

Chapter 1

“And I John Saw”

His heart was always stirred a little when he went to meeting, particularly when a revival was being conducted, and the preachers from hither and yon exhausted their oratory to frighten and to drag the people by hook or by crook up to the altar and into the fold.

John Ed saw his erstwhile confederates in all sorts of youthful depredations capitulate one by one and sidle sheepishly toward the mourner’s bench. Then such a hullabaloo of rejoicing and praying and shouting would ensue that John Ed caught himself almost smiling at the incongruity of this mode of coming to God. But he knew of no other way, so he sat still and listened and looked, never joining the participants.

John Ed’s father had died when he was but a little fellow, and he had early learned that life was not a bed of roses. Those were the days back in the 70’s, when no warm, comfortable, ready-made knitwear was readily available to make the bitter cold winters more bearable, and no one seemed to have time to make the homemade kind for him. The big fireplace in the living room toasted one’s face, but the corners of the room were frigid. Deep feather beds and heavy comforters pieced from woolens made the icy bedrooms livable.

John Ed’s job from the age of nine had been to build the fires. After fifty-five years, he still remembers his reluctance to leave his warm nest in the feather bed, slip into cold clothes in a bleak room, and break kindling with cold, stiff fingers. The fire in the cookstove, then the one in the fireplace, had to be laid and lighted. He could see his breath a half hour later on cold mornings.

School was not graded in those days. There was Webster’s blue spelling book, which had to be committed practically to memory. It made no difference if one didn’t know what “asperity” meant, or how it could be used in a sentence, he

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must be able to spell it. Then a pupil was in the first reader, or the second, or the third. In some schools, one got into reading history after the sixth reader. And pupils who were reading in history were to be looked up to as having attained quite high scholastic standards.

Arithmetic was delved into; and writing with many a flourish was considered quite the thing.

But little John Ed, trotting to school, swinging his lunch in a battered tin pail, was already tired out; for, besides his early chores, he always had his stint of wood to chop after breakfast. Then his mother would hand him his lunch pail containing the invariable sandwich made of a soda biscuit and a slice of bacon, a piece of pie, and a hard little ill-favored apple. How surprised he would have been if he could have seen the lunches children carry now! Cottage cheese sandwiches with head lettuce and mayonnaise. Date-nut sandwiches. Salad. Tangerines, oranges, bananas. Hot cocoa in a thermos bottle. Wafers and cookies that melt in the mouth.

It was perhaps that long walk to school after perspiring from chopping wood that gave John Ed such heavy colds. That is why he had lobar pneumonia and pleurisy seven winters in succession; why he never mastered Webster's blue-backed speller; and why he never did get to read history. That indifference with regard to religion persisted too. Even when pneumonia carried him down near - very near - to the dark river, and his mother pleaded with him, he was stubborn and hardhearted.

"Johnnie, make your peace with God! Oh, do!"

"No, ma. No! No! What d' I care? What d' I care?" And he would turn his weary face to the wall; his heart was hard as stone. The gentle supplications of his mother were of no avail.

Yet John Ed lived. And forty years later, he often asserted positively, "The good Lord raised me up! He knew I wasn't ready to die!"

At some revival meetings held in his early manhood, he made a little agreement with God. Why he did it he never knew. He was coming home from meeting one frosty winter

night. The heavens seemed to be pointing starry fingers accusingly at him. Quite suddenly he spoke out loud. The sound of his voice startled him. "I'll be a Christian, Lord, when I'm twenty-five. Then I'll change my way of living, and join the church," he said.

But for the present he went on doing his own ways. He could and did swear terrible oaths. A mashed thumb, a balky mule, a sticking window, a kicking cow, all called forth a hideous volley of terrible curses. Even people who were not Christians shuddered a little and turned away when they heard them. Then he was no stranger to the "cup that cheers." He was always on hand when a new keg was opened, and drank heavily. The stars looked down on him many and many a night as he took his unsteady way home, loose-lipped and foolish.

