

The Conversion of Valentine Burke.

Burke was a burglar, a very wicked man, and had been in prison for twenty years in different places. He had a hard face, and a terrible tongue for swearing, especially at officers of the law, whom he regarded as his natural enemies.

Twenty-five years ago Burke was in jail in St. Louis when Moody, then comparatively a young man, came there to hold a series of revival meetings. One of the daily newspapers announced that it was going to print every word he said—sermon, prayer, and exhortation. Moody said it made him quake inwardly when he read this, but he made up his mind that he would weave in a lot of Scripture for the paper to print, and that might do good even if his own words failed. He did it, and his printed sermons from day to day were well sprinkled with Bible texts. The reporters tried their cunning at putting big, blazing headlines at the top of the column. Everybody was either hearing or reading the sermons.

Burke was in the St. Louis jail awaiting trial. Solitary confinement was wearing on him, and he put in his time railing at the officers when they came around. Somebody threw a newspaper into his cell, and the first thing that caught his eye was a big headline like this: "How the jailer at Philippi got caught." It was just what Burke wanted, and he sat down with a chuckle to read the story of a jailer who had got into trouble. "Philippi!" he said, "that's up in Illinois. I have been in that town."

But somehow the reading had a strange look, out of the usual newspaper line. It was Moody's sermon of the night before. "What rot is this?" asked Burke. "Paul and Silas, a great earthquake—what must I do to be saved? Has the 'Globe-Democrat' got to printing such stuff?" He looked at the date. Yes, it was Friday morning's paper; fresh from the press. Burke threw it down with an oath, and walked about his cell like a caged lion. By and bye he took up the paper, and read the sermon through. The restless fit grew on him. Again and again he picked up the paper and read its strange story.

It was then that a something, from whence he did not then know, came into the burglar's heart, and gave him a sharp thrust of pain. "What does it mean?" he began asking. "Twenty years and more I've been burglar and jailbird, but I never felt like this. What is it to be saved, anyway? I have lived a dog's life, and I'm getting tired of it. If there is such a God as that preacher is telling about, I believe I'll find out, if it kills me to do it."

He found it out. Away toward midnight, after hours of bitter remorse over his wasted life, and humble, broken prayers for the first time since he was a child at his

mother's knee, Burke learned that there is a God who is able and willing to blot out the darkest record at a single stroke. Then he waited for day, a new creature, crying and laughing by turns.

Next morning, when the guard came round, Burke had a pleasant word for him, and the guard eyed him in wonder. When the sheriff came, Burke greeted him as a friend, and told him how he had found God after reading Moody's sermon. "Jim," said the sheriff to the guard, "you better keep an eye on Burke. He's playing the pious dodge, and first chance he gets he will be out of here." But Burke made no attempt to get away.

In a few weeks his case came up for trial, and through some legal entanglement failed and he was released. Friendless, an ex-burglar in a big city, known only as a hardened criminal, he had a hard time for months of shame and sorrow. Men looked at his face when he asked for work, and upon its evidence turned him away.

But Burke was as brave as a Christian as he had been as a criminal, and struggled on. Seeing that his sin-blurred features were making against him, he asked the Lord in prayer if he wouldn't make a better looking man of him, so that he could get an honest job. You may laugh at this, but God answered that prayer in a wonderful way, and the consciousness of the love of Christ in his heart transformed Burke's face until it became full of a benevolence and a gentleness that made people trust him when they looked him in the eyes.

Not being able to get steady work, Burke went to New York, hoping that, far from his old haunts, he might find honest labor. He did not succeed, and, after six months, came back to St. Louis, much discouraged, but still holding fast to the God he had found in his prison cell.

One day there came a message from the sheriff that he was wanted at the court house, and Burke obeyed with a heavy heart. "Some old case they have got against me," he said; "but if I'm guilty I'll tell them so. I've done lying."

The sheriff greeted him kindly. "Where have you been, Burke?"

"In New York."

"What have you been doing there?"

"Trying to find a decent job," said Burke.

"Have you kept a good grip on the religion you told me about?" inquired the sheriff.

"Yes," answered Burke, looking him steadily in the eye. "I've had a hard time, sheriff, but I haven't lost my religion." It was then the tide began to turn.

"Burke," said the sheriff, "I have had you shadowed every day you were in New York. I suspected that your religion was a fraud, but I want to say to you that I know you lived an honest Christian life, and I have