

# For Another's Crime



**T**he power of the Gospel to change the human heart and plant in it the spirit of forgiveness is wonderfully exemplified in the life story of an ex-convict known for many years as "Forty-five." Few, perhaps, have had to forgive the degree of injury that this man did. But Jesus said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

At the age of sixteen, Forty-five left his home in Rhode Island and drifted west. One night he came into the city of Tacoma, Washington, in a boxcar, reaching there just when a murder had been committed. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor in the penitentiary.

For eighteen years of that time he suffered all the severity of punishment that is meted out to a desperate criminal. Once, for talking in line, he was placed in a dungeon twenty feet below the ground. The third day that he was there, as he was hanging chained by the wrists, he prayed to God.

There had been one bright spot in his prison life, and that was his friendship with the little daughter of the warden. He had once saved the child from being struck by a revengeful prisoner. From that time on she was always kind to him.

There in the dungeon he prayed that if

## Sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labour-for a crime he didn't commit!

God would let him see this little girl again he would serve Him, and would read the Bible to the prisoners the rest of his life. That very night when the deputy warden came with his allowance of bread and water, there stood the child. She held out her hand and said, "Come out, Forty-five. I have come for you. Papa says you shall work in the hospital."

He worked for three years in the hospital, where he kept his promise to read the Bible to the prisoners. At the end of that time he was discharged from the prison nearly wrecked in body and mind-homeless, friendless, and nameless.

He took the train for Portland. For four days he wandered about looking for work, with nothing to eat nor a place to sleep except the lumber piles. At last he started down to the Burnside Bridge to throw himself into the river. The bridge keeper pulled him down from the railing and said, "You cannot do that." As he walked away he saw the large lighted sign of the Apostolic Faith church.

An unseen power seemed to compel him to attend a Gospel service there. At the close of the meeting Forty-five went to the altar, prayed, and God saved him.

About two years later, as he was testifying during a service of his life and conversion, a man sat listening in the back of the church with tears flowing down his cheeks. He left his seat and ran down the stairs. A few days later someone who had talked with the stranger told Forty-five that this stranger knew something about him. Eager to learn something about his people, he obtained a description of the man and found he had gone to San Francisco, California.

Forty-five followed the stranger there, and learned that he was in a hospital, dying of tuberculosis. So great was his desire to talk to the man that Forty-five went to the hospital superintendent and asked for work. When asked where he had been employed previously, he breathed a prayer to God and told his story. The superintendent wept as he listened, and told him to report for duty that night.

Almost a month later he had the opportunity to converse with the stranger. One night, the man asked him to read the Bible to him. Forty-five read to him the story of the Prodigal Son. While talking, the man put his arm

around the ex-convict and said, "Can you forgive me for the wrong I have done you?" The ex-convict replied, "You have done me no wrong. Can you tell me about my mother?" The man answered, "I know nothing about your people, but I am the man who committed the crime for which you were sent to the penitentiary." He said, "I want you to forgive me for all those years that you spent behind the prison walls."

Here was the real murderer for whose crime Forty-five had spent twenty-one long years in the prison! And he was asking Forty-five to forgive him!

The thoughts of the ex-convict went back to the long years he had spent in the prison. He thought of the ball and chain he had carried. He thought of the thirty lashes he had received at the whipping post, and of the time he was shot in the leg, and of the weeks spent in the dungeon. He felt he was not prepared to forgive from his heart. He left the sick man and went into a little room alone. Kneeling down on the concrete floor, he prayed. For nearly three hours he wrestled with God for a real spirit of forgiveness. At last a Voice said, "Forgive him for My sake."

He went back and took the man in his arms and said, "I forgive you all the injuries you have done me, but you will also have to ask God to forgive you."

The man began to say, over and over, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." And God had mercy and saved him. Three days later the man died.

That criminal's hands were stained with blood, but God had forgiven him. And Forty-five, whom he had caused to suffer so terribly, also had forgiven the wrong, from the bottom of his heart.

Many years have passed since then. Forty-five, too, has gone on to be with the Lord. In eternity, with a new name - and no longer just a number - he is walking the streets of gold. There he and the man in whose stead he suffered those many long years are praising God that their sins were washed away by the Blood of the Lamb.

The Lord Jesus, who taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," gives every man power to forgive.

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