PROFESSOR JOHN O. CROSBY, A. M., B. E.

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IN the little village of Crosbyville, Fairfield county, South Carolina, on the twenty-second of December 1850, the subject of this sketch, Rev. John Oliver Crosby, was born in slavery. His mother's name was Sylvia. She came from Richmond, Virginia, when she was only twelve years old, having been sold to a speculator at the sale of John Tinsley to satisfy his creditors. His father was Thomas Crosby. At a very early age John Oliver was apprenticed to the carpenter's trade, which he learned so rapidly that at the age of twelve he was made foreman and superintended the building of numerous small houses of from two to ten rooms each. In 1860 Thomas Crosby died, and the same year the Crosby estate was sold. Mary Q. Crosby bought the young carpenter for $1260. His apprenticeship ending, he moved to Shelton's Depot and became the slave of William Stanton, who had married his young mistress, Miss Crosby. In 1864 Mr. Stanton was drafted into the Confederate service and sent to Florence, South Carolina, to guard Federal prisoners. In the summer

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Mr. Stanton came home on a furlough, and on his return took the boy John along as a servant. At Columbia, Stanton and all other reserved soldiers returning to their commands were stopped by order of the government and put on duty as a guard at a prison containing about fourteen hundred Federal prisoners. This prison was about three miles west of Columbia, across the Congaree river, and about half a mile from the Saluda river. General Means was in command, and being an intimate friend of Stanton's, Stanton was appointed by him sutler to the prisoners. From this time, he made his headquarters in Columbia. John Oliver spent the greater part of his time at the headquarters of General Means, where he made himself useful as a servant, and occasionally acting as drummer, beating the reveille and other signals.

The boy despised slavery and had always studiously and artfully avoided addressing his owners as "master." He therefore resolved to assist the prisoners in every way possible. There were three ways in which this could be done. First, some of the prisoners were allowed to go out on parol to get wood, and as John was well known at the camp and allowed to go everywhere he pleased, he would occasionally furnish a prisoner with sufficient provisions to last two or three days. In this way the prisoner could spend several days in accomplishing his escape from the neighborhood. Secondly, he could furnish some of the prisoners with an occasional newspaper, giving the Confederate movements. But the greatest services were rendered in a very different way. At the headquarters, in a tent next to the one occupied by General Means himself,

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and to which John Oliver had free access at all times, were two large baskets. These baskets were the recipients of all the mail brought from the "prison post-office" to be forwarded to wives and friends in the North. Three young men were daily occupied reading these letters; those deemed fit to be sent on were put into one basket, and those containing any objectionable matter were thrown into the other basket. More than two-thirds of the letters were thus rejected and went to the flames. John Oliver conceived a plan by which some of the "refused letters" could be forwarded to their destination. The mail would leave the camp at eleven o'clock daily, and as all the letters examined between this time and the next day were allowed to remain in the basket, he would transfer from twenty to thirty letters daily from the rejected basket to the one containing the "approved letters."

After the war he went to live with his mother on a farm in Chester county. He remained there about one year; but he and his stepfather could never agree, as the "old man" despised "larning" and said it was "spilin" all the boys on the place. John was also pretty expert at figures up to division and could read well in the second reader. He was to the boys on the plantation what 'Webster's Dictionary' is to the learned, and, notwithstanding his ragged condition, was a favorite with all the old people. His mother was a woman of fine sense, her greatest blunder being the selection of a husband. This is a common blunder with women who have children. How many young men would become useful but for this very thing; they are hedged in on all sides by men of blunt

feelings, of rough natures and of a lack of appreciation that ought to be given to the aspiring hopes of children. With his mother's advice, he resolved to make his escape from this paternal slavery far worse than the other. Promising to return to his mother in due time, he started from home late one afternoon, carrying with him a smaller brother. They had no money and only a pound of bacon and a corn ash cake. Their mother was not a Christian, but they felt while on their journey that their mother was praying for them. After some hardships, the boys reached Winnsboro, a town of fifteen hundred inhabitants, thirty-five miles distant. Being poorly clad, they found some difficulty in getting employment. On the second day, however, he got a place for himself and his brother. He was at this time in good circumstances and completing a course in music at one of our leading colleges, Mr. Crosby entered school, working at odd times for support and paying for tuition by ringing a school bell. He soon got to be president of a debating club and teacher of the only colored Sunday school in town. Having joined the Union league, and becoming prominent in the county politics, he was appointed in the spring of 1869, by Governor R. H. Scott, the census taker for Fairfield county. He entered Biddle University in the fall of 1869 and by the Shaw University in 1870, graduating from the latter in 1874. He has since graduated from the National School of Elocution and Oratory, being the first colored man who ever graduated from this famous institution. Mr. Crosby resolved to enter the ministry; his first work in this line was done in the summer of 1872 as a student missionary under the auspices of the American

Baptist Home Mission Society of New York. He was assigned Mecklenburg county as a field of labor. During the four months after the commission was given him he raised two hundred dollars for the First Baptist church of Charlotte and eighty dollars for Shaw University, besides organizing a church at West Holly, North Carolina, which has now a large and flourishing congregation. In 1874 he was ordained and took charge of the first Colored Baptist church of Warrington, North Carolina. In 1875 Mr. Crosby was elected delegate from Warren county to the State Constitutional convention, which framed the present constitution of the State. He took an active part in the deliberations and vigorously opposed by speeches and vote every ordinance aimed directly or indirectly at his race. In 1880 he was called to the Dixonville Baptist church of Salisbury, and during the same year became principal of the State Colored Normal school, located at the same place. These two important positions he still holds. He has also been moderator of one of the largest Baptist associations in North Carolina since 1881. He is chairman of the Home Mission board of the North Carolina State convention and editor of the *Golddust,* the organ of the colored Baptists of the State. He is connected with numerous other positions, boards, and business enterprises.

To name and give an account of all the honors conferred and positions bestowed upon this worthy son of the old North State would occupy more space than can be allowed in a book of this

size. He has baptized more than twelve hundred persons. Mr. Crosby occupies a place in the front

rank as a preacher. He is one of the most popular and successful men in his denomination, which numbers more than one hundred and ten thousand in this State. Notwithstanding his charitable habits, he is worth more than four thousand dollars--the fruits of his own toil. He has risen by degrees from poverty and obscurity to one of the most honorable stations in the State.