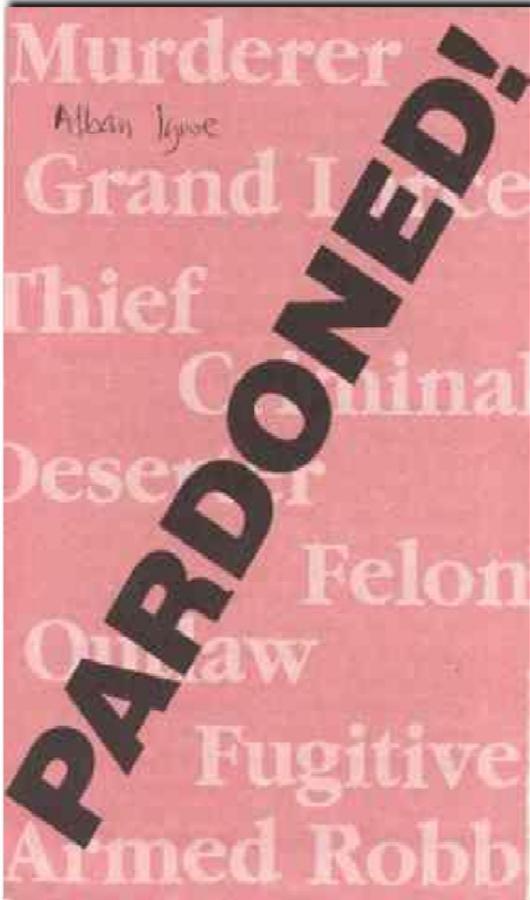


PARDONED

God spoke to my heart when I was hidden away in the oil fields of Oklahoma under an assumed name. I was a robber, a man of the underworld.



I had been brought up in a good home. My mother was a Christian, and she faithfully read the Bible and prayed with me. My father tried to bring me up to do the right thing, but I would not come under my father's rule.

When I was fifteen years old, my father heard that I had shot at a boy on the street. He said, "Son, there is only one thing to do, and that is to do right. Then you will keep yourself out of trouble, and you will keep me out of trouble. If you go on the way you are now, you will land in the penitentiary. And going there, you will take every dollar that I have, because I know the love I have in my heart for you." That day, instead of going to the schoolroom, I left home.

I got a job washing dishes in a restaurant. But there was a gambling hall upstairs, and I began to frequent that place. In a very short time I saw that I was going to need more money than my wages. The boss's long pistol was under the counter. I decided to steal that gun and get more money with it. But what did it bring? More sorrow, more heartache.

From there on, I committed one crime after another. I deserted the United States Navy. I wore the mask and carried two big guns, and had a string of crimes that reached clear across the United States. I stole automobiles and held up gambling houses.

It is just God's mercy that I was not killed. When the officers' bullets whizzed all around me, I looked up and said, "God, have mercy! Don't let them kill me!" I knew where I would go if I died. Mother had taught me the Bible stories, and the memory of them was in my heart. Sometimes the thought of suicide crossed my mind but then I would think of that place—Hell!

One time I spent fifteen days hiding out in the swamps of Arkansas with a Winchester strapped on my back. All the sleep I got was in some treetop while my partner watched for us.

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Another time a twenty-five man posse was instructed to take me dead or alive, and some of them came within thirty yards of me. But high up in Heaven, Jesus, the Friend of sinners, was looking down on my broken heart. And I believe He saw a little spark of honesty that wanted to do the right thing.

Later, I came out West. Then one day as I was driving up Washington Street in Portland, Oregon, I saw a group of people telling what God had done for them. I pulled my car up to the curb and listened to what they had to say. They spoke of having peace and happiness, something I knew nothing about. If they had asked me about misery, heartache, and remorse, I could have told them about it from A to Z.

Their testimonies impressed me. I went to the Apostolic Faith Church and knelt at an altar. I said, "Lord, if You will save me, I'll give You my life. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll go to work and be a man. I'll confess out that old life, and let them do to me what they want. Please save me."

The Lord did save me. He brought peace and happiness, and the misery moved out. For days, I walked the streets saying, "Oh, it is wonderful!" What was wonderful? The change that had revolutionized my life. I had peace.

I began going back over my old life and confessing. The stolen money ran into thousands of dollars. One fellow that I had robbed of a hundred dollars wrote back saying he didn't want pay. All he wanted was for me to pray for him that he might have this same religion.

I faced the Naval authorities and said, "Here I am, a deserter from the United States Navy. I left the ship in New York City. But I was saved in the Apostolic Faith Church and am going over my old life. You can do to me what you want to do." They said they would consider the matter. In a few days, I received a letter from them. It said, "According to the laws of the United States you are a wartime deserter. But because of the new life you are living now, we will not punish you for your desertion."

My hands were stained with the blood of my fellow man. I had accidentally killed a man in one of my holdups in Texas. As he died, he said, "Oh my God, why did you have to kill me?" His cries haunted me. I wrote to the governor of Texas and confessed this crime. God went before me, and I never had to spend one moment behind prison bars.

God delivered me from all the many sinful habits and appetites that had me bound for years. He set me free. One time on the job I mentioned to a fellow worker that God had lifted me out of the old life. He asked, "Just how high did God lift you?" I replied, "He lifted me so high that you can't look at me and tell what I used to do." After I told him how I had lived, he said, "I never heard of such a thing as getting out of a life like that."

The only way a criminal and outlaw can be saved is through the Blood of Jesus. Today I have a clean record, a clean heart. Jesus did it for me. — Bruce Archer