

The Dying Drummer Boy

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*"Thy Word
Is
Truth"*

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The Apostolic Faith

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THE DYING DRUMMER BOY

TWO or three times in my life, God, in His mercy, touched my heart, and twice before my conversion I was under deep conviction.

During the American War, I was a surgeon in the United States Army, and after the battle of Gettysburg there were many hundred wounded soldiers in my hospital, among whom were twenty-eight who had been wounded so severely that they required my service at once, some whose legs had to be amputated, some lost an arm, and others both an arm and a leg. One of the latter was a boy who had been but three months in the service, and being too young for a soldier, had enlisted as a drummer. When my assistant surgeon and a steward wished to administer chloroform previous to the amputation, he turned his head aside and positively refused to receive it. When the steward told him that it was the doctor's orders, he said, "Send the doctor to me."

When I came to his bedside, I said, "Young man, why do you refuse chloroform? When I found you on the battlefield you were so far gone that I thought it hardly worth while to pick you up; but when you opened those large blue eyes I thought you had a mother somewhere who might at that moment be thinking of her boy. I did not want you to die on the field so ordered you to be brought here; but you have now lost so much blood that you are too weak to

endure an operation without chloroform; therefore, you had better let me give you some.”

He laid his hand on mine, and looking me in the face, said, “Doctor, one Sunday afternoon in Sabbath school, when I was nine and a half years old, I gave my heart to Christ. I learned to trust Him then, I have been trusting Him ever since, and I know I can trust Him now. He is my strength and my stimulant; He will support me while you amputate my leg and arm.”

I then asked him if he would allow me to give him a little brandy. Again he looked in my face, saying, “Doctor, when I was about five years old my mother knelt by my side, with her arms around my neck, and said, ‘Charlie, I am praying to Jesus that you may never know the taste of strong drink. Your papa died a drunkard and went down to a drunkard’s grave, and I promised God, if it was His will that you should grow up, that you would warn young men against the bitter cup.’ I am now seventeen years old, but I have never tasted anything stronger than tea or coffee; and as I am, in all probability, about to go into the presence of God, would you send me there with brandy in my stomach?”

The look the boy gave me, I shall never forget. At that time I hated Jesus, but I respected the boy’s loyalty to his Savior; and when I saw how he loved and trusted Him to the last, there was something that touched my heart, and I did for that boy what I had never done for any other soldier – I asked him if he wished to see his chaplain. “Oh, yes sir,” was the answer.

When Chaplain R – came he at once knew the boy from having often met him at the tent prayer meetings, and taking his hand, said, “Well, Charlie, I am sorry to see you in this sad condition.”

“Oh, I am all right, sir,” he answered. “The doctor offered me chloroform, but I declined it; then he wished to give me brandy, which I also declined; and now if my Savior calls me, I can go to Him in my right mind.”

“You may not die, Charlie,” said the chaplain, “but if the Lord should call you away, is there anything I can do for you after you are gone?”

“Chaplain, please put your hand under my pillow and take my little Bible. In it you will find my mother’s address. Please send it to her and write a letter and tell her that since the day I left home I have never let a day pass without reading a portion of God’s Word, and daily praying that God would bless dear Mother – no matter whether on the march, on the battlefield, or in the hospital.”

“Is there anything else I can do for you, my lad?” asked the Chaplain.

“Yes. Please write a letter to the superintendent of the Sands Street Sunday School, Brooklyn, N.Y., and tell him that the kind words, many prayers, and good advice he gave me I have never forgotten; they have followed me through all the dangers of battle, and now, in my dying hour, I ask my Savior to bless my dear old superintendent. That is all.”

Turning toward me, he said, “Now, doctor, I am ready, and I promise you that I will not even groan

while you take off my arm and leg, if you will not offer me chloroform.” I promised, but I had not the courage to take the knife in my hand to perform the operation without first going to another room and taking a little stimulant to nerve myself to perform my duty.

While cutting through the flesh, Charlie Coulson never groaned, but when I took the saw to separate the bone, the lad took the corner of the pillow in his mouth, and all that I could hear him utter was, “O Jesus, blessed Jesus, stand by me now!” He kept his promise and never groaned.

That night I could not sleep, for whichever way I turned I saw those soft blue eyes, and when I saw those soft blue eyes, and when I closed mine, the words, “Blessed Jesus, stand by me now,” kept ringing in my ears. Between twelve and one o’clock I left my bed and visited the hospital, a thing I had never done before unless specially called, but such was my desire to see that boy. Upon my arrival I was informed by the night steward that sixteen of the hopeless cases had died and been carried down to the deadhouse. “How is Charlie Coulson? Is he among the dead?” I asked.

“No, sir,” answered the steward, “he is sleeping as sweetly as a babe.” When I came to the bed where the boy lay, one of the nurses informed me that about nine o’clock two members of the U.S. Christian Commission came through the hospital to read and sing a hymn. They were accompanied by Chaplain R – who knelt by Charlie Coulson’s bed and offered up

a fervent and soul-stirring prayer; after which they sang, while still on their knees, the sweetness of all hymns, "Jesus Lover of My Soul," in which Charlie joined. I could not understand how the boy, who had undergone such excruciating pain, could sing.

