

**FROM THE SALOON
TO THE PULPIT**

OR

THE LIFE OF BLUM H. VESTAL

THE WAY OF HOLINESS

When first I heard of holiness I thought it must be right;
It seemed to fit the Bible, And be the Christian's light.
I heard the people sniging, And testifying, too ;
They seemed to love their Savior, As Christians ought to do.

CHORUS

We'll sing and we'll preach,
We'll preach the way of holiness so true,
We'll sing and we'll preach,
Till our precious loving Savior's face we view.

I went to a campmeeting And heard them preach and sing ;
They surely preached the Bible And made the welcome ring.
It made me think of heaven, The Christian's home on high ;
Where they will live forever, And never, never die.

I little thought of joining, I said I could not stand
To be among the people That's called the "holy band,"
The world looked down upon them, And said they were so rash,
They often spoke against them, And said they were but trash.

But as I went to hear them, And saw the way they did,
I saw they had a treasure, From worldly people hid
They seemed to be so happy, And filled with Christian love ;
When people talked about them, They only looked above.

My heart began to hunger, And thirst and burn within ;
I wanted full salvation A freedom from all sin.
I went to God for holiness, And called upon his name ;
He cleansed my heart completely, And filled it with the same.

And now I'm one that bears that name, That happy "holy band" ;
I've crossed the river Jordan, And live in Canaan land.
The atmosphere is pleasant, And fruits of every kind.
When you reach heaven's portals, I'll not be far behind.

—F. M. Graham.

Part I

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF B. H. VESTAL

I was born in Yadkin, three miles west of Yadkinville, in a log house near what was called the Sol Branch, on the 19th day of March, 1874. My father's name was Solomon. He was known far and near as a man who made, sold and drank whiskey. He raised a family of thirteen children, eight boys and five girls, all of which are living at this writing, as far as I know. He was a man who took no interest in education, Sabbath-school, and preaching. We children were never permitted to attend Sabbath-school or church, but were driven through the cold and heat to make whiskey and brandy. He ran a government distillery and also blockade distilleries. I can remember grinding apples at the brandy distillery when I was not tall enough to reach the hopper and would have to stand on a block to feed the mill.

We were also taught to drink as well as make it, and to sell it to others. I can remember my father sending me to public gatherings when I was a very small boy, with a gallon or two of liquor and a glass, and I would stay in the woods and sell it to those who came to buy. I have carried a number of gallons of liquor in buckets and jugs to our nearest towns and exchanged it to the merchants for goods.

My father, like all other men who dealt in whiskey, began to drink and gamble, and kept on until he lost everything he had. At one time he was worth quite a little, but he lost it all in paying out fines.

Now, dear reader, I wish I were able to tell you all that happened during these days, but it is a long story and some of it is too cruel to mention. I will, however, for the benefit of others mention a few things that happened in those days.

As I told you before, my father began to drink and staying

away from home, and when he was at home there was no peace in the household. If there ever was a home on earth that had hell in it, that home was ours. I had a very good mother, but ah, what a home she had to live in! More than once have I seen my father take a whip or a chair and drive my mother from the house, even at night with a little one in her arms and one or two at her side. This would always happen just after he had been off drinking and gambling and had lost what money he had. At such times he would come home and take his spite out on his wife and children, just like all other men who follow drinking and keep bad company.

He continued to do this until one day while drunk he moved all his property and children who were at home with the exception of the baby, to a little log house about 16 by 20 feet, off in a desert place about a mile from the public road. By this time I was getting large enough to remember what happened. Dear reader, I wish that I could talk to you face to face and tell you what I witnessed with my own eyes during the few years that we lived in this little log house without a mother. My father would have dances and frolics in our home, and I have seen both men and women dance, drink and get so drunk that they would lie on the floor and around the house all night and sometimes two or three nights together.

Our home was within a mile and a half of the church, but we were never permitted to go to Sabbath-school or preaching, and no preacher ever came to our house. I don't remember ever hearing a prayer prayed or a religious song sung in our home. I do remember one time when there was a camp-meeting being held at Center Church, that we heard people sing while we were grinding apples and making brandy. I remember that, during a revival held at this place, men would come on Sundays and at night and buy liquor, get drunk and gamble.

I have known my father to get drunk and to remain so for four weeks at a time. During these times he would be perfectly wild. Sometimes he would get up on a cold night and walk through the snow and ice with only his night clothes on and bare-footed, cursing at the top of his voice, declaring that he was going to kill some one. I have also known him to sit on the side of his bed at night with a revolver in his hand and a

box of cartridges, and shoot them all away into the fireplace and other places in the house while we children were hid, some on and some under the bed, and others in the loft of the little log cabin, not knowing when we were going to be killed or hit with a bullet. God cared for and protected us while in this danger. He would take these spells that lasted four or five weeks, keep us children awake at night waiting upon him, threatening to kill us while we were doing so, and then in the day he would give us tasks, a certain amount of work to do, and if we failed to get it done, we had whippings too cruel to mention.

