

NOT THE RIGHTEOUS!

ADAPTED FROM PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION'S RADIO SERIES, "UNSHACKLED!"

by Jack Odell

"For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13

Copyright © 1955

Chapter 10

Cecil Carnes . . . no leg to stand on

THERE ARE ENDLESS WAYS FOR A MAN TO SLIP DOWN AND down until he hits rock-bottom. But there's only one way up - One Way that's trustworthy and Eternal. JESUS said, "**I am the way.**" And there is no other.

Cecil Carnes found his own way down - and then was found by the only Way up.

The unique thing about Cecil Carnes is that he never had the slightest intention of being anything else but a success. He had what it took to be outstanding, and that's just what he planned to be.

He was born on a farm near Charleston, Illinois, of a wonderfully easy-going father and a little French pepper-pot of a mother. They often disagreed, usually over one of his father's charming impracticalities. But it takes two to make a quarrel, and Cecil's father never bothered to hold up his end of an argument.

Cecil was a retiring, detached boy who spent a lot of time by himself, dreaming his own big dreams. They all had to do with shining achievements and big accomplishments, and he did his best to carry them out in everyday life. Whatever Cecil did, he always tried to do better than anyone else.

Even farming, much as he hated it, was a challenge. He learned to plow the straightest furrow and handle horses like an expert. In school he made the highest grades and brought home his report cards like trophies. Most of his dreams were not of wealth, but of being admired.

He won all the admiration a boy could want the year he was fourteen, but the price was a high one. His father had gone to town, leaving Cecil to disk a field with a four-horse hitch.

Something startled the horses. Skillful as the boy was, he lost control. The runaways broke off across the field and Cecil was thrown down. One of the shining, knife-like disks passed over his ankle. A neighbor in the next field saw the accident and came running.

"Cecil! Are you hurt, boy? Are you . . ." He saw the boy's leg and gasped.

"Oh-son!"

"My - my foot! It hurts lots, Mr. Hallec"

Hallec knelt at Cecil's side.

"I - I reckon it does hurt, son." He hesitated and then told the truth.

"Your foot's layin' thirty feet away - over there by the fence."

"Huh?" Cecil struggled to see.

"My foot's - cut off?" "Mebbe I shouldn't have told you, boy."

"No - it's all right." Cecil had a vision of courage to live up to. "I'd have missed it - anyway."

He raised himself on an elbow and looked at the hemorrhaging stump.

"Mr. Hallec!"

"Yes, son. We'll have to git you to a doctor right away!" "Sure, Mr. Hallec - but first we've got to stop the bleedin'. Take the lace outa your shoe - and tie it tight around my ankle."

"Why, yeah - sure, Cecil - sure."

The farmer fumbled with his boot-lace while Cecil told him what to do.

"I learned that - in school, Mr. Hallec. You see, you have to stop the bleedin' - right away. They call it - applying a tourniquet."

The newspapers made quite a thing of it. They wrote about Cecil's courage and the calm way he took charge of the first-aid treatment. Later, when an amputation had to be done just below the knee, they ran the story all over again with the new developments.

Cecil had all the admiration he needed. It helped, somehow, to make up for the accident and the loss of his leg.

A couple of years later he went on to the University with hopes of becoming a history teacher or a chemist. But when it was time to go back for the sophomore year, his schooling was interrupted. His father broke the news in the fumbling way that was so annoying to Cecil's mother.

"Cecil, your mother and I hate to tell you this, but - ah - but . . ."

"Get to the point, Hez!" The hemming and hawing was too much for her peppery nature.

"Well, Tinny - don't rush me, now. I keep thinkin' there must be some way to work things out."

"No, there isn't! Cecil, there's no possible way you can go back to the University this year, and we might as well all just face up to it."

"I can't go back at all?"

"Not without money. And your father has squandered it all on 'improvements' we didn't need."

Hez Carnes shouldered the blame patiently.

"I meant to do the right thing, Cecil. Guess I must have been awful wrong, though. Same as always when it comes to money. I'm sorry, son."

