

*Real Life Stories*  
*The Old Colonel*

He was one of the worse tramps that ever entered the Mission. He was over six feet tall. He was sixty years old but looked a hundred. His dirty gray beard was a foot long and his hair hung a foot down his back. His swollen eyes were blurred and blood-shot. The color of his face showed that he had not washed for weeks, perhaps months.

His ragged old overcoat, probably pulled out of some trash barrel, was fastened with a nail. A musty old jacket and vest completed his wardrobe. His trousers were little more than holes with rags tied around them. His shoes were a collection of things tied with bits of string.

Such was the description of the old derelict who wandered into the Water Street Mission in New York one night in June, as recorded by S. H. Hadley, to whom we are indebted for this story.

But who was this specimen of the devil's cruel power and handiwork? Let Mr. Hadley answer!

I had known him for years. He was commonly known as 'The Old Colonel.' The fact was, he was from one of Ohio's oldest and best families; from a wealthy, prosperous Christian home. After going through college he studied law in the firm of E. M. Stanton, War Secretary under Lincoln. He married and began to practice law. But, alas! in college he began to drink whiskey, and everywhere he went he was a failure.

He joined the army at the outbreak of war, and when mustered out a colonel in an Illinois regiment, he was a confirmed drunkard. He struggled against the deadly habit, but it was useless. Finally, when home, wife and children were gone, he became utterly discouraged and gave up in despair. Then he came to New York under an assumed name. He never went near the Post Office. Ultimately he became a street beggar. For over a quarter of a century he had been a chronic drinker.

It was Sunday when at the time of our story he wandered into the Mission. In the middle of the evening service, he stood up and peering ahead said:

"Mr. Hadley, are you there?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I am here."

"Will you pray for me? I am contrite."

At the invitation he came up with probably twenty others, and prayed away like a man in dead earnest.

When they arose from their knees, he stood up and said:

"Well, I am saved. There is no doubt about it."

At the close of the service he came up to the platform and put his arms around Mr. Hadley's neck, and said: "Brother Hadley, what are you going to give me?"

"Oh, you will get a night's lodging."

"Yes," said he, "that's right, but what else." "I will give you a quarter for your breakfast." "That's right", said he. "I always knew you were a Christian." And with his quarter and ticket for a bed he tottered off. As he left he said: "I'll come every night, brother Hadley."

"Oh don't," said Hadley: "just come occasionally." But the Old Colonel said again: "Yes, brother Hadley, I'll come every night."

He was on hand early the following evening, as he had promised. He came forward again for prayer and prayed again like a good fellow. After they arose from their knees, he stood up and with much emotion said he was saved sure enough this time. He tried to put his arms around Hadley, but this time he was repelled and pointed to the door.

"Do you mean it?" said the old man.

"If you linger much longer, you will see if I mean it!" was the reply.

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Two weeks from that night, Jerry Griffen, a saved drunkard came across the Old Colonel in Battery Park, and told him that Mr. Hadley was praying for him.

"I hastened," Hadley wrote, "to the elevated road and came down to the Mission. There on the back bench sat the Old Colonel.

I got him a beefsteak, some potatoes, bread and butter, and coffee. He ate like a famished animal.

"I got a tub of water, a bar of soap, and plenty of towels, and with the hands that pen these lines, I washed the poor old outcast.

"I threw his rags into the furnace. I dressed him in clean clothes from head to foot.

"I then took him across the street and told them to put the clippers on him. His long hair and beard soon disappeared, but the mustache was left."

He stayed for the meeting that night, but oh how changed! His whole frame trembled with emotion, and tears fell from his eyes as he cried:

"Oh, Lord, if it is not too late, forgive this poor lost sinner!"

For six nights this was repeated, and at the close of the service on Saturday he arose, and with heaven in his face said: "Oh, brother Hadley, I am saved!"

"I believe you," replied Hadley.

"With all my heart I believed that God had received and saved this 'chief of sinners.' "

And so it proved. From that instant the old beggar tramp was changed into a child of God. He fairly loathed drink and all its works. God restored his intellect which was so badly impaired. His youth returned and he became transfigured.

Thousands heard him during the next thirteen years that he labored faithfully at the Mission, and told of the wonderful love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, in that, "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25.

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