Dear reader, I am not telling this to cast reflection on my father, but only to show you what the devil and liquor will do for a man. My father was kind-hearted and a good neighbor when he was sober, but when he took these drinking spells he would get mad at everybody and would have no reason. I have had to get up out of bed more than once and go with my elderbrother to our uncle's, Wm. Holcomb's, Fred Wagoner's and other places three and five miles from our home to get liquor for him. This was after he had lost all of his property and had stopped making liquor for himself. Dear reader, this may seem like fiction to you, but it is not half what I could tell. Pen and time will never be able to tell what we children witnessed.

At one time my father owned considerable property, but he continued to make, sell and drink whiskey until he lost all that he had, and, like all other men who have ever had anything to do with liquor, he got into trouble with the State and Federal courts. How well I remember the morning when he carried my mother to the courthouse in Yadinville and made her sign away her right to the home and the last foot of land we had. He did this in order to keep out of jail. This was before he left my mother and moved away. He continued in this business until the time came when he had no friends, began to pay his fines and costs by staying in jail. During this time we children began to leave home and scatter out over the country.

I will now tell you about the first time I went to church. It was after I was sixteen years of age. One afternoon father gave my brother and me a task and said that if we got it done in time we might go with our cousins at night to the closing exercises of a school which was to be held in the church. We

finished our task and I went to a church that night for the first time in my life. I remember well how I entered the church. It was the first time I had ever been to a gathering like this. The church was packed to its utmost capacity, every seat being taken with the exception of around mourners' bench which was in front of the pulpit, and I sat down on this, facing the congregation. I discovered the people were laughing, but did not know what they were laughing about until my cousin told me that I must pull off my hat. I have often thanked the Lord that I took a seat on the mourners' bench the first time I ever entered church, although at that time I did not know what it was for, but, praise the Lord, I found out later.

The next time I was at church I was nineteen years of age. This was after our home was broken up and we children were scattered over the land. At this time I was living in the little town of Yadkinville, and, of course, I was still in the liquor business, drinking and retailing as I had been taught to do. I had lived there and drank and sold liquor until the good citizens of the town were getting tired of it. One day a good man came to me and asked to talk to me a little while. I went with him back into his store where we sat down and he began to talk to me. Now this was the first time any one had ever spoken to me about doing better or about my soul. He told me that the people of the town were going to have me indicted for retailing whiskey and that he felt sorry for me because I had not had any chance, and if I would agree to go home with him he would take care of me and see that I was not indicted. He talked so good and kind to me that I accepted his proposition. How well I remember how I cried when he talked to me about doing better. Although I had been and was at that time a bad boy, yet I had a tender heart and only needed some one to tell me of the better way.

I went home with the good man, that afternoon and that night his wife gave me some soap and warm water and had me to take a bath, then she gave me some of her husband's clothes. They were too long and large, but I rolled and tucked them until I made them fit. I was then shown where I should sleep, and there I found a nice, clean bed which was something new to me. Now, dear reader, you can imagine how I slept that night. Oh,

it was so much better than sleeping in hay racks and barn lofts and then I could sleep in peace, too, as I was not afraid of any officer, as the man to whom I had been hired had promised to protect me. This was on Monday night. I remained with these good people until the following Sunday morning. After breakfast on Sunday morning I thought I would go back into town and spend the day with my old associates, but the good man begged me not to go, to stay and go to Sunday-school with them. I started on the road to town, but his good wife came to the door and persuaded me to come back. She said, that if I would do so, her son and daughter would keep me company and go with me to Sunday-school and meeting. I decided to stay, and that afternoon for the first time in my life I went to Sabbath school.

At that time I was over nineteen years of age and did not know one letter from another. We entered the church and heard them singing; then the superintendent read and prayed. This was the first time I ever heard the Bible read and also the first time to hear anyone pray. After reading and praying, the superintendent said, "The classes will now take their places." I was invited into a class, but could not read. I listened to the little boys and girls reading, and, ah, how my heart did hunger to read. It was then that I began to see my misfortune and to come to myself. I remember very well how I was dressed. I was barefooted and had on a coat that the good man had given me, the sleeves of which were too long for me, but I had rolled them under. My hat was a little ten cent straw.

As I listened to those little folks read and answer questions I began to cry because I couldn't read. I picked up my little hat and left the church. I went to the woods and sat down on a log and began to cry and talk to the Lord the best I knew how. This was my first experience in trying to talk to Him. I told him I wanted to read like those children, and the Lord promised me there that I would live to read and also preach the Word and I have never doubted the call from that moment. I remember that I knelt down and prayed the best I knew how, I tried to utter the same words that the superintendent did. I do not know what I said or did, but I do know that I was real happy and a great burden rolled away from my heart.

I remained with these good people about twelve months. In