

CANFIELD WILLIAM A.

A HISTORY OF THE ARMY
EXPERIENCE OF WILLIAM
A. CANFIELD

William Canfield

**A History of the Army Experience
of William A. Canfield**

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PREFACE

Readers: In writing this little book, I do not claim to issue a work of choice language, nor to present any new facts or startling developements concerning the general history of the war. My intention is simply to write a short narrative of my life as a soldier in the Army of the Potomac and South West, and in the Hospital.

Having lost my left arm from a wound received in front of Petersburg, I have taken this method of procuring sufficient means to enable me to engage in some business by which I may gain an honest livelihood for myself and family.

Craving your kind indulgence, I bring my claim before you, hoping you will grant it a favorable reception.

Yours respectfully,
WM. A. CANFIELD.

HISTORY

I was born on the 10th of June, 1840, in Thornton, a small town in the northern part of New Hampshire. I was the youngest of six children. Our parents were poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith and in the knowledge of God as it is in Christ Jesus. My early instructions were limited to a common school, and I was deprived of this at the age of twelve years. Had I improved even these few years, I might have been much farther advanced than I now find myself. As it is, I have to regret many misspent opportunities of my childhood.

My parents, as I have said before, were rich in faith, and it was first in their thoughts to instill into the hearts of their children principles of wisdom, virtue and love. Especially did our dear mother, both by precept and example, endeavor to lead us in the right way.

The summer of 1853 I went to Franklin, N. H., to work in a hosiery mill. I liked my work, had a good boarding place, and in a short time felt quite at home.

I had been there several weeks, and there had been an unusual interest in religious matters for some time; many had already sought and found God. One after another of my associates had found peace in God through the merits of Christ, yet I remained unmoved.

One evening several of the boarders invited me to go to the prayer meeting. I went, little dreaming of the great blessing there was in store for me that night. I felt no conviction of sin at this time, nor did I until the invitation was given for those to arise who desired the prayers of God's people. To my surprise the whole party that came with me manifested a desire to be prayed for. Then for the first time in my life did I feel an earnest consciousness of God's presence. My friends had left me – God was with me, and I was afraid. Oh, how my poor heart shrank to hide itself; how gladly would I have hid myself from the presence of God, but I could not; the pure light of God's love was shining into my sinful heart, making every plague-spot clearly visible to my spirit's vision.

We returned home. My sister, being one of Christ's little ones, invited them to go into the sitting-room for a season of prayer. Thus was I again left alone, but not long; for very soon I felt a gentle touch on my shoulder, and heard sister's sweet voice saying: "Come, Will, and pray with us."

I went, and in earnest prayer entreated God for Christ's sake to pardon my sins. I did not plead long in vain, for Jesus was very near me, and when I yielded my will to the Divine, how quickly He received me, and lovingly sheltered me in His bosom. Thank God, I have found a hiding place there ever since. When I came out of that room I was clothed and in my right mind – I was no longer afraid. For was not God my father, Jesus my elder brother, and Heaven my home?

I could hardly wait until Saturday night, I desired so much to tell my dear parents of my new-found joy. But the week soon passed away, Saturday night came, and I was home again.

I think my dear mother perceived the change almost as soon as she saw me. I would here say that my father had for some time neglected family worship, and was not enjoying much of spiritual life; but when I told them of my new-found joy, father fell upon his knees praying fervently for pardon for his neglect of duty, renewedly consecrating himself to the Lord. Truly there was great rejoicing in that little cottage that night. The family altar was again established, and we rejoiced greatly in the love of God.

The time passed very quickly until the autumn of 1858, when I went to Manchester to work for my brother in a hosiery mill, and boarded in his family.

I soon connected myself with the M. E. Church in this place, and found many warm friends. Among others, I became acquainted with Miss M. F. Stewart, of New Hampton, N. H., and in due time married her. We had been married about one year when the war broke out.

My parents always taught us to reverence the stars and stripes; I loved my country's banner, and when rebel hands were raised to hurl it to the ground, I felt as if I must go and bear a part in the great struggle. My ancestors had fought bravely to establish the glorious liberty I had so long

enjoyed. It was hard, very hard, for me to leave those whom I loved so dearly, but still harder to sit with folded hands here at home, while others were dying for the aid I could render. Frequently, when about my work, would my eye fall upon my hands (I have often thought it strange), and they seemed to reproach me every time I looked at them. At last I could bear it no longer; I felt sure it was my duty to go, and go I must.

I enlisted under H. D. Davis, at Manchester, N. H., July 12, 1862, in the Ninth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers. I went directly to Northfield, to visit my parents and friends before going into camp. It is almost useless for me to speak of the parting scene. I took leave of all my friends except my wife and sister, with her husband. My aged parents were bowed down with sorrow and grief. They had buried their oldest son and two daughters; there were only three of us left – and now to lose me (for they had little hope of ever seeing me again) was almost too much for them to bear.

We went into camp the first of August. Spent the first night in the barracks. I did not sleep much, I assure you, every thing was so strange – so much noise and confusion of tongues. But I soon became accustomed to my surroundings, and found real attractions in camp life.

I had always made it a rule to reprove sin whenever an opportunity offered; but I soon found out what it meant to cast pearls before swine.

Then I adopted another plan; it was this: first, to watch every opportunity of doing a good turn for my comrades. I interested myself in the loved ones they had left at home – in a word, I tried to make them love me; and I succeeded far beyond what I expected. I do not think there was one in our company who would have seen any harm come to me if they could have prevented it. Then, when occasion required, I could reprove sin without being reproached and made to understand it was none of my business.

Our time was mostly occupied in drilling, until the 24th of August, when we were mustered into the United States' service. On the 29th, we struck tents early in the morning and marched to the depot, where we took the cars for the seat of war. It was a sad time with us that morning, as one after another bid farewell to loved ones. Very few of those brave men ever returned. I had previously taken leave of my friends and told them I should return to them again.

We started from Concord about seven in the morning; large crowds were gathered at the stations all along our route to encourage and cheer us.

We arrived in Washington on the first of September; laid in the barracks near the station that night. The next morning, I got leave to look about the city, and must confess I was sadly disappointed. I had expected to see something grand, and perhaps I should if I had traveled far enough. As it was, about all there were to be seen were cows and goats, with vast numbers of swine running at large in the streets. I went back to the barracks not very well pleased with our Capital.

In a very short time we had orders to fall in. We then crossed the long bridge, and marched about three miles beyond, and camped for the night. About midnight we received orders to turn out – the rebels were upon us. We turned out in a hurry; formed a line across the road with bayonets fixed, for we had as yet received no ammunition. We remained in line about twenty minutes, and then started off on another road; marched about two miles at double quick; were then ordered back to camp, without seeing or hearing a single rebel. The next day, we marched about six miles up the Potomac. Here we found work chopping down trees, and throwing up fortifications.

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