Nor was that the only shackle with which the devil strove to bind him. John Ed carried a little flat sack in his hip pocket, to which he resorted at intervals. He would open it, and bring forth a wisp of pungent brown leaves, and put it in his mouth. As a result, his saliva was always dark brown. His teeth were stained, and his expectoration, liquid and copious. The habit of chewing tobacco was strong. It held him tight in its grasp.

He was a slave to the pipe also. He could not rest or relax unless he was puffing and blowing, and surrounded by pillars of smoke. Verily, he was in the toils of the devil himself, and he knew it not.

There must have been a streak of Viking or the blood of nomad in John Ed, for he started out early to see the country. He wandered into the wheat fields of the Dakotas, the corn lands of Illinois and Missouri. It seemed he was searching, searching for something he knew not what, and could not find it.

There came a time when he was "proving up" a little homestead in the mountains of Colorado. He possessed a tight little cabin, a grubstake, and a few traps. John Ed had just turned twenty-five. He had long ago forgotten a strange promise he had made.

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Suddenly, one day, it seemed as if a voice were speaking to him: "Your promise to Me, John Ed. Have you forgotten?"

Instantly he answered. "No. No. Not now, Lord. Why, I haven't got time now! Wait a while."

The Pleader turned away. It seemed as if a light had gone out. John Ed went on, living on his little homestead winters and working in silver mines or on ranches or farms in the summer. He was a faithful and thorough worker, and was much sought after.

He had a close call one day when he was lassoing calves. He lassoed two young calves at once out on the range. Of course, they were frightened out of their wits, and frantic to be rid of the rope, so they started to run as hard as they could go. By some strange, dreadful quirk of circumstances the end of the rope had lashed out and tied itself around John Ed's neck. The calves, streaking across the plain, would have choked him to death in a few minutes if he hadn't held the rope tightly with his hands, and followed the calves with giant strides of ten or twelve feet at a jump. When they slowed down, winded, a few minutes later, he was indeed glad to remove the constricting rope.

Again John Ed's life was spared.

Five years slowly passed by. It was in February of the year 1902. John Ed was snugly established in his cabin in the hills. The snow was falling softly, and the whole world was a miracle of white velvet and lacy, frosty fretwork. One could almost feel the silence. But John Ed did not mind. There was something about the dimensions of the world of quietness that satisfied his soul.

Night had drawn her curtains, and the darkness was but an hour old when a knock sounded at his door. Callers were few and welcome to his lonely cabin. John quickly opened the door.

There stood a man, knee-deep in snow, smiling uncertainly. "Good evening, sir. My name is McAllister. I wonder if I may spend the night with you. It is snowing so hard I am afraid I shall lose my way if I try to go on to Hygiene."

John Ed smiled broadly, and flung the door open wide. "Come in, stranger!" he cried. "And welcome!"

They talked on generalities for a while. Then, "What might your business be, stranger?" John Ed asked.

"I sell books - religious books," was the answer.

"Oh!" John Ed was definitely not interested.

The man said nothing further about his business, but conversed pleasantly on various subjects until they both agreed that it was time to go to bed.

John Ed went about the cabin, fixing things up for the night, and when he got back to the fireside, he noted with surprise that Mr. McAllister had gotten a Bible from his satchel, and was reading quietly. It was such an odd thing for a man to do that John Ed was dumfounded. He had met men of every ilk, he thought - men who read blood-and-thunder novels, men who could not read, men who reveled in obscene pictures, men who gloried in a filthy joke; this was his first experience with a man who would voluntarily read and seem to enjoy the Bible! John Ed didn't say a word, but gratefully crawled in between the blankets. He noted also that the stranger knelt quietly in prayer at the bedside. That, too, was odd.

It snowed hard all the next day, and the visitor had to stay lest he be trapped in the deep snow and lose his life.