Five days after I had amputated that dear boy's arm and leg he sent for me, and it was from him on that day I heard the first Gospel sermon. "Doctor," he said, "my time is come: I do not expect to see another sunrise, but thank God, I am ready to go; and before I die, I desire to thank you with all my heart for your kindness to me. Doctor, you are a Jew; you do not believe in Jesus. Will you please stand here and see me die, trusting in my Savior to the last moment of my life?" I tried to stay, but could not, for I had not courage to stand by and see a Christian boy die, rejoicing in the love of that Jesus whom I had been taught to hate, so I hurriedly left the room. About twenty minutes later a steward who found me sitting in my private office, covering my face with my hand, said, "Doctor, Charlie Coulson wishes to see you."

"I have just seen him," I answered, "and I cannot see him again." "But, doctor, he says he must see you once more before he dies." I now made up my mind to see him, say an endearing word, and let him die; but I was determined that no word of his should influence me in the least so far as his Jesus was concerned. When I entered the hospital I saw he was sinking fast, so I sat down by his bed. Asking me to take his hand, he said, "Doctor, I love you because

you are a Jew; the best Friend I have found in this world was a Jew."

I asked him who that was. He answered, "Jesus Christ, to whom I want to introduce you before I die; and will you promise me, Doctor, that what I am about to say to you, you will never forget?"

I promised, and he said, "Five days ago, while you amputated my arm and leg, I prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ to convert your soul."

These words went deep into my heart. I could not understand how, when I was causing him the most intense pain, he could forget all about himself and think of nothing but his Savior and my unconverted soul. All I could say to him was, "Well, my dear boy, you will soon be all right." With these words I left him, and twenty minutes later he fell asleep, "safe in the arms of Jesus."

Hundreds of soldiers died in my hospital during the war, but I only followed one to the grave, and that one was Charlie Coulson, the drummer boy, and I rode three miles to see him buried. I had him dressed in a new uniform and placed in an officer's coffin, with a United States flag over it.

That dear boy's dying words made a deep impression upon me. I was rich at that time so far as money was concerned, but I would have given every penny I possessed if I could have felt toward Christ as Charlie did; but that feeling cannot be bought with money. Alas! I soon forgot all about my Christian soldier's little sermon, but I could not forget the boy himself. I now know that at that time I was under

deep conviction of sin; but I fought against Christ with all the hatred of an orthodox Jew for nearly ten years, until finally the dear boy's prayer was answered, and God converted my soul.

About eighteen months after my conversion I attended a prayer meeting one evening in the city of Brooklyn. It was one of those meetings when Christians testify to the loving-kindness of their Savior. After several of them have spoken, an elderly lady arose and said, "Dear friends, this may be the last time that it is my privilege to testify for Christ. Oh, it is a great joy to know that I shall meet my boy with Jesus in Heaven. My son was not only a soldier for his country, but also a soldier for Jesus Christ. He was wounded at the battle of Gettysburg, and fell into the hands of a Jewish doctor, who amputated his arm and leg, but he died five days after the operation. The chaplain of the regiment wrote me a letter, and sent me my boy's Bible. In that letter I was informed that my Charlie, in his dying hour, sent for the Jewish doctor and said to him, 'Doctor, before I die I wish to tell you that five days ago, while you amputated my arm and leg, I prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ to convert your soul.'"

When I heard that lady's testimony I could sit still no longer. I left my seat, crossed the room, and taking her by the hand, said, "God bless you, my dear sister; your boy's prayer has been heard and answered. I am the Jewish doctor for whom your Charlie prayed, and his Savior is now my Savior."

DYING WORDS

of Sinners

“I am suffering the pangs of the damned.”

“Give me laudanum that I may not think of eternity

“I am taking a fearful leap into the dark.” - The Atheist Hobbs.

“Oh, my poor soul, what will become of thee? Whither wilt thou go?”

“I would gladly give thirty thousand pounds to have it proven that there is no hell.”

“All my possessions for a moment of time.” – Queen Elizabeth.

“The devil is ready to seduce us, and I have been seduced.” – Cromwell.

“What blood, what murders, what evil counsels have I followed! I am lost! I see it well!” – Charles IX of France.

“I am abandoned by God and man; I shall die and go to hell!” – The Infidel Voltaire.

“I would give worlds if I had them, if the ‘Age of Reason’ had not been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me; it is hell to be left alone!” – The Infidel Tom Paine.

“Until this moment, I thought there was neither a God nor a hell. Now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty.” – Sir Thomas Scott.

Of Christians

“How bright the room! How full of angels!”

“The best of all, God is with us.” –John Wesley.

“Eternity rolls up before me like a sea of glory.”

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” –The Martyr Stephen.

“Oh, how beautiful! The opening Heavens around me shine!”

“The battle is fought, the battle is fought; the victory is won!”

“I am sweeping through the Gates, washed in the Blood of the Lamb.”

“Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus.”

“I wish I had the power of writing; I would describe how pleasant it is to die.”

“I am in perfect peace, resting alone on the Blood of Christ. I find this amply sufficient to enter the presence of God with.”

“Oh, that I could tell what joy I possess! I am full of rapture. The Lord doth shine with such power upon my soul. He is come! He is come!”