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THE CHRISTIAN TREASURY

A FAMILY MISCELLANY

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CONVERTING SOULS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D.D.



YOU know a great deal, Dr Beecher,' said a man to the Boanerges on Litchfield Hill, 'but what is the greatest of all things?' The quick reply was, 'It is not theology, it is not controversy; it is *saving souls*.' This has been the keynote with all the choicest spirits in Christ's army corps from the days of Paul, whose motto was, 'If by all means I may save some of them.' No one has come up to this high calling until he has learned to love an immortal soul, irrespective of its trappings and surroundings—the soul of a beggar as much as that of a millionaire. David Brainerd—who may perhaps be regarded as the holiest man the American Church has seen—had for his parish the red barbarians on the banks of the Delaware. 'I care not,' he says, 'where I live, or how I live, or what hardships I go through, so that I can but gain souls to Christ. While I am asleep, I dream of these things; as soon as I awake, the first thing I think of is this great work. All my desire is the conversion of sinners, and all my hope is in God.'

These are apples of gold for us pastors, and for all living Christians at this season of the year which is most favourable for personal religious effort. Not vague, wholesale effort, which ends in smoke, but direct effort brought to bear upon a *soul*. Men are saved, or lost, individually. The sagacious Apostle did not evaporate the idea into any vague generalities about 'reaching the masses,' &c.; he distinctly says that 'he who converteth a *sinner* from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.' A single soul was a sufficient audience for the Son of God at Sychar's well, and in the inquiry room with Nicodemus.

To convert signifies to turn around and go in the opposite direction. Conversion is the penitent sinner's own act in turning from that path which leads hell-ward, and setting his footsteps into the path of obedience to God.

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, who influences and enables the sinner to turn. The Divine Spirit and the human will work in blessed partnership; neither can do the work without the other. But the Apostle James recognises a third party when he speaks of one's converting a sinner from the error of his way. Then it appears that it is possible for me to convert my neighbour. Not, of course, that I can change his heart or regenerate him into the new life; a saved sinner is not, nor ever can be, a sinner's Saviour. Jesus alone can be that. But I can bring an influence to bear upon my neighbour; I can ply him with arguments and entreaties; I can put God's claims before him; I can set gospel religion before him attractively by kind acts and consistent example; and so I may *move him to move himself* towards Christ. This is what we understand by a Christian's converting a soul. Self-conceited itinerants and certain noisy revivalists do, indeed, often boast of the number of *their* converts, which prove to be as worthless specimens as Whitefield's tipsy friend, who claimed to be his convert. But still the mighty fact remains, for God's Word declares it, that a servant of Jesus can convert a sinner from his evil way, and thus save a soul from death.

This is a tremendous trust. No power vested in any human being can compare with this one, of moving an immortal creature from the slavery of Satan, and the doom of hell, into a pathway of life everlasting. What a trust, brother! Think of it. Father, mother, teacher, Christian friend, just think what a stupendous prize God sets before you, and what a prodigious responsibility He lays upon you! God seems to say to you, here is this immortal soul, worth more than all worlds, for Jesus died for it; here is this soul, now convert him unto Me. I put him in your way; I give you the opportunity; I will supply you with the help; save this precious soul. This is not profanity, nor is it poetry. God does this very thing when He commissions His

children to pray, toil, and live for the conversion of the lost. Nay, He goes further still; for He declares that if we do *not* warn the sinner to turn from his wicked way, that soul shall die in his iniquity, but 'his blood will I require at thy hand!' The threatening for unfaithfulness is as tremendous as the trust; the reward of fidelity is glorious enough to whet the appetite of an archangel. It will be a crown indeed to be laid at Jesus' feet if we discover even a single soul in heaven whom you or I have been instrumental in converting from the error of his way. We pity those who might have had such star-crowns and flung them away.

I am confident that we who call ourselves Christians do not begin to face these mighty facts as we ought; we do not set squarely before our eyes the *trust of souls*, and our vast accountabilities for them. The more we do this, the more intensely will we give ourselves to this most Christ-like endeavour. Our own heart must first be moved for the one we may convert. Mere hap-hazard counts for nothing. Fix your eyes on the friend whom you mean to reach and to labour for. Take hold of that case as Harlan Page took hold of young Edwin F. Hatfield, with a grip of personal interest—loving him enough to tell him plain truth. Watch opportunities; in doing, do not overdo. He that winneth souls is *wise*, because he first asks God to make him so. Worrying an unconverted friend by incessant 'nagging' at him, preaching at him in a certain Pharisaic tone, or addressing him in a public way so as to mortify or disgust him; all such blunders good people sometimes fall into, who have more zeal than common sense.

But remember that the most terrible blunder of all is to let a soul go to perdition without one effort to save it! It seems to me, sometimes, that it will be enough to make us half-crazy in heaven not to find there some souls that we ought to have striven—yes, 'agonised'—to bring there. I do not doubt for a moment that heaven will have its self-compunctions as well as its ecstasies of gratitude and joy. And there is no preparation for heaven that can compare with the unselfish, patient, prayer-steeped, and Christ-like labour and life for perishing souls. The nearer a soul is to us, the greater the responsibility for it. May God help us all to follow a "Week of Prayer" with many weeks of putting prayer into practice.—*Boston Congregationalist*.

FROM TWO STAND-POINTS.

BY KATE CALLA.

'O LAURA! Mr Dale tells me you have taken a class in our mission school. I am very glad. We need so many more teachers than are willing to come. I had great difficulty even in getting a substitute for the last five Sundays while I was away.'

'Yes, I've taken a class, but it seems a very discouraging project to me.'

'Discouraging! Why?'

'Because one must work so many years before there is any hope of seeing results.'

'I am more in the dark than ever. We can't expect the children to become marvellous saints at once, but neither do we wait years for the fruits of our work.'

'Oh, well! I suppose the little Arabs are rather better than they would be if they didn't come there; but I was thinking of their being converted. It is unreasonable to expect it. Take my boys, for instance. Not one of them is over nine. They have never been taught anything good in all their lives, except what they learn in Sunday school. They know that it is wrong to lie and steal and swear, but it is certainly hopeless to look for any fixed purpose in them, any persistent effort to do right, or any clear idea of Christ's atonement. It wouldn't be natural. It might be easy enough to your brother or mine, brought up amid totally different circumstances. With these mission-school scholars it seems to me simply impossible.'

"With God all things are possible." I don't agree with you that it is *natural* for any one to be a Christian. It seems so sometimes, because, among our friends, the change, to our eyes, is often so gradual that we never really contrast the end and the beginning. If we did, it would sometimes seem just as strange as with these neglected scholars of ours. The very word "conversion" means a complete turning around, that can be effected only by God's power, and I suppose it will always be "marvellous in our eyes." It ought not to be. It wouldn't be if we had more faith. My boys are no older than yours, and yet I am sure one of them is a Christian. He is very ignorant, but he knows that he is a sinner, that Jesus died to save him, that He will help him to do good, and will forgive him when he fails, if he asks it. What more is necessary? He is very quick-tempered, and I have often seen his little fist clench and his eyes flash at some slight provocation; but since he began to love Jesus, a word or glance of reminder will cause the fingers to relax, the fire to die out, and in a moment he is good again. He shows the change in many such ways. Can you call the work discouraging now?'

'No, indeed! My faith is strengthened, and I will work with double energy.—*Westminster Teacher*.