

WILLIAMSTON, N. C., May 1875.

Elder P. D. Gold, Dear Brother  
in Christ:—

It has become my fortune to get hold of some of your valuable paper (ZION'S LANDMARKS,) through the hands of one of my old neighbors, who is an Old Baptist, and I hope he is an old servant of God also, for he is an earnest contender for the truth, as well as all the rest of that old sect which is everywhere spoken against by the religious world. And, since I have read the different pieces written by our beloved brethren and sisters, and viewing their sore trials and hard difficulties which they have had to contend with in this cold-hearted and sin-disordered world—it makes me feel that it is my indispensable duty which I owe to you and my God to write you a short sketch of my travail from nature's night to the marvelous light of God's dear Son; but, when I view my inability, and know that it will be so disconnected, it is more than a reasonable task for me to convey to a world of people: but we are commanded to let our light so shine before the world that sinners may see our good works, and turn and glorify our Father which is in heaven.—So I am made to go to my work without making any excuse, only to ask God to direct my mind so that what I say or write may be in compliance with God's holy will, and to a true christian experience; but, before I enter on the task I will say, that I am a very illiterate man—I have only enough education to enable me to write a little.

I hope that the proper spirit is bearing witness with me, that I have passed from death unto life.

I was born February 17th, 1839, in Martin County, N. C. My parents both belonged to the Primitive Baptist order, but by some means my father was cut off from the privileges of the Church about the time the split took place, which was before my recollection: but my dear old mother remains unshaken to this day and is one among the oldest Baptists that I know of. My father was killed by the limb of a tree falling on him in the year 1850, which left my mother with four small children to mourn our sad loss. Oh my dear brethren, this was the beginning of trouble with us, for we were, as it might be said—poor folks—it took nearly all that father left to pay his debts. But, the blessed Lord was with my mother, and, if there ever was a poor widow blessed by the hand of the Lord, she was. It appeared to me that her prayers were all answered, and all her need was seen by all that were able to help her. But she did not forsake her little Church. One year after the death of my father she was able to buy a horse—and, as I was her oldest son, I went with her almost everywhere she went (I was then about thirteen years old.) I had one sister older than myself, and two younger brothers—but my sister and her playmates visited the Free Will and Methodist Churches. So, some Sabbaths I was at the Old Baptist Church, another at the Methodist Church, and another at the Free Will Baptist Church, (now called Christ's Disci-

ples). At that time I cared but little about preaching, but always had manners enough to behave myself when I went to Church.

In '55 the Methodists had a great revival, and on Monday my mother and sister went to see what they were doing. When they returned they said the Methodists were having such times it made me feel like I wanted to go; and so I said to my mother, that probably I could get religion too as they had so much of it at Mt Zion. I went and when I got there they were singing

"Father, I stretch my hands to thee,  
No other help I know:  
If Thou withdraw Thyself from me:  
Ah, whither shall I go?"

I looked around and saw many who looked like they were deeply interested about the welfare of their souls. Soon after this preaching commenced and soon they began to call for mourners when the people started from all quarters of the house, and among them was my sweet heart.—Right here I will tell you, dear brethren, was the first time I ever had an impression made on my mind about the welfare of my soul, and they prayed and cried and shouted so loud that there were but few left on their seats—but among them I was one.—They tried hard on me, but my feelings at that time I shall never be able to express. After preaching I went home and it seemed that my heart would break, and for two or three days I could not bear to hear preaching mentioned but that it would cause me to burst into tears of grief. From that time I began to pray, and for two years I prayed regularly. By some means my sister discovered that I did something every night before I retired. One night she watched me, and told some of the girls in the neighborhood about it, and they would laugh at me and call me a preacher. I soon got tired of being laughed at, so I stopped praying and soon began to be the head man in the ball room, and once in a while I could be heard to use an oath. I went on until March '57, when the Disciples of Christ first changed their names from "Free-will Baptists" to "Christian Baptists," and then to *Christ's Disciples*—and they started a new Evangelist and in March they held a protracted meeting and had a great ingathering, and among them I was one, and I held on about six months, a very good fellow, when I got married and moved in a new neighborhood and visited one of my brothers' in-law who was a very profane swearer: he had a pack of cards, and he and his wife and I and my wife all took a game. One night one of the members caught us. I was arraigned before the Church and was turned out—then I commenced cursing again.

