

Communicated.

PROSPECT HILL,
CASWELL COUNTY, N. C.,
April 28th, 1874.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Zion:—

It has been my intention for some time to offer to the public my experience in religion, if it be religion—though in so much darkness and gloom I fear I am a stranger to that blessedness: and feeling my incompetency to edify I hope you will bear with my infirmity, and I will try to abbreviate as much as possible.

From my youth up to my twenty-second year in life I was a gay, giddy and thoughtless girl—company, fashion and the praise of the world were my glory; thoughts of death and eternity rarely ever interrupted my mind. I went to preaching often, but like many of the present day—to see and be seen. I flatter myself to say I was kind-hearted and unassuming, ready to do my friends any favor that was in my power, never could bear deceit and hypocrisy in anything, particularly in religion, and it was never my design to wear any cloak of divine things. I felt a partiality for the Methodist doctrine, their plan of salvation appeared most reasonable and easy to me, besides I received my education in a Methodist school to which I was much attached, and my teacher was a minister of that faith, whose piety I never doubted, and through all my life have been surrounded with Arminian influences. I have often attended their revivals, and, on many occasions, during the exercises, felt deeply impressed, but like the morning mist it soon passed away, and I returned to my sin again, and rolled it as a sweet morsel under my tongue.

During the year 1862, I became very much troubled. I don't know that there was any special instrumentality—the pleasure that I once delighted in became burdensome to me, I would strive to drive it off in various ways, but all in vain, and was always fearful that some one would discover the melancholy that was brooding over my spirit, I felt forsaken and uncared for by all my relatives and friends, and would often wonder to myself why it was so. I could bear others speaking of their anxieties and troubles of the war, but I did not feel it as they expressed themselves, although I had a brother, relatives and friends engaged in the struggle. I thought surely that I had a worse heart than anybody else, yet there was a depression in my feelings and my heart was burdened with a secret trouble. I felt a keen sense of my unworthiness, and that I had been a great sinner, and truly desired religion, but how to obtain it I was at a loss. My constant prayer was, Lord convict my heart of sin and show me what to do. I felt willing to renounce all worldliness to obtain the blessing for the preparation for death was of more importance to me than

all the charms of the world, but my faith was hedged and bounded. I knew not how to pursue. I would try to read the Bible, but it seemed so dark and mysterious that I could not understand it, and I would lay it aside, thinking that a convicted soul would love to read the Bible, and it would give them some comfort. I yearned for consolation but it was nowhere to be found. If I could have felt that God had convicted me I would have had some hope of deliverance, but I could not believe it.

I attended a Missionary Baptist revival and felt very much concerned under the exhortations; in conclusion, the minister invited those who wished the prayers of the church to make it known by kneeling. I felt that I wished the prayers of Christians, and I immediately knelt, and there came such a hardness in my heart I could not shed a tear, and instead of trying to pray myself, I thought I had committed a sin in kneeling. I was trying to impress the congregation that I was seeking religion when it was false, and I felt when I arose to my seat, if God would forgive me for that deception I never would kneel in public again.

Soon my troubles returned with more force than ever. There was to commence another revival, Methodist, the next Sabbath. I went and heard a sermon from my old school teacher, which affected me very much, and I was made willing that day to go anywhere or do anything that would afford me any relief. I went back next day feeling very much hardened, so much so, that I could not support it, and at the first invitation for mourners I arose deliberately and knelt at the altar. Many others followed and they said many were happily converted, but I was too much concerned about my own condition to know or care for anything that was going on. They prayed and talked to me a good deal, but I felt that it was doing me no good. I tried to pray unceasingly myself, but it seemed that my petitions did not reach the throne of grace. They would tell me to look and believe—that I would receive the blessing, that it would certainly come, and to give my heart to God. I thought that it was all an impossibility, for I was trying to do all that I could, and concluded that mine was a different case from all others. I longed for some to tell me their feelings when they were mourners, but I received that comfort from none. Their shouting and exhortations did not excite me. I was immoveable, determined never to trifle with such a pure thing as I thought religion ought to be. I went every day until Thursday, went to the altar every invitation and remained 'till dismissal, but my heart became hardened. I felt that I was in the wrong place. I desired to be alone where I could pour out my heart in secret to him who heareth the penitent's prayer. I felt compelled to

