

## Charles McCallon Alexander, 1867-1920.

Born: October 24, 1867, Meadow, Cloyd's Creek, East Tennessee.

Died: 1920, at his home which he called "Tennessee", Birmingham, England.

Buried: Lodge Hill Cemetery, Birmingham, England.

On his tombstone are inscribed the words of what was originally the last stanza of the "Glory Song":

"When by the gift of His infinite grace,  
I am accorded in Heaven a place,  
Just to be there and to look on his face,  
Will through the ages be glory for me." (1)

Charles' father, John, a good singer and violinist, taught him to read music at a young age and to beat time with his hands. John Alexander had fought for the Union Army in the American Civil War. Charles' mother was also a great influence on his life. She read the sermons of Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899) to her family at night around the fireplace, talking with Charles and his siblings. By the age of 9, Charles had read the entire Bible. When he was 13, Charles committed his life to Christ during a revival meeting and made a public profession of his faith.

His father's death had a profound impact on his life. He said, "The night my father died, there came to me, as never before, the worth of a human soul...I was not absolutely sure whether my father was in heaven...I knew he was an elder in a church...I cried to God, 'If there is any way that You reveal Yourself to people, whether by vision or voice or impression, give me the certainty that my father is with You, and safe' and I promised Him that I would serve Him all my life if He would give me the assurance. As clearly as anything I ever experienced, the impression came to me, 'Your father is up here safe with Me.' There and then I promised to serve Him all my life..." He declared later that, at that moment as he looked up at the stars, he felt the load lifted right off him.

At age 14, in 1881, Charles Alexander studied music at Maryville College, Maryville, Tennessee, remaining for eight or nine years, the last three of which as Professor of Music. Alexander became a singing associate of Quaker evangelist John Kittrell for three months. Charles attended The Moody Bible Institute 1892-1894, being choirmaster of the Sunday-School, and making the acquaintance of Rev. Dr. Reuben Archer Torrey, D.D. (1856-1928) with whom he would work so closely in later years. In 1893, Alexander was associated with D.L. Moody in the Chicago World's Fair revival services. After graduation, Charles did evangelistic work from 1894 to 1901, with Milan B. Williams, State Secretary for the YMCA in Georgia, doing revival campaigns in Iowa and the Midwest for the first five years. He was also the song leader for Billy Sunday, an evangelist in Chicago. In 1902, Charles went to Australia as song leader for Dr. R.A. Torrey in the first Australian crusade. Dr. Torrey had missions in Melbourne, Hobart and Sydney. They traveled throughout Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, and Benares. There was much revival. It was during this that "Glory Song" first came to popularity. Alexander wrote, "At the close of the campaign, it seemed everyone in the city was singing the 'Glory Song.'" He then went to Britain with Dr. Torrey in 1903. There was revival there too.

In Birmingham in 1904, Charles met Helen Cadbury, fourth daughter of the late Richard Cadbury, a Christian philanthropist whose family had founded Cadbury's chocolate. Charles married her July 14, 1904. His wife said, "No one who ever heard Charles Alexander sing needed to be told that he, like the birds, sang because there was within him a holy impulse which he could not resist. It was not his profession to sing; it was his life." Charles, himself, said, "I have yet to see the first church that remained empty for long where each person entered heartily into the singing of hymns. In order to maintain this equality [between preaching and singing], every individual must be made to feel his responsibility in the singing part of the worship."

Charles had been trying to find an attractive and practical way of bringing the Bible into the lives of people. During the Torrey-Alexander campaign in February 1906, he heard of George T.B. Davis' "Testament Circles" in Philadelphia, whose members pledged to carry a New Testament in their pockets. He decided in 1907 that he would urge people to adopt that habit.

When Helen heard this, she exclaimed, "That reminds me of our old Pocket Testament League at high school". She told Charles and Mr. Davis, who was present, about what she had done among her school mates after she became a Christian at the age of twelve. She had carried a Bible to school and read verses from it to her friends, with the result that many of them were converted. Later she invited her friends to carry New Testaments in their pockets in the playground and they called themselves, "The Pocket Testament League". Helen had started The Pocket Testament League in 1893. Charles immediately revived The Pocket Testament League. The most important change made was to not confine it to Christians but seek to enlist anyone who would carry a New Testament and read a chapter a day. This led to many conversions. The Pocket Testament League (TPTL) became a prominent feature in Charles' work.