They really did need Cecil's help, and he put in ten solid years on the farm. Each one was pure agony. His brothers left home and followed careers of their own, but Cecil stuck to the place and helped his parents. He wasn't even consciously resentful. Just heart-broken.

It was some relief just to get off the farm when they moved to the town of Mattoon. Cecil found a job of his own, while his parents started an advertising and distributing business. Their operations expanded, and after a few years they asked Cecil to join them on a full-time basis.

The money was good, but the business was really his mother's. Though he did well, the sense of personal accomplishment was lacking. Years were slipping away, and Cecil felt he was getting nowhere. He wondered more and more if he'd ever break loose from his parents and make a name for himself.

Yet when they died, within two years of each other, Cecil felt at loose ends. He'd been chained so long he found freedom uncomfortable. To fill the emptiness he began drinking, not much at first but more and more as time went on. He was still ambitious, and never drank enough in those days to hurt him in a business way.

When a job was offered in a large hotel, Cecil took it. Hard work paid off and he was promoted to Assistant General Manager. He seemed to have a real bent for hotel work. Bit by bit the owner turned over nearly all the responsibilities to him.

Carnes worked as assistant, and then as General Manager, for more than two years. When he quit, he wasn't really sure of the reason. He just felt-dissatisfied and restless.

In Minneapolis he took a job representing an artificial limb manufacturer. Again the money was good. And again, no satisfaction. His drinking was on the increase.

He moved to Chicago and found a job with a glass company. By gritting his teeth and drinking just a little more all the time, he managed to stick that one out for more than four years.

Misery was becoming a habit with Cecil. He found company in a Czech plumber named John, who was hugging the misery of having lost his wife. They spent most of their weekends at John's house, drinking and watching Class B action pictures on television. Sometimes, drunk as they were, even Cecil and John found the entertainment too poor.

"Let's turn this thing off, Cecil."

"Sure, I saw that picture twice before already."

John reached for the switch and emptied the flickering screen.

"You gonna quit your job at the glass factory?"

"Yeah, John. They don't know it, but I've already quit. Too long, John. Four and a half years too long."

"You get along good."

"Sure - so what?"

"Here, Cecil. Hold out your glass."

"Okay. Hey, John - we gotta call up for some more whiskey pretty soon."

"Yeah. I'm gettin' so I need a lot of it. Thank GOD for whiskey!"

"That's very funny, John. 'Thank GOD for whiskey'."

"I don't think much of GOD. Do you, Cecil?"

"GOD? I'm not interested in Him, and He's prob'ly not interested in me."

"Me, I don't like GOD!"

"You got reasons, John. Good reasons."

"Plenty good reasons. If my Elsie hadn't of died, I wouldn't be a no-good drunken bum. Three years now she's gone. GOD took her away, and still I cry myself to sleep."

"You don't know how lucky you are. You got a reason to hate GOD, John. But me, I've got nothin' - not even a leg to stand on."

Cecil chuckled at his own joke. John was too occupied with his troubles to catch it at once. Then he saw the point and began laughing too.

"You made a good joke, Cecil. Listen, you got a leg to stand on. You got a fine wooden leg to stand on!"

John wiped his eyes and reached for the telephone. It was time to call the liquor store.

In Chicago, Cecil lived with a friendly couple who owned a restaurant and had a big apartment upstairs in the same building. They were fond of Cecil, and his drinking worried them more and more. When his condition grew so bad he was unable to hold a job, he couldn't bear to face the

warm-hearted Domenicos any longer. He moved out and drifted from one cheap hotel to another, living on his savings.

The money held out seven months. Then, broke and in pitiful condition, he turned up at his old friends' restaurant. Mrs. Domenico saw him come in the door and helped him to a table.

"Cecil Carnes, are you trying to drink dry every tavern in Chicago?"

He stumbled, and she caught him just in time. "Here, Cecil. Sit down before you hurt yourself!"

Cecil rummaged through his pockets for money.

"I got-money - to pay for a cup of coffee. You don't have to worry, Mrs. Domenico. I got money - look."

He came up with three dimes.

