

a community called ...

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Men of the North

Testimonies
of _____
Condemned
Criminals

DESMOND COMPANY
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Compiled by
J. W. Montgomery

*—Testimonies of—
Condemned Criminals*

By

J. W. Montgomery

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"Personal Evangelism"
"Living Ambassadors"



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DEDICATION

To prison workers and personal workers throughout the land, who strive to inspire hope in the hearts of those who seem hopeless; to parents, who use all available means to warn their children of the horrible effects of crime; and to Christian workers everywhere, who share the viewpoint of the great General Booth who said, "A man may be down, but is never out," this little volume is tenderly dedicated by

THE COMPILER

PREFACE

In his annual report to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover expressed the opinion that the criminal is without hope. He says there is no way to save those who are committing crime. That our hope is to save society, as far as possible, from the criminal by the strict enforcement of the law, and to give ourselves to the training of youth. Law, he says, will never make a decent citizen out of the criminal.

If God is left out of the picture, we fully agree that the criminal is hopeless. We further agree that the law will never make decent citizens out of those who are committing the crimes, and that the greatest good can be accomplished through the training of youth. But, my friends, there is salvation, through the atoning blood of the Son of God, even for the criminal who is now behind the bars! There is power in His blood to save the lowest of the low! When He said, "Whosoever will may come," He meant what He said. The poet had some conception of the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ when he wrote, "He has saved the worst among you, when He saved a wretch like me."

It is a joy to bring you the testimonies of four condemned prisoners mentioned in the following pages. For the first story, I am deeply indebted to Evangelist Kiemel of Kansas; for the second, I am equally indebted to Rev. Mrs. E. Y. Davis of Pasadena, California; for the third, to Rev. Charles F. Pegram of St. Paul's M. E. Church, Ft. Wayne, Indiana; and for the fourth, to Rev. M. F. Grose of Pasadena Nazarene College.

In the distribution of this little volume, bearing the heart messages of most earnest souls, it is my sincere prayer that hundreds may be won to Christ.

In keeping with the simple manner by which the testimonies herein contained are given, I shall try to tell of the

incidents leading up to them in every-day language. Hundreds and hundreds of children have read the letter written by Gussem Varando to the evangelist, and by it have been deeply moved in their hearts toward the way of righteousness. I trust that they may find it easy to read this little booklet throughout, and that by so doing many of them may be led to escape the road of crime.

THE COMPILER.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TESTIMONIES OF CONDEMNED CRIMINALS	7
WHAT THEN?	13
CONVERSION AND TRIUMPHANT DEATH OF BEN FOWLER...	14
PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF ALEJANDRO C. OCHOA	19
THE LAST MARCH OF JOHN STACEY	25

Testimonies of Condemned Criminals

In October, 1933, I came in possession of a very strange document—so strange and so interesting, in fact, that I sought permission immediately to take it to the audience of Radio Station WOWO. The response that came from my listeners, in that early day of my broadcasting experience, was amazing. The week after I read the story of Gussem Varando before the microphone, almost five hundred letters came to my address asking if it would be possible to secure a copy of the last letter ever written by the man about whom I told in that radio address. Five hundred copies were made and sent out.

The next Sunday afternoon, the audience was told of the many requests that came for it; and a copy of the letter written by Varando, and one written by the hangman who sent him to his death, were promised to anyone who would write in and request them. Three or four hundred more letters were received, asking for copies of the strange articles. Within a couple of weeks the supply was exhausted, and still requests came! Week after week, requests continued to pour in. Little did I realize the first time the letter was read that 2,500 copies would be sent out from my office.

A few months ago, about three years from the time the letters and poem were first read on the broadcast, a letter came from an evangelist. It read in part: "Brother Montgomery, someone borrowed my letter written by Gussem Varando in order to copy it, and it has been lost. I would not have taken any price for it, because it had been the means of winning no less than 250 souls in my meetings. Is there any way to secure another copy?"

It seemed that the writing of that letter to Evangelist E. W. Kiemel was the only act of that poor gangster's life

that gave opportunity to reach souls after he was converted. It was not his lot to live long after his conversion and sanctification to witness for the Lord, but God understood the sincere desire of his heart to reach others, and it seems that He chose this means to extend his influence over the country, after he passed through the trap to his eternal home.

Hundreds of people have written me during the three years since I first read the letters, saying they were greatly impressed by the definite stand Varando took for God in the death cell, and the confession made by the hangman who sent him through the trap door to his death. Mothers from all over the country wrote about the effect it had on their unsaved boys and girls, and not a few succeeded in bringing their children to repentance after reading the remarkable story to them.