In '58 I went to overseeing, and thought when I did the worst I could it pleased my employer the best. I became so wicked and cruel that I came very near killing a servant. That caused me and my employer to fall out. I was then confined to a bed of affliction and thought I would surely die. I began to pray and make promises to God that if he would raise me up one more time I

would live a better life than I had ever lived before. But, as soon as I began to recover, I found myself just what I was before. Sometimes I was a praying man and sometimes a cursing man. In the latter part of '59 I thought I would become a good man again, for I thought it was in my power to work myself in the power of God just when I pleased. I thought if I did an evil deed and would then pray all would be right. In '58 my sister married a Disciple preacher. In '60 he told me to offer myself again that the Church would receive me—I offered and was received again.

In '61 the war began. I volunteered and went off to fight (as the leading men said) in the defense of my country, and, as soon as I got off in the army, I was everything that any one could be but a good man. I was in Virginia all the time during soldiering, and soon the time of hard fighting came on and many of my comrades were falling on every side. It caused me to say, Behold, what manner of persons ought we to be! In '63, I think, was the time of the Seven Days Fight. It was then I began to feel the need of a Savior.—Before I thought I could save myself but now I found that I was mistaken, for I read in the scriptures "Cursed is man that trusteth in man or maketh flesh his arm: about this time I would often cry out, Lord, have mercy on us—and would often go off and look for a place to pray where I could not be seen. I had a wounded heart and would go to the Doctor. Sometimes he would prescribe for me, and sometimes he would tell me that nothing was the matter with me. I went on in this condition until the Winter of 1863-'64, when our Chaplain began to hold preaching every night: (he was a Missionary Baptist) and I would often talk about religion to him and often he would make this reply, When the Lord begins a good work he will carry it on. Oh, I was so miserable. About this time I was solicited to hold prayer meeting, which I began and kept it up until the Summer of '64, when I began to try to exhort in public. Shortly after I was taken prisoner and if I did feel the need of a Savior it was then—my poor heart would at times rise up in my throat, and at times it seemed that I would faint. I went on this way until '72—praying and beseeching my heavenly Father to forgive me of my past sins which were so numerous.

Oh, dear brother Gold, I shall never be able to describe my feelings nor describe my anguish of heart. It appeared that I had not a friend in this world, and everything seemed to cross my mind; which caused me to pray to the Lord to take me from this world, and then the thoughts of an everlasting burning hell would come to my mind; and then I would pray the Lord to remove all such troubles from me. My load of sin and guilt would at times seem as mountains and as black as jet. Finally I quit trying to pray in public or anywhere else except off in some thicket or solitary place, and then it appeared for me to pray was a sin and everything I said or did seem-

ed to be a sin, for I was so sinful it seemed that I was meaner than any of the whole brute creation. Sometimes I would read my Bible but it appeared that at the end of every sentence there was a curse laid down against me, so much so that I stopped reading the Bible, for twelve months I don't think I read twelve chapters. I would work day after day, crying and praying; and at times it seemed that I would be comforted, but the most of my time it seemed that my prayers would reach no higher than my head. I could see the little birds flying and singing all around me while at work, and would often wish that I was like they were: and at times would even wish to be the horse that I was working, that had no soul to be lost or saved. I envied everything that I saw that seemed to have any peace. I would go to sleep at night and would awake almost frightened to death, for I thought I had some of the most fearful dreams to encounter with of any person in the world. In June '72 I went with Elder J. L. Ross to visit one of the Old Baptist congregations, which convened at Bear Grass in Martin County, N. C., when one of my old friends and neighbors went forward and related an experience of grace and was received and was baptized the next morning. Right there and then I had one of the hardest times I ever had in my life, but I tried very hard to hide it. That evening brother Ross and myself went home with one of my cousins who was an Old Baptist, and at night they wanted me to sing

"The cross of Christ inspires my heart  
To sing redeeming grace."

After I got through they commenced talking of their travails from nature's night to the marvelous light of God's dear Son. I thought my poor heart would burst within my breast and it appeared that I would choke to death. Shortly after brother Ross came in and asked me if I didn't wish I could throw it up. It made my eyes burst forth in grief for him to talk in this way to me; but since I think I have heard him say that he has been in just the same condition. The night passed off, and when morning dawned I could hardly face any one that I thought was a christian—I thought I had sinned away the day of grace and that hell would be my portion. But as soon as we got breakfast we started to the baptizing, and I said nothing to any one—my feelings I can't express—all I wanted was to get off somewhere so I could pray. After preaching that day brother Ross and myself went home with the gentleman that was baptized. We did not stay long before we started home, and on the way we saw several little boys playing when this passage of scripture was presented to my mind, "Except ye be converted and become as a little child you cannot enter the kingdom of God." But to my surprise I got home safe and met my dear companion with smiles on her face as usual. She asked me if I was sick. I told her that I was not sick but felt very bad. For two weeks I think I saw as much trouble as any man on earth. One day while I was plowing it