"See - I told you. Thirty cents - for a cup of coffee. Whatsa matter? Isn' thirty cents enough?"

"I no want t'ree dimes! You sit still and I make a good hot breakfast. Then you go upstairs and sleep."

The Domenicos offered him a job on condition that he stay sober. He promised, stuck it out for several months, then began nipping again. When Mrs. Domenico lectured him, he felt picked on - so he just quit.

His second night on the town, Cecil was jack-rolled and left penniless. He drifted to Kokomo and stayed with a half-sister. That didn't work out. From there he moved on to his old home town of Mattoon where he had other relatives. That didn't work out, either. The relatives bought him a railroad ticket and gave him a little money.

Now, back in Chicago, he wandered up Canal Street to the Northwestern Station. Cecil was sober, but he was sick and scared. He just plain didn't know where to go or what to do next.

That's how he happened to approach a total stranger with a pitiful question.

"S'cuse me, mister."

"If you want money - no!"

"I know I look pretty bad, mister. But I don't want money. I've got two dollars."

"Well, then' . . ."

"It's-well, I'm afraid I'll get picked up if I keep on walkin' around the streets. I can't go in a saloon, because if I get started I'll drink up the two dollars. Mister, I've never - I mean, I've always tried to . . ."

"Get to the point."

"All right - where can I go to keep out of jail?"

"Well now, let me think." The man began to be genuinely concerned. "Try the Pacific Garden Mission."

"Mission?"

"Yeah, it's over on State Street just south of Harrison."

"What kind of a Mission?"

"Well, they've got free food - and beds - and the cops won't bother you."

"Yeah, but is it - a religious layout?"

"Religious? Sure, but you look like a little religion wouldn't hurt you."

Walking across town, Cecil began to think the man might be right. Maybe a little religion wouldn't hurt him. He found the Mission and got the free bed and food. But the service in the chapel left him unmoved.

One person impressed him. It was a dark, handsome young man with a peaceful face. He shook Cecil's hand and said, "GOD loves you, buddy," but Cecil changed the subject. He didn't want this religion business to get out of hand.

In the morning he picked up his one small suitcase and walked out. Except for the free meal and a night's sleep, he was in the same situation he'd been in the day before. The two dollars were still in his pocket, and he still didn't know what to do or where to go.

Cecil wandered toward the lake and sat in the park.

Then, for reasons he couldn't really figure out, he headed back toward the Mission. There's a bar across the street from the Old Lighthouse. Cecil went in there and sat down. Three big drinks and a package of cigarettes put a deep dent in his two dollars, so he went outside again and stared across at the Mission door. As he watched, the peaceful-looking young man came out and stood on the sidewalk enjoying the sunshine.

A wild impulse sent Cecil running across the street, as fast as he could go on his wooden leg. He dodged a taxicab and a big truck, ran around the back of a streetcar, and reached the safety of the curb. He tugged at the young man's coat sleeve, and the thing he said was even wilder than his actions.

"Listen - can you save me?"

The young man looked startled.

"No, sir - I can't. But I know Someone Who can."

"Yeah - who?"

"Do you - want to be saved?"

"Look, I'm not even real sure what it means - but I want to be different from the way I am. Listen, will you help me find GOD?"

That is a question no one needs to ask more than once at Pacific Garden Mission.

In the prayer room, the young man tried to make it clear to Cecil that no one needs to look for GOD, because He is looking for us through JESUS CHRIST.

When he fell on his knees to pray, Cecil didn't know one word of Scripture. He didn't understand a shred of doctrine. But the thing he knew beyond all doubt was that he had made a horrible mess of his life, and that he didn't have the power to make it right. So when he had poured out his load of sins and his guilt and fears, he prayed a prayer as simple as the publican's.

"Lord, give me a new life. I can't run my life - stands to reason I can't run it. How could I? I'm not GOD!"

Right there he stated a truth so simple that it takes some a lifetime to see it. Cecil Carnes still can't run his own life, and he knows he'll never be able to. But that doesn't bother him at all.

Because Cecil Carnes belongs to CHRIST. And CHRIST is GOD.

~ end of book ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