Through the kindness of Evangelist Kiemel, the original letters were secured; and I am quoting them to you in the few following pages, word for word:

Bridgeport, Connecticut
November 13, 1932

Reverend Kiemel:

I have been four weeks trying to locate a preacher who was supposed to have held a meeting in Elkhart, Kansas last September, 1931.

I have for many years been a Death-chamber employee and have sent many men and one girl to hell up in a north-east state.

Four weeks ago I made a promise to a man condemned to die, and that is why I am writing you. I just want to say that I don't believe in God and your religion.

Well, getting down to facts: I hung a man some time ago who claimed he was in your meeting on September 14, 1931, at Elkhart. Well, I pulled the trap that sent his soul back to its original beginning.

He asked me to tell you, as his last request, that after he arrived back to the pen, God did really perform a miracle in his life by forgiving him of his many sins and gave him complete assurance that heaven was his goal. He testified to another thing—and that I believe he called “sanctification.” Well, something surely took place in his life because he quit tobacco, and confessed all his crimes from a child to the gallows. He claimed he had been under deep conviction since he left Elkhart, and was arrested five days later. His worst regret was: “Oh, why didn’t I pray through to victory and make my confession then, in public!”

He was the only man I ever feared to hang, but it was my job. Well, I resigned just as quick as he was pronounced dead. His name was Gussem Varando. I write this by request.

(Signed by the Hangman)

PRISONER’S LETTER

A. T. & St. F. Train, East
En route to Prison
September 18, 1931

Mr. Evangelist
Elkhart, Kansas
Dear Friend:

Please pardon me for calling you friend, as I am not acquainted with you. But I know you are a man of God. Am sure of it, for no man could send out convicting power unless he was of Christ-likeness.

I ventured into your service Sunday night, September 13, one of few times to be in church in my life. I am a wicked man and know it well. I have broken the laws of the nation for one-fourth of a century. I was taught crime when a child. When a boy of seventeen, I was caught in a booze raid and pulled 87 days and pardoned. I got back in with another gang and went to doing everything. In 1922, September 12,

in a New England state, I was in a big job of bank robbery which resulted in the death of two. We were caught, and I got life.

In the spring of 1926, on March the 3rd, we sawed and escaped to freedom. In nearly five years I have wandered this land with plenty of dough planted in various places from crimes of the past. I was one in your service last Sunday night. That sermon on "War Is Over" was so good and I could never use words to tell you how I appreciate it, and I was touched by our Creator Spirit through you. I would give all the money I have in this world planted—and it would be thousands—to just sit free in another meeting and hear the old, blessed Bible explained. "Crime never pays!" Little did I know as I sat there that I was listening to my last sermon, which was almost the first, or to the last invitation or the last prayer. My God, please have mercy and convicting power on all unsaved boys and girls, men and women, that attend church and are not saved. Evangelist, please insist on the unsaved getting right. Please take advice from a wicked sinner who knows something of the awfulness of sin and its destination and get right with your Maker now before it is too late. Oh, I used to think when a boy, when the conviction came to me to be a Christian after hearing the Salvation Army play on the streets of New York: "Well, I will just wait a few more years and have my fun (so called) and then I will become a Christian." But, as the weeks, months, and years passed on my life was becoming a life of sin and of crime, and the desires to make a change became weaker and less and my heart getting black with sin and Satan's desires. I know God is love and merciful. If you let an unsaved person read this, my plea to that party is: Get on your knees now, and cry to God to save you and keep you saved. Never would you regret it.

Well, Mr. Evangelist, as I am trying to write to you my heart is sad and heavy and my eyes are red with tears. As

the train is rambling on, the following thought came to me: "Sin never pays, and crime never pays." Be sure your sin will find you out. My sins have found me out, and when I arrive at the prison I will be whipped at the post for several weeks, twelve or fifteen lashes one day a week. And in the dungeon—the dark pits of hell for anyone who has escaped. I wish the train would wreck and I be killed, rather than hell back in an eastern state. "Be sure your sins will find you out." Sinner, crime never pays. "War is over" with some it is true, but with me it is just beginning. As I sat in your church last Sunday night, I wished so much to become a Christian. My eyes were wet with tears. I felt like coming forward and falling on my knees and face and ask God to have mercy and pardon me. The hum of those songs still rings in my ears.