The young homesteader was really glad of company, so he outdid himself to entertain his guest. There were never bigger or fluffier biscuits; tenderer, richer pancakes covered with hot sugar syrup; appetizing stew; doughnuts sprinkled with sugar.

Of course, it was inevitable that the subject of religion should come up, and John Ed himself broached it.

"You're a religious man, McAllister. I'm not. Tell me, why is it that professed Christians are so inconsistent. They will go to church, spit out their tobacco at the door, and go in and take part in the service."

McAllister's eyes twinkled a little.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "I cannot tell you why some people do not do the right thing. I do not use tobacco in any form. It is such a dirty, useless, expensive habit. And the Bible says that

some day there will come a time when God will say to such as do evil, 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.' I tell you, I don't want any filthy habits clinging to me when He says that!"

John Ed subsided into silence. As he rocked back and forth in his old rocking chair, he could hear the crackle of the tobacco paper in his hip pocket. He took his pipe from his mouth, and regarded it for a long moment. It was a meerschaum. The bowl of it held a tiny glowing ash, from which a thin spiral of smoke ascended.

With a sudden determination, he arose and threw it hard against the stone hearth of the fireplace, where it broke into fragments. The vile odors it had been emitting in the room were now going out of the cavernous chimney to mingle with the feathery snowflakes.

"That's the last tobacco I'll ever use!" John Ed said simply. "I didn't know I was filthy." Then silently he prayed his first prayer: "Lord, help me to give up this thing." The prayer was instantly answered; never again in his life did he have a hunger for tobacco, though he had used it for years.

There was a curious light in the eyes of the colporteur as he observed this act. Then he did a most diplomatic thing. He opened his Bible and began to read. His voice was soft and pleasing. John Ed listened, veering between amazement and profound interest. McAllister read the second chapter of Daniel, and explained the story of the kingdoms of earth as revealed through Daniel to a heathen king. He read the Ten Commandments; then the three angels' messages, and explained them in such a lucid manner that there was no room for doubt. John Ed did not miss his tobacco during the three days the colporteur stayed with him. There was too much to hear, too much to learn. Then the colporteur, when he went away, forgot (?) and left his Bible with the young homesteader.

John Ed seized it joyously when he found it on coming in from inspecting his traps. "Now, I am going to find that part that tells about the Ten Commandments," he said to himself.

He went to work to hunt for it. He searched all the first day, all the second, all the third. Along toward night he found it

in Exodus 20. Then he wrote the chapter down carefully, and put in a bookmark to keep the place. Besides, he memorized the Ten Commandments.

It took him three more days to find the three angels' messages. As soon as he found them, he memorized them carefully, word for word.

He had a great time with the Old Book up there in the hills, isolated by snow and storm and blizzard. The Holy Spirit was speaking to his heart.

It was about this time that conviction and contrition led him to pray his second prayer, and that was in regard to his profanity, also a habit of years' standing.

"Now, Lord, help me to quit using bad language," he prayed. "I want to quit, but I can't seem to do it by myself."

Instant help came. An oath never again sullied his lips.

John Ed had learned a great deal about God's requirements by the time he went down to the ranch in the early summer. He had learned of the seventh-day Sabbath, of clean and unclean foods, and of certain striking signs of the times that dovetail with prophetic utterances. He had left off eating unclean food, swearing, smoking, chewing, and drinking. His mind constantly dwelt upon the marvels of God's word. His attitude was that of Saul of Tarsus: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

It wasn't surprising that the colporteur, McAllister, should look him up. It was a sweet May day, and John Ed was getting ready to plow corn when he saw the man approaching.

"How do you do, Mr. Lee. I just thought I'd come and see what you are doing about what we talked of last winter at your cabin. How are you getting along? Have you ever smoked again?"

"No, not once!" asserted John Ed proudly. "The taste for tobacco was completely taken away from me when I prayed."

