

# **THE STORY OF A DEDICATED LIFE**

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The story of a dedicated life by James C. Moffat

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**JAMES C. MOFFAT**

**THE STORY OF A  
DEDICATED LIFE**



THE STORY

OF

Joseph Owen

A DEDICATED LIFE

BY THE

REV. JAMES C. MOFFAT, D. D.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DAYS OF EDUCATION.

Among the youth pursuing their studies at Princeton, in the year 1834, there were a few, who regularly met weekly, for religious improvement. Their association was called the Philadelphian Society, from its purpose to promote the feeling of Christian brotherhood in its members and through them among mankind. Singly, or in committees, they collected information of the moral and religious condition of their own and other countries. And among the enterprises of the time most interesting to them was that of Christian missions to the heathen.

On entering the society in those days, there were some names with which a newcomer soon became familiar, not because those who bore them were obtrusive in any way, but from the general deference paid to their characters and opinions. Such were especially Morrison, Dougherty, Freeman, Owen, Janvier, and Canfield. It is pleasant to think of them as they were then, just entering upon manhood, or approaching it, full of energy, buoyant with hope and elevated with the sentiment of a lofty purpose. The burden of their conversation, at all times, among themselves, was alleviation of the ills of human life, the salvation of souls, the glory of God, the Saviour, and the means through which they hoped to be useful to those ends. There is a nobility in the self-forgetting consecration of

pious youth. In many cases it wearies and fails in the struggle with the world. In the case of that little group, it never suffered debasement. The purpose of their youth ripened into the execution of their maturer years. At a time when foreign missionary work was still new to most of our Protestant churches, and viewed with more apprehension, and attended with more privation and danger than it is now, they all offered themselves on the altar of that sacrifice, and never afterwards shrunk from the duties thus incurred, or ever revoked their choice.

Joseph Owen, then about twenty years of age, was already marked by a maturity of purpose, which, while it made him unattractive to those who lived for pleasure, enlisted on his behalf the respect of earnest and studious men. Of stature above the medium, of staid demeanor, profoundly modest, and yet self-possessed, there was a gentle dignity in his address, which effectually defended him against offensive intrusion, and could easily become severe upon violation of its bounds, while always ready to warm into a beam of affection for a friend. He was a native of Bedford, Westchester County, New York, a son of James and Lucretia Merrit Owen, born on the 14th of June, 1814. His father, a man of highly estimable character, died while his son was yet under ten years of age. His mother, a pious member of the Presbyterian church in Bedford, endeavored to bring up her children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. Joseph early evinced a superior capacity for acquisition of learning, and a desire to become a minister of the Gospel.

In the course of his studies with a view to that end, he was encouraged by his pastor, the Rev. Jacob Green, who also employed him, during college vacations, in Christian

effort, equally profitable to his own spiritual life, and preparatory for his contemplated work. Mr. Green was one of those who formed the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, and was its recording secretary for many years. To him and his excellent lady was Mr. Owen greatly indebted for that Christian influence which entered into the formation of his character. In October, 1832, he entered the Sophomore class at Princeton. Before the session had far advanced, he was ranked among the best scholars of the class, and had taken his place with those who in the Philadelphian Society were banded together in the cause of practical religion.

Oren K. Canfield was a man of few words, whose religion was severe, and his deportment grave. He had taken leave of the world when he gave himself to Christ, and no longer admitted of tampering with any of its ways. But the sombre manner covered warm and gentle affections, which needed only the approach of Christian fellowship to elicit. He was a moderate scholar, and faithful in application, but believed that all effort after class honors, and all manifestations of himself, belonged to that spirit of the world which he sought to resist and mortify. Severe to himself, he was considerate and forgiving to others, and willing to be spent for the salvation of his fellow-men. Maturer experience might have taught him that a man limits his usefulness in thus denying himself; but his serious, single minded, devoted life was early laid down, in the front rank—the forlorn hope of missionary effort on the west coast of Africa. And I have no doubt that it was laid down as bravely, with as complete a resignation as if it had followed a victory. When I think of that quiet, self-contained, seldom speaking young man, moving about