Dear Mr. Evangelist, this letter is from a sinner who has reached the bottom of sin in all its fury. I am writing this with steel irons on my wrist and with a heavy, sad, black, dried-up sin-cursed heart. As I sat in your church last Sunday, September 13, I was convicted with deep conviction, and I think if one more verse of song had been sung, I would have come and called on God. But I know if someone had said, "Come, and ask God to save you," it would have been the sweetest words uttered to me in my life, and I know I would have jumped at the chance to come and ask God to hear me.

I never had heard any of the songs that were sung, but oh, how I did enjoy them. The song leader said, "Turn to 92," I believe, "Grace That Is Greater Than All." In turning to that number, I glanced at 89—"When I Come to the End of the Road." Oh, how I would have loved to hear that song sung. I heard it once over the radio. I never knew Sunday that in five more days I would be to the end of my road, lost, without God, without a friend in the world, without a home above. Oh, God! How, Mr. Evangelist, can others reject God's calling and continue in sin? A sinner no matter

how wild or how wicked is headed for the same hell I am, as long as he rejects God's calling. I write this letter hoping it will influence someone to become a Christian. Just a few more thoughts and I will close. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." "Be sure your sins will find you out." "Crime never pays."

Please fill this one request from one who has run life's race, and has reached the end of the road. I will be placed in utter darkness as soon as I reach the prison and I know I will never live through it. Only one out of a dozen can stand the torture and darkness of punishment for one year. My desire and request is: Please sing 89—"When We Come to the End of the Way." Then, Mr. Evangelist, ask the sinners under your hearing if anyone of them would like to come to the end of the road as I have? Insist please on their accepting Christ now, this day, this minute. As long as they remain in sin, they are headed and bound for the same hell that I am plunging into.

Mr. Evangelist, if you want to hear from me again, and more of the cost of sin, you may be letting me know. I hope this will influence some sinner to come home to Christ. His or her sins may not find them out in this life as mine have, but one thing we must meet them at the judgment seat of Christ. "Be sure your sins will find you out." "Crime never pays." From a man without God, without a friend in the world, lost, doomed, and facing torture and punishment. If you want to hear from me again, let Toney Varando know and he will get me word.

TONEY VARANDO
General Delivery, Denver, Colorado

WHAT THEN?

When all the great plants of our cities
Have turned out their last finished work;
When our merchants have sold their last yardage
And dismissed from his desk the last clerk;
When our banks have raked in their last dollar
And paid their last dividend;
When the Judge of the earth says "Closed for the night"
And asks for a balance—WHAT THEN?

When the choir has sung its last anthem,
And the preacher has made his last prayer;
When the people have heard their last sermon
And the sound has died out on the air;
When the Bible lies closed on the altar
And the pews are all empty of men
And each one stands facing his record—
And the great book is opened—WHAT THEN?

When the actors have played their last drama,
And the mimic has made his last fun,
When the film has flashed its last picture,
And the billboard displayed its last run;
When the crowds seeking pleasure have vanished,
And gone out in the darkness again—
When the trumpet of ages has sounded,
And we stand up before Him—WHAT THEN?

When the bugle's call sinks into silence
And the long marching columns stand still,
When the captain repeats his last orders,
And they've captured the last fort and hill,
And the flag has been hauled from the mast head,
And the wounded afield checked in,
And a world that rejected its Savior,
Is asked for a reason—WHAT THEN?

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

CONVERSION AND TRIUMPHANT DEATH OF BEN FOWLER

Two men had been murdered in a Tennessee village. An intensive search was made for one Ben Fowler, a stalwart young man who grew up in the mountains of southern Kentucky. Finally, he was arrested and brought to justice. The murderer spent many hours in reflection, and not a few in remorse, while in his prison cell alone. Finally, the days of the trial had passed, and the time arrived for a jury of twelve men to file into the courtroom and read their verdict. The foreman slowly read in solemn tones the following words: "We find one Ben Fowler guilty of murder in the first degree."

He was placed in the state penitentiary at Nashville, Tennessee, to await the time of his electrocution. Both he and his friends had appealed to the Governor for clemency, to no avail. A few days before the electrocution, the prisoner approached the chaplain, the Rev. Travis, and said, "I've decided to get right with God." Within a few hours, he was beautifully saved, was baptized, and received into the membership of a church. During the baptismal service, which was administered by immersion—and that in the cold, January atmosphere—the old father stood near, wearing an old, slouched hat and worn overcoat. A brother, who had shared with the prisoner the meager comforts of the Kentucky mountain home, and with whom he had strolled the wooded hills in their innocent and youthful years, stood near with bowed head and a grief-stricken heart. Only a few more hours remained for Ben. The stout-hearted but sympathetic warden fell on the prisoner's shoulder and wept, as a Negro quartet sang, "Steal away with Jesus, for I have not long to stay here." The prisoner's face radiated happiness and hope, al-

though he was, as it were, in the very shadow of the death chair.