"Is that so! Well, now what are you going to do about the use of unclean foods - swine's flesh, for instance? That is strictly forbidden in God's word, you know."

John Ed laughed easily.

“Mr. McAllister, I quit that right after you were up there with me on the mountain. My bacon, and my coffee too, went up in smoke just as my tobacco did.”

The colporteur’s mouth dropped open in amazement. “Yes, and I believe the Lord is coming soon just as you do,” continued John Ed. “I believe in the third angel’s message.”

“The Sabbath?” breathed McAllister. “Have you - have you learned that too? Do you keep the Sabbath of the Lord?”

The joyous look died out of John Ed’s face. He dropped his eyes.

“I believe it, yes, I believe it; but I haven’t taken that step yet. It seems so strange to keep Saturday for Sunday!”

A new zeal leaped into McAllister’s face. “Why, man,” he cried, “it is the Sabbath of the Lord! Peter kept it. Paul kept it. The whole Christian church kept the Sabbath till they sold themselves to paganism, Mr. Lee.” The man looked earnestly into John Ed’s eyes. Then he said solemnly: “It is a life-and-death matter, my friend! It is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.”

John Ed gazed at him. “Why, I believe it is!” he said slowly.

The colporteur went on his way, and John Ed plowed corn; but the good seed that had been sown in his heart sprang up, and prepared to bear fruit.

People who belonged to the Longmont, Colorado, church noticed a stranger in their midst in May, 1902. Tall and spare, he sat listening eagerly to everything that was said. Friendly worshippers, shaking his hand at the close of the service, found out that his name was Lee, and that he was working on George Myer’s ranch. No, he was not a member. Just interested. And they were especially kind to him.

The next week McAllister came around again. John Ed met him in the lane, his eyes fairly ablaze with joy.

“Guess what I did last Saturday, McAllister!” he said.

“Have no idea, Lee,” he replied.

“I went to church over in Longmont.”

The colporteur fairly clapped his hands for joy. Then he grasped Lee's hands and said fervently, while tears stood in his eyes, "Praise be to the Lord!"

About three weeks later, Pastor Colcord led John Ed down into the waters of the St. Veraine Creek, and there buried him in baptism. No one was happier that day than was Colporteur McAllister; verily, there is no joy so deep as that of saving a soul.

"And now," spoke John Ed fervently, "I want to learn something."

"What d'ye mean?" asked an interested listener.

"Well, I had pneumonia seven times when I was a child. I didn't get beyond the fifth grade. I'm going to go to school."

So with a saw and a hammer and nails and some clean new pine boards John Ed built himself a house on a wagon bed. At the far end was a neat little cupboard for his plates and cups, pans and books. A clothespress was built in beside it. Then a tiny cookstove with four lids and an oven stood ready to warm him and to cook his food. A cot, a tiny table, a lamp, and a chair completed the furnishings. This was his home while he attended the Hygiene church school.

He entered the sixth grade, and the children forgot that he was a grown man. He raced and played at recess, taking his turn at "it" in the games or pelting the delighted children with snowballs in the winter.

He fairly gobbled up the multiplication table, geography, nature, and Bible - but not English grammar.

"Name a noun, John Ed."

"A what?"

"A noun."

"What's that?"

"Why, a name word. You know it's in our lesson."

"Oh! Let's see. A name word? Uh, uh, uh, I give up! What's the answer?"

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All the rules of grammar eluded him. But that did not prevent him from becoming an excellent colporteur.

All over the Grand Valley of Colorado he left copies of "Heralds of the Morning" and "Patriarchs and Prophets." It was then that he learned the real value of prayer.

"Don't go to that next house, young man," a farmer's wife advised him. She had just given him an order and a warm, filling dinner. Replete and happy, he was preparing to leave.

"Why so?" he asked pleasantly.

"He's an infidel. He hates Christians, and curses Christian workers. You'll just save yourself an unpleasant experience if you skip that place."