leave them. I went home feeling worse than before—all my efforts had proved unavailing. I knew not what to do, but still my prayer was like the poor publican who smote upon his breast and said: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I felt that I had done all that I could, that mine was a peculiar and helpless case and if I was saved it would be the goodness and mercy of God. Saturday night after I retired to rest there came over me a peaceful comfort which I could not account for, yet did not take it for religion. I had spent many sleepless nights before, but that night I slept sweetly. When I awoke next morning my burden was gone, everything was new; as I walked in the house my steps were easy and light, the birds sang a new song. I felt joyful and happy but said nothing to any one. There seemed to spring up a love for the Primitive Baptists, and I felt like I wanted to hear one preach. There was a section meeting at Ebenezer, ten miles from home. I asked my mother if she would go with me there—she consented. I never enjoyed a ride better, all nature seemed to be enrobed in beauty and loveliness. I had been there often in my childhood (living near there then) to preaching and singing schools, but the place appeared new, and altogether changed. Elder David Moore preached. I thought I never had heard a sermon before. I had seriously objected to the Baptists telling their experiences, but it was just the thing I wanted to hear—it was music to my ears; and in telling his own I thought that he expressed my feelings better than I could have done myself. All the way home I was perfectly happy, no thoughts of the world interrupted my mind, all was love, joy and peace—ready to acknowledge I had been brought by ways I knew not, and in paths I had not seen. I loved God and all his creation, and I beheld as it were, with my natural eyes, Jesus on the cross atoning for my sins; I saw his purity, goodness and love in forgiving such a wretched sinner as I had been, and thought surely I would never sin against such a good Being again. My once sinful heart was changed into a heart of love, and I was filled with such a rapture of delight I could not refrain from telling my mother of it. But oh, too soon to repent it! Soon I began to have doubts and fears that I had missed the substance and caught the shadow. I began to read the Bible which was before so dark and mysterious, I found it to be plain and easy to my understanding, and every word of it seemed a confirmation of the Bible doctrine. I had never noticed before that "Satan was transformed into an angel of light," 2nd Cor. 11: 14. Here I began to pause, thinking perhaps Satan had given me that light. Clouds then seemed to be hovering over me, which caused me much anxiety. I knew that it was not such as

God would have nor such as he deserves, I concluded if I ever joined the church that it must be the Missionary Baptists, they were more popular, that their preachers were educated and it would be a disadvantage to me to join the Old Baptists, although what I had experienced and read had taught me that they were right. I knew that such thoughts were wicked, and was convinced that I would be punished for it; worldly desires and pursuits crowded my mind so fast I lost sight of faith. My corruptions commenced rising like mountains and it seemed that every sin that I had committed in my life came rushing in my mind and united in my heart. Alas, I fell—I fell as it were from earth into the jaws of hell—inexpressible misery. I was like the dove that Noah sent out from the Ark, I felt no rest for the soles of my feet, I ceased to pray, I felt that I had abused the goodness of God, that I had played the hypocrite and betrayed myself to the world. I felt unworthy to walk upon the earth, unworthy to eat the bread the earth brought forth, unworthy alas! to fall at the feet of Jesus and ask forgiveness; shut out from earth and from heaven; doomed to everlasting punishment—wretched and undone, I saw no way of escape. I hated my existence and wanted to hide myself from all of God's creation. Sad and alone I would roam the fields and woods, seeking relief but it was nowhere to be found. I could see the goodness of God in everything: his purity, wisdom and righteousness, and to feel how polluted and corrupt my heart was, it seemed more than I could bear, and thought surely my heart would burst, and oftimes have pressed my hand there to support the burden—it was so heavy I thought it impossible to carry it. I cannot better describe my heart than a solid rock impenetrable and immoveable, I felt no softness nor sympathy for anything. No earthly ties nor affections aroused me from my lethargy. My brother was killed in the last battle fought at Petersburg; when the news reached us I could see my mother and sister weeping, but not a dart of sorrow could I feel, wretched and miserable to know that my only brother, the only protector I had on earth was gone never to return, and I could not shed a tear of regret for him. How guilty and condemned I stood before God, and how despised and abhorred by the world—it even makes me shudder to think of it now. I felt meaner than anybody living or that God had ever created—and I must receive my portion in the lowest pit in hell. I was satisfied that I had committed the unpardonable sin, for I had never heard nor read of any one being in such a condition as I was. I was encompassed with devils and had no power to resist them, nor hope of deliverance. I would look back on the past to the time that I received so much comfort—it