. Holcombe had won thousands of friends, hundreds had been put in the way of a new life and the whole city was in sympathy with the work.

"We were now to select and secure a suitable place for the permanent home of the mission. Another search brought us to the room on the south side of Jefferson between Fourth and Fifth streets, No. 436. It had been occupied as a gambling room, and the gambling apparatus was still there when we took possession of it. In a few days the house was fitted up and the 'Gospel-Mission' was opened.

"The work was now thoroughly organized. There was, in addition to the regular services, a Sunday-school for the children whose parents never went to church. Colonel C. P. Atmore was superintendent. The 'Industrial School' also was organized, where Christian women taught the girls to sew, furnishing them the materials and giving them the finished garments. It is especially worthy of remark that the old associates of Mr. Holcombe, the gamblers, contributed more than \$500 toward the expenses of this work.

"This house became an open home for any weary, foot-sore wanderer who was willing to come in, and through the years many were the hearts made happy in a new life.

"The year following the organization of the work, Rev. Sam P. Jones conducted a meeting at the Walnut-street church, and his heart was strangely drawn to that mission. He himself conducted many services there and he was more impressed with the character of the work and of the man who was in charge of it than with any Christian work he had ever seen. During this meeting of Mr. Jones a programme of street-preaching was carried out by Mr. Holcombe and his fellow-workers. Mr. Holcombe himself preached several times on the courthouse steps, and, even in the midst of the tumult, souls were converted to God."

This is the end of Dr. Morris' account of the beginnings of Mr. Holcombe's work, though the reader will probably wish it were longer, and even more circumstantial.

Mr. Holcombe's family lived in the same building, over the mission room, and whenever men in need or distress applied, he gave them board and lodging. Mrs. Holcombe says that for three months they had never less than twenty men eating two meals a day. Of course, among so many there were, doubtless, some imposters, but it took a pretty keen man to play imposter without being spotted by the keen man who was in charge of the enterprise. Mr. Holcombe had mixed with men long enough to know them. He had spent most of his life among bad men. He had studied their ways and he knew their tricks. And it is not necessary to say to the reader who has perused the foregoing pages, that Mr. Holcombe was not afraid of any man. His former experience in sin and his former association with sinners of every sort led him to see that it was necessary for him rigidly to protect the work he was now engaged in and he determined to do so. Men would come into the meetings, sometimes, in a state of intoxication; sometimes lewd fellows of the baser sort would come in for the purpose of interrupting the service and still others for other purposes; but when Mr. Holcombe had put a few of them out, they saw that this man in getting religion had lost neither common sense nor courage, and that Steve Holcombe, the converted gambler, was not a man to be fooled with any more than Steve Holcombe, the unconverted gambler; so that all such interruptions soon ceased. But nobody should get the impression that Mr. Holcombe was harsh or unsympathetic. On the contrary, he is one of the most tenderhearted of men, and few men living would go farther, do more or make greater sacrifices to save a drunkard or a gambler or an outcast of any sort, than Steve Holcombe. For days he has gone without meat for himself and his family that he might have something to help a poor drunkard who was trying to reform. Indeed, his pitying love for wretched men and women of every class and degree, manifested in his efforts to look them up and to do them good in any possible way, is the chief secret of his wonderful success in dealing with hardened and apparently inaccessible cases. The following account of his last and perhaps most desperate case is taken from one of the Louisville daily papers and will illustrate what has been said:



## **DRUNK TWENTY-THREE YEARS**

### **REMARKABLE STORY OF "WHISKY JIM'S" WASTED LIFE AND FINAL CONVERSION. HOW THE WORK WAS EFFECTED**

The work that Steve Holcombe is doing is well known, in a general way, but the public understand but little of the wonderful good that man is doing. The reformations he has brought about may be numbered by the hundred, and the drunkards he has reclaimed would make a regiment.

But of all the wonderful and truly startling examples of what Mr. Holcombe is doing, the case of James Williams is the climax. Williams has been known for years as "Whisky Jim" and "Old Hoss," and there is not a more familiar character in the city. Until the last two or three weeks no man in Louisville ever remembers to have seen Jim free from the influence of liquor. He was always drunk, and was looked upon as an absolutely hopeless case, that would be able to stand the terrible life he was leading but a year or two longer.

The story of his life and reformation as related to a *Times* reporter is very interesting. He had asked Mr. Holcombe when his protégé could be seen, and was told at nine o'clock at the mission. Williams was seen coming up the steps, his face clean shaven, his eyes bright and his gait steady. Mr. Holcombe said: "There he is now, God bless him; I could just kiss him. I knew he'd be here. One thing I've learned about Jim is, that he is an honest man, and another is that he will not tell a lie. I feel that I can trust him. He has had the hardest struggle to overcome the drinking habit I ever saw, and I feel sure that he has gained the victory. I began on him quietly about one month ago and got him to attend our meetings. But here he is." The reporter was introduced, and Mr. Williams readily consented to tell anything concerning himself that would be of interest to the public and calculated to do good in the cause of temperance. He said: "I was born in Paducah, Ky., and am forty-eight years old. My father's name was Rufus A. Williams. While a boy I was sent to school, and picked up a little education. I was put at work in a tobacco manufactory, and am a tobacco-twister by trade. My father died when I was nine years old, after which our family consisted of my mother, now seventy-five years of age, my sister and myself. We now live on the east side of Floyd street, near Market. Shortly after I grew up I found work on the river and have been employed on nearly every boat between Louisville and New Orleans. That is what downed me. I began to drink little by little, and the appetite and habit began to grow on me until I gave up all idea of resistance. Up to yesterday a week ago, I can truthfully say that I have been drunk twenty-three years, day and night.

"In 1862 I got a job on the 'Science,' Number 2, a little Government boat running the Ohio and Cumberland rivers. Coming down the Cumberland on one trip I was too sick to work, and the boat put me ashore about twenty miles above Clarksville. The woods where I was dumped out were full of guerrillas, but I managed to secure a little canoe in which I paddled down to Clarksville. There I sold it for three dollars and with the small sum I had already I came to this city, where we were then living. I then drank up every cent I could rake and scrape. I could get all sorts of work, but could keep no job because I couldn't keep sober. I finally depended on getting odd jobs along the river front, such as loading and unloading freight, etc. But the work was so hard I could scarcely do it, and finally I had to give that up, especially after falling and breaking my leg while at work on the old 'United States' several years ago. That accident laid me up in the Marine Hospital for several months, and just as I felt able to get out I broke the same leg again at the same place. After recovering I yielded entirely to the appetite for strong drink and cared for nothing else. As I say, for twenty-three years I have not known what it is to be sober until a few days ago.

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