On Tuesday afternoon at 4:30 o'clock, Ben was removed to the death cell. The shadows of night soon shrouded the little death-house, where the new convert was to spend only a part of the night never to see the rising of another sun. About 9:00 o'clock, four clergymen conducted a religious service in and about the door of the death cell and administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the man who expected to drink anew in the kingdom of his Lord before another sunrise. Sleep, for those who were with him at that hour, was unthinkable, and was almost impossible for several nights that followed. Yet, in the midst of such tension, Ben seemed perfectly composed. A snowy-white bed had been prepared for him in the death cell, in case he should desire a few hours of sleep before the fatal moment; but he spent the time in conversation with his father, his brother, the minister and friends. The father and brother did not remain to see the tragic end. Just before they left, Ben said to his father, "Now go on, Pap, like you was going to mill or somewhere, and tell Maw I will meet her in heaven for I am ready to go, and tell all the folks I am going to die like a Fowler from Kentucky."

The four clergymen, who had previously administered the Sacrament and conducted the service, retired to the room through which death was soon to stalk. Newspaper reporters had made their appearance, as had the staff of prison physicians. Again, a brief religious service was held; but it came to an abrupt end as the moment had arrived for those making final preparation to enter and perform their sad mission. A sense of death pervaded the room, and all realized that they were standing in its very presence. The ministers and the warden warmly embraced Ben, and clasped his hand bidding him goodby until "the day break and the shadows flee away." The stout deputies then moved to the door and said in kind but firm tones, "Well, Ben, the time has come to go." To

which he promptly replied, "All right, boys, I am ready. It is all fixed." Then he asked, "Do you want me to take off this coat?" "Yes," replied the officers, "and you had better roll your pant's leg up about to your knees, and your socks down over your shoes." Ben tossed the coat across the bed where he had left his Bible, hat and newspaper. He then stepped to the electric chair with a firm and steady tread, without aid from any human hand, and seemingly as much resigned to his fate as though he were retiring for a peaceful period of sleep. He seated himself in the death chair, and four officers busied themselves in strapping him into the chair. Two physicians stepped behind a curtain, and two officers emerged and entered a small door to the left of the chair. They both pushed switches, and a buzzing noise of the twenty-three hundred volts of the electrical current was heard for probably one-half minute.

A physician came shortly with a stethoscope, and Ben was soon pronounced dead. The chaplain announced, "It is all over." And friends descended the stairs that led out into the night, with firmer faith in God, and with assurance that Ben Fowler was ascending the golden stairs to the palace of the Eternal City. Thus, another Kentucky mountaineer, who wholly missed his way in life, became numbered among the very few of those "diamonds from the depths" that are reached and won to our Master and Lord.

For the foregoing we are grateful to the Rev. Chas. F. Pegram who was one of the ministers rendering special service during the last moments of the life of Ben Fowler.

From Mrs. E. Y. Davis, wife of the District Superintendent of the Mexican District, Church of the Nazarene, I have secured the thrilling facts about one Senor Alejandro C. Ochoa, a Mexican prisoner who is rendering great service as a minister in the San Quentin Prison. He was the husband

and father of a nice family; a hard worker and fine citizen when he was sober—but he was addicted to drink. He spent an evening with some friends; and in the social gathering, they began to drink, as he thought, lightly. But somehow the deceptive fluid got the better of him. He awoke the next morning not knowing where he was. He learned that he had been drinking some the night before, but had no idea that it had affected him very seriously. Upon inquiry, he learned that he had killed a man and was being held in prison!

In the weeks before his trial, he became desperate over his plight, and well-nigh lost all hope of his life. Seemingly by chance, he came in possession of a black-backed book, from whence he read sentences that flashed hope into his mind and heart. Very soon, he found himself on his knees crying to God for help and mercy. Eventually, there came to his heart the sweet assurance of sins forgiven, and a peace that enabled him to be happy in the face of all that the future might hold for him.