In 1908 Charles served as song leader for Rev. Dr. John Wilbur Chapman, D.D. (1859-1918) in Chapman's return to evangelistic crusades. For the next ten years these two men carried the Gospel around the world in sermon and song. TPTL was officially launched in 1908 during an evangelistic campaign with Dr. Chapman in Philadelphia. It was begun in Melbourne, in 1909 when Charles, Davis and Dr. Chapman held a four month Australian campaign. Mr. Davis said "We want the League to spread all over the land which will bring the greatest revival this Commonwealth has ever known". It did spread like wildfire throughout Australia and across the world with thousands coming to know Jesus Christ.

Charles felt the need of a headquarters for TPTL. In 1914, at his own expense, he rented a small room on Paternoster Row near St. Paul's Cathedral in London, which he and Helen furnished. A.M. MacGill of Glasgow was honorary secretary.

Not long after the establishment of the headquarters, England faced war. Had it not been for the new office, the work could never have developed the way that it did. Hundreds of British soldiers and sailors became Christians. Later, news reached the office that over nine thousand soldiers has signed the TPTL pledge. TPTL ministry also occurred in American camps during the war. Branches were formed all over America.

Charles promoted TPTL until his death in 1920. Helen continued the work of TPTL. At the first International Conference held in 1928 at "Tennessee" (Helen's home) in Birmingham, it was affirmed that TPTL would be "a world-wide movement uniting all those who make a regular habit of reading the Word of God daily and of carrying a Bible of New Testament with them wherever they go". It was agreed, "to exalt the Word of God by inducing others to adopt the same habit in order that Christians may be spiritually strengthened and equipped as soul-winners and that the unconverted may be led to accept Christ as their Saviour." The League's Foundation of Belief included the pledge, "I hereby accept membership in The Pocket Testament League by making it the habit of my life to read a portion of the Bible each day (at least a chapter, if possible) and to carry a Bible or New Testament with me wherever I go". The pledge was adopted and signed by Helen, Founder and International President, with several people from other countries. Since those early days, TPTL has spread to many parts of the world with many members continuing what Helen began, and what she and Charles revived. By 1936, there were 5 million members in TPTL. She died in 1969 at the age of 92, having seen millions of New Testaments carried in many pockets.

Charles Alexander, as far as is known, did not write hymn lyrics nor compose sacred music. However, of the 253 hymns in *Revival Hymns*, 1905, which he co-edited with Daniel Brink Towner (1850-1919), many of the copyrights were held by Alexander, including hymns by his late father-in-law, Richard Cadbury (1835-1899), and Robert Harkness, 1880-1961. Robert Harkness served as Charles M. Alexander's pianist for a time, and when Harkness died in 1961 he was buried in the Alexander family plot, Birmingham, England.

In 1921, Helen Cadbury Alexander co-authored the biography of her husband, Charles.

#### **His works include:**

Alexander's Hymns, No. 3. Charles M. Alexander. (New York: Flemming H. Revell Company. 1898.)  
 Alexander's New Revival Hymns. Chas. M. Alexander. (London: Marshal Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd. 1900.)  
 Revival Songs (Melbourne. 1901.)  
 Revival Hymns (London. 1903.)  
 Revival Hymns. Daniel B. Towner and Chas. M. Alexander. (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association. 1905.)  
 Northfield Hymnal with Alexander's Supplement, 1907.  
 Alexander's Gospel Songs. (New York, Chicago, Toronto, London, Edinburgh: Flemming H. Revell Company. 1908.)  
 Northfield Hymnal, No. 3. Charles M. Alexander and May Whittle Moody. (East Northfield, Massachusetts: The Bookstore (The Northfield Schools). 1918.)

#### **Sources:**

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, p. 122. (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company. 1908.)  
 Ford C. Ottman. *J. Wilbur Chapman-A Biography*, pp. 110-13. (Garden City; New York: Doubleday, Page & Company. 1920.)

1) *O That Will Be Glory*. Words and Music: Charles Hutchinson Gabriel (1856-1932), 1900. In Edwin O. Excell. *Make His Praise Glorious*, etc. Regular edition. (Chicago, Illinois: E.O. Excell. 1900.) © Renewal 1928, Homer A. Rodeheaver, Owner.

Other Reading:

G.T.B. Davis. *Torrey and Alexander*. (Chicago. 1905.)

Helen C. Alexander and J. Kennedy Maclean. *Charles M. Alexander: A Romance of Song and Soul-Winning*. (London: Marshall Brothers Ltd. 1921.)

*The Quaker Girl and Her League*. (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster Press, 1986.)

Helen Cadbury and Charles M. Alexander. (London: Marshal Morgan and Scott Publications Ltd. 1989.)