"Thank you kindly for telling me; but I never skip any place. This is God's work. That man is God's child; I must do what I can to save him."

The woman looked skeptical.

"It will do no good," she said.

Before John Ed reached the next farm, he turned in at a little grove, and asked God to go with him and to put the right words in his mouth.

The day was perfect. The colporteur felt strangely uplifted as he emerged from his little tryst with God to go forth to do His bidding.

Before he got to the big, rambling white farmhouse, one of those unaccountable summer showers came up. He took his raincoat out of his grip and donned it hastily. The rain was coming down in torrents. He could see men running to the house from the harvest field, dripping wet.

Who sent that rain?

John Ed thinks God did, for his "infidel" had scuttled to the house to get out of the downpour. And he was there when John Ed came up with his prospectus; there was nothing to do but listen to a canvass on "Patriarchs and Prophets."

The man said little while the exhibition was going on. He looked and listened quietly. He took the order book in the end, and signed his name without a murmur.

"Yes, I'll take one," he said good-naturedly. "I'd like to study up on those old fellers."

"You'll never deliver it!" declared an old lady in the next house when she learned that the "infidel" had ordered a book.

"Yes, I think I shall," replied the colporteur quietly.

And he did. He was met at the door with the money and the words: "Good! Good! Pop's awful anxious to get that book."

Later John Ed went canvassing for that grand old book "The Great Controversy" in the Big Bend country in the state of Washington. And he left hundreds of those truth-filled books in the homes in that state.

He came to a house one day that he himself almost passed by. It was really a hut - low, squalid, and miserable. It was set on the side of the road, and the door was open. When he glanced in, he saw that the air was blue with tobacco smoke, and four men were sitting at a ramshackle table, playing cards. "Regular tough customers!" he thought. "Be just a waste of time going in there. Like as not I'd get cursed for interfering."

But while he was thus ruminating, a thought flashed through his mind: "They are lost sheep! If anyone needs a comforting word, they do." And John Ed walked in.

The men laid their cards down, and listened courteously while he explained the book. Interest flickered in their eyes. He took three orders for "The Great Controversy" from this one exhibition!

Later in the fall he met one of the young men in town. "Oh, you're the man who sold me the book!" was the greeting.

"Yes, I remember," said John Ed; "how are you?"

"Just fine. But say! That book! It's the best book I ever read! I wish everyone had a book like that!"

We've said before that John Ed was a wanderer. After canvassing for a while, he went to Alaska with the idea of working in the gold mines. But he didn't ever work in them, for the men there were then working seven days a week. He

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couldn't do that; for God says: "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath."

So John Ed became a colporteur again. He canvassed in the city of Juneau, and worked on fishing boats. He took up a homestead on Admiralty Island, built him a tight little cabin, got a grubstake, and prepared to spend the winter. He saw just seven persons that winter. But he was not lonely. He had his Bible (which he read through twice), "Early Writings," "The Great Controversy," and "Patriarchs and Prophets." He read and cooked and split wood and kept warm that winter.

One of his visitors was a young Indian, who was out deer hunting. He walked in stolidly, and sat down without any word or ceremony. Though the temperature was away below zero, around his head he had only a filthy red rag.

John Ed was frying doughnuts, and he delighted the heart of the Indian by presenting him with two of the big sugary confections. The Indian's eyes grew big and his teeth flashed in a slow grin. He went off down the beach, his jaws working rhythmically and appreciatively.

The years have wrought changes in John Ed. They have written their autograph on his face. His hair has turned gray. His hands are rough and work-worn. But his eyes are keen. He has read the Bible from cover to cover twenty-nine times, besides his daily topical study.

According to the scholastic records of the schools, he has barely passed the sixth grade; but according to the records of heaven, he has learned the science of salvation.

His greatest hope is that someday he may have a grand and glorious graduation from the bitter school of life into the glorious "University of the Hereafter."