When the trial was over, he was sentenced to die. He spent the night in prayer, and felt a strange assurance that his life would be spared. Four times, he was brought to the very shadow of the electric chair, but each time God has spared his life. Now, his sentence is changed to that of life-imprisonment. This has been done, so far as his friends know, without any effective aid of human instrumentality. He bears the distinction of having had the time fixed for his execution on four different occasions. Each time he has spent the night in prayer; and each time something happened to stay the hands of his executioners just before the hour arrived for him to go. It seems that God has spared him for special service as pastor of the Mexican prisoners.

He has organized a class of about one hundred men for his Sunday Bible school. He has regular preaching services,

LIBRARY
BETHANY-PENIEL COLLEGE
Bethany, Oklahoma

and has succeeded in winning a number of his fellow prisoners to Jesus Christ.

Through the kindness of Mrs. Davis, I have secured a letter written by Senor Ochoa, in which he tells his own story. Those unaccustomed to the language will find it rather strangely worded because he speaks a foreign language; but I am sure the sincerity and the earnestness of the testimony will be appreciated.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF ALEJANDRO C. OCHOA

(Converted in Prison)

Dear Brother in Chrst:

I wish to acquaint you with the joy I have felt on receiving your letter of the 25th, which comforts me with your good spiritual advice, and I take the same pleasure in answering your letter and complying with your wishes—that of giving my testimony of conversion to honor and to glorify God. Amen.

Dear Ones: I understand that I should not praise myself, but it is necessary to let you know that I was always a good man—of noble heart. I was a good brother, a good husband, a good father, a good son, and well loved by all my friends. I used to gain the good-will of all that knew me, but I never thought of winning the good-will of God. What did I gain by winning the good-will of this world, when my soul was lost and corrupted in darkness? I enjoyed entertainment such as dance parties, trips, and amusements of all kinds, generally. These pleasures ended with liquor—of which I drank excessively, until by means of this liquor, Satan took possession of me. I lied without limit, adulterated, blasphemed, until I arrived at the point of committing one of the darkest sins—murder—for which I was not responsible at the moment, because I was intoxicated. Because of the cursed liquor, I lost my mother, my wife, my four children, my brothers, my friends and my honor. What horror and what disillusion for me! On awakening as if from a dream, I found myself behind the bars of a jail. At a time when the other prisoners slept, I was ready to take my own life. I took some paper from the lavatory and on it I wrote a note to my wife expressing my

disillusion and shame. I took a belt and placed it on my neck: remorse came to my mind, in a moment—I thought to myself—would God pardon these dark sins? And I thought, Christ, the Son of God himself, saintly, pure, and just, and without any fault having been found in Him, was arrested, condemned and crucified and took His sentence meekly as a lamb. I who am a worthless sinner, with more reason shall take the sentence imposed upon me. I shall pay according to my acts. I took the note which I had written to my wife and destroyed it in despair. My tribulations were multiplied. I cried bitterly without finding comfort for my soul. The prisoners saw my worry and tried to comfort me, but I found no comfort—I could not find what my soul yearned for.

The prison library had many books, but I could not find any book that would lighten my heart. A few days later they changed the books in the library and I went to see if there was something that would interest me. My eyes fell upon a book with black cover, on which was written, "Holy Bible." I took it to my cell and truthfully I may say—I would hide it so that the other prisoners would not see it and make fun of me. How blind is the person who does not know God's Word!

On Sunday a few brothers would come to preach the Holy Word. A brother would come to me and say, "Don't fear; no matter how dark your sins may be, they shall be made as white as snow." This would interest and comfort me. I started to read the Holy Word, and I would feel in my heart the cure which I yearned for. It says in Matthew 7:7, 8, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." I would say to myself, "Every-one that asketh receiveth." If I should ask pardon of God would He pardon me? Of course! I would read in Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is

light." My heart would be strengthened by these words, and the more I would read the more comfort I would find. I would read where it says, "I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven because of a sinner who repents than because of ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." I would read enthusiastically and would find rest for my soul. I would read where it says, "They who are well need no doctor. Go then and learn what mercy may be, I seek mercy and not sacrifice, because I have not come to call righteous but sinners to repentance." Joy was in my heart. I turned the pages with eagerness. I would have liked to read the whole Bible at once. I would read in John 3:16 where it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I understood that God had pardoned my sins. Then and there I made a firm and sincere repentance—giving my soul to God. I rested in the faith that if my body died my soul would never do so, because I was in God's hands. I felt His strength in my heart, and enjoyed the great comfort placed in me by means of the Holy Ghost.

The day arrived when I stood before the bars of human justice. I was given the death sentence. They read the sentence: I took it without emotion for I would say to myself, "They shall kill my body but have no more that they can do, because my soul is in God's hands. The next day the press announced: "Ochoa sentenced to death, but took his sentence without emotion." They did not know of the joy and comfort which I enjoyed, put in me by the Holy Ghost. The next day after my sentence my worried wife came to see me. Great was her surprise on seeing me for she thought to find my spirit completely broken; but on the contrary found me as satisfied as if such a thing had never happened to me. I said, "Look here my dear, do not fear, nothing shall happen to me. Brothers and Sisters—the day arrived when I was separated from my mother, my wife, my beloved children, and my brothers.

You may well imagine how painful this was; but glory to God, because greater was the strength and comfort which God granted me. They put me in solitude, but I was not alone, I was accompanied by the Lord's angel. I thought of those holy promises which state: "And all that thou asketh in prayer believing that thou shalt receive." My faith was abundant. I asked God in the name of Christ our Lord that He should not desert me; I asked mercy for me, and for my afflicted wife I asked strength and comfort. I asked that this sentence should never be consummated, always with faith in His holy promises, with a live faith and without doubt. I thank His holy name, that they have all been granted save one—which is this sentence, and I do not doubt that this prayer will also be granted. On the 9th of October, 1931, my first term expired, Thanks to the Lord and Christ our Savior, my case was passed on the Superior Court. I waited for the result with patience and faith. The Supreme Court affirmed the sentence and sentenced me for April 15, 1932. Praise and glory to my merciful God—my sentence was extended until May 26th. On the 16th of May I received a letter from our brother in Christ, Mr. J. M. Nead, 115 N. Wilson St., Pasadena, California. This brother is the one who is working in my behalf with the governor, and he tells me in his letter, "Only God knows the result and our only hope is that our Savior may grant our prayers." I am thankful to His holy name that He has given me life so as to testify to the mercy which He has granted me. On receiving Mr. Nead's letter, I knelt in prayer to the Lord, I asked that He should never permit this sentence to be consummated. I prayed every moment without doubting His holy and faithful words. The 26th day arrived and I was led to the Death Cell. I entered without fear, my heart was greatly strengthened—the comfort of the Holy Ghost was with me. My faith was so great that it seemed God's angel was saying, "Do not fear because God is with you, just keep your faith and do not doubt." I passed

the night of the 26th in this manner and at dawn of the 26th I was already praying and at intervals I would read the Holy Word. Noon arrived and I had received no word, but I did not cease to pray—my faith in God in those Holy Promises was not exhausted and I prayed, "Dear God, do you not listen to my prayers? Do you put death before me so as to try my faith? My faith does not decrease; on the contrary, *it grows!* I do not fear death, death cannot claim victory over me. I trust in your holy and faithful promises and if I die I trust that I shall go with you and that you shall give me eternal life. I trust with patience that God will answer my prayers." If by 4 p. m. I would not receive notice, my hopes were few. About two or three o'clock I sang the praise of God and again prayed, "Dear God, have you deserted me? No this can never happen. You are faithful in your Holy Promises. You tell us, 'And all that thou shalt ask in prayer believing, that thou shalt receive.' I believe it with all my heart and do not doubt it. I ask this in the name of your divine son Christ, our Lord. Have mercy on me and my innocent children—make this sentence to be suspended, and deliver me from this cell." I finished my prayer and sat on a chair. About a quarter of an hour later an officer came and said, "How do you feel Ochoa?" I answered with these words, "I have never felt better in all my life." Then he said smiling, "I have good news, your sentence has been suspended." Praise and glory to my Lord and His divine Son, our Christ! I raised my arms toward the sky, my eyes filled with tears because of the joy I felt in my heart on seeing God's miracle. I gave thanks to my Lord, in spite of the serious steps I have taken. I take great pleasure in telling you of my joy in having been in such great danger and to have been delivered from it by God's mercy, and to testify as to God's power and mercy. How merciful and how loyal to His Holy Promises! I ask all my brothers and sisters in Christ to thank the All-powerful for me, for the mercy which He has had for me to testify for

His praise and glory. Amen. I again ask all my brothers and sisters, that they all sing Hymn No. 46, page 48, "Gran Gozo Hay en mi Alma." That is in "Himnos de Salvacion." I beg that you sing this hymn to the Lord for me. I suppose that you are all acquainted with the fact that my sentence has been extended until the 24th of June, so, my dear brothers and sisters pray for me and let us trust in God's mercy, because He is merciful. May God and His divine Son, Christ our Lord, bless you always.

Yours in Christ,

ALEJANDRO C. OCHOA
Box 50592

THE LAST MARCH OF JOHN STACEY

Through the kind co-operation of my good friend, the Rev. Madison F. Grose, Business Manager of Pasadena College, Pasadena, California, I give you the remarkable story of what the grace of God meant to John Stacey on his last march in Decatur, Illinois, where the Rev. Grose was pastor. In connection with this story, you will be able to see the effect of the power of God unto salvation, by referring to the pictures of John before and after his conversion. Rev. Grose tells the story:

"The memory of the last days of John Stacey, executed for the murder of Herman Rubenstein, will not soon fade from the memory of those who were nearest to him, and who spent the last hours with him in his prison cell.

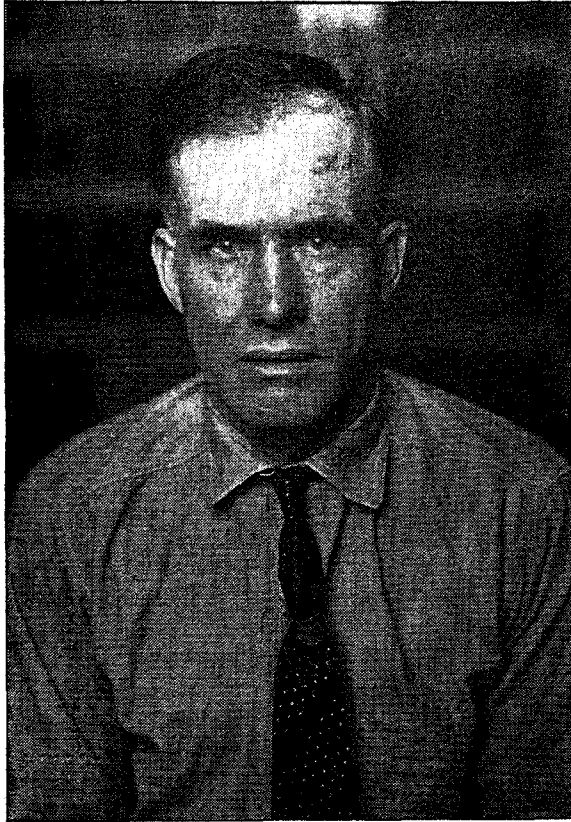
"Perhaps nothing has aroused the people of Macon County, Illinois, in recent years, like the murder of one of Decatur's shoe merchants. Stacey was taken in the very act of the killing, given a speedy trial, and condemned to hang on the 13th day of February, 1925.

"Owing to the kindness of the tender-hearted sheriff, William Underwood, many people were allowed to visit John in his cell. In fact, every reasonable request of the doomed man was granted by the good sheriff. Christian people visited him almost every day, and no effort was spared to arouse John's spiritual nature and prepare him to meet his God.

"Stacey had followed the habits of sin so long that it took him some days, after being put in jail, to get out from under the influence of his evil habits. On the day of the murder he had swallowed the contents of fourteen tins of "canned heat," a preparation of denatured alcohol. Of course, stimulants were denied him in the jail, and his mind was thus allowed slowly to clear itself from their influence. He was given a hot bath



JOHN STACEY BEFORE CONVERSION



JOHN STACEY AFTER CONVERSION

every day, and a wholesome diet of food. These things, together with a good bed and regular habits, soon had their effect on the condemned man, and his better self began to assert itself.

“Once he was in a position to do so, John readily accepted the attentions of those interested in his soul, and he was soon brightly converted. It was noticed very distinctly by all that, notwithstanding his sincerity, he would have despondent spells, and would show an ugliness of spirit at times which brought many remarks from the interested public. Later on he was brought to see his need of more grace. He prayed and consecrated his life, and from that hour there was a vast improvement in his conduct. He no longer made any expression of ill feeling against those around him for their aggressive actions in his conviction. He began to manifest a real Christian love for the sheriff who held him and the judge who had sentenced him, and for those who stood guard at his cell.

“As time wore on, his visitors dropped off to the little band of workers who came from the church to which he had shown his preference.

“Every effort was made to obtain a commuted sentence for him, but all efforts failed, and the final week of John Stacey on earth was at hand. He repeatedly said, when efforts were being made to save his life: ‘I do not believe it is God’s will, and I do not want a thing done contrary to His will. The happiest days of my life have been here in this cell. If freedom were offered me to live my life over again, I would not accept it. It may seem strange to you, but there never has been a time in my life when I did not believe in God, and when the Spirit of God did not strive with me to yield myself to Him. In my worst days, I have feared God and called upon Him many times. There have been times, while beating my way across the country in freight cars and on train tops, that God has talked to me and I have prayed to Him. He has been

good to me. I have had many men killed right by my side, but for some reason God has spared my life. Only the Sunday before I got into this trouble, I went into a mission in Bloomington, Illinois, and the good people tried to get me to come back at night, but sin had such a hold upon me that I would not yield. I am sure that God's hand is in all this. I have had the chance here in this cell to think and pray, with my evil habits broken, and God has run me in here to give me a chance to get ready for heaven. I am a happy man; God has forgiven all my sins, and, while I have to die, I am going to heaven, praise the Lord'."

The evening before his execution, Mr. Grose, Frieda Mauritz, and several of the workers stayed with him until close to midnight, singing and praying. He was very fond of the hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross." He had them change that part of the chorus, "And exchange it some day for a crown," to "And exchange it tomorrow for a crown," joining with them in singing the words.

On the morning of the execution, Friday, February 13, 1925, the courthouse and the streets on the outside were crowded with people. On the inside of the jail several armed guards paced back and forth; several newspaper reporters were present, together with John's pastor, Mr. Grose, Miss Frieda Mauritz, Rev. Roy Smith and several religious workers. The morning was spent in prayer, singing and talking. Occasionally John would ask his pastor how much time he had left, for the set time of the execution was twelve o'clock and the death march was to start to the gallows at 11:45. At half-past eleven o'clock Miss Frieda sang the song that he had requested of her to sing last, entitled, "Just as the Sun Went Down." Being informed that he had just fifteen minutes left, he retired to the privacy of the inner cell, where he knelt during the song. At the close of the song he prayed aloud, followed by his pastor. Coming out, he inquired how much time he had remaining, and being informed he had only two

minutes left, he handed out all of the little trinkets which he had accumulated during his stay in the cell. Several letters, several ties and some flowers constituted all of his belongings. By the time this was attended to, two stout deputies came in and unlocked the door of his cell. John stepped up to them without a tremor, and, with a smile on his face. As the deputies stepped back, Brother Grose, and his assistant, Roy Smith, took John, each in turn, in their arms and kissed him goodby, and the death march started through the jail corridors. As he passed by the other prisoners, he warned them with his favorite expression, "Watch your step, boys; you see what I am coming to."

Arriving at the feet of the stairs leading up on the gallows, he was permitted to stop and given an opportunity to speak, but bowing his head he replied, "I have nothing more to say." Immediately he was led up the steps of the gallows, with the two ministers following close behind. The four corners of the gallows were occupied, two by the sheriff and his deputy, who pressed the trap buttons, and two by the ministers. The two deputies who led him up placed him on the trap, and then adjusted a leather harness to his legs, making them fast, as were his arms. As they finished this, he asked that he might be allowed to pray, which privilege was granted to him. He prayed for the sheriff and the judge, the jury, and the family of the man, whom he had killed while under the influence of liquor. There was a hush in the corridors as he prayed. Seventy-five people had been invited to the execution, including the jury that was to pronounce him dead. Then there were the sheriffs from fifteen surrounding counties, and other officials. As he finished his prayer, he said, "Ready, sir," and the deputies began adjusting the black cap and the noose. They first placed the cap over his head, then placed the noose on his neck, but one of the visiting sheriffs running up the steps stopped them, had them to remove the cap and place the noose on first. As they did this, taking off the cap, it was

noticed by those who stood near that there was a peaceful smile playing around the lips of the condemned man. A moment later, the noose being properly adjusted and the trap fixed, the two buttons were pressed; there was the bang of the trap as it fell, and a dull thud as John's body shot through the hole to the end of the rope. He was cut down in sixteen minutes, having been pronounced dead by two physicians: his body was taken to a hospital, where an X-ray was taken of the neck, showing that the neck had not been broken, but that the tendons had been pushed in.

People who met him when he was first arrested could not recognize in the executed man the same individual. His pictures taken, the one at his first imprisonment, and the other shortly before his death, have little or no resemblance. While the law was enforced, and its demands were met, yet many hundreds of people were led to see in the life of this man that, while God hates sin, He can and does love the sinner, and they have also seen what a marvelous transformation the grace of God will make in a man.

