

## CHAPTER LXXXV.

### Enquirers and Converters.

There are gentlemen, in England, who can afford to drive a coach and four from town to town and carry nobody, performing their journeys for their own amusement; but I am not able or willing to do anything of that kind. Unless I can have my coach loaded with passengers to Heaven, I would sooner it was never started, and had rather that my team stopped in the stable. We must carry some souls to Heaven, for our call is from above and our time is too precious to throw away on mere pretence of doing good. We cannot play at preaching; we preach for eternity. We cannot feel satisfied merely to deliver sermons to senseless throngs, or to the most attentive crowds. Whatever smiles may greet us as we start, and whatever salutation may welcome us at our close, we are not content unless Jesus works salvation by us. Our desire is that grace should be magnified, and that sinners should be saved. They used to jeer at the Tabernacle in Moorfields, and the one in Tottenham Court Road, and call them Mr. Whitefield's soul-traps;—a very excellent name for a place of worship; such may this Tabernacle ever be!—C. H. S., in a sermon preached August 19, 1877, a night when the Tabernacle was free to all comers, the regular congregation having vacated their seats.

I am sure that, if a minister wants conversions, he must identify himself with his people. There are persons, nowadays, who make a difficulty about Moses praying for Israel, "If Thou wilt forgive their sin—"; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written;" and they raise questions about Paul being willing to be separated from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. Oh, but there is no difficulty in the matter if you once get to feel such an intense love for the souls of men that you would, as it were, pawn your own salvation, and count it little if you might but bring the people to the Saviour's feet! A man who has never felt that willingness does not yet know the true throb of a pastor's heart; he has not been ordained to be a shepherd if he would not lay down his life for the flock, if it were necessary.—C. H. S., in a sermon preached at the Tabernacle, August 23, 1883.

He who has spoken the Word with power to the heart bears to him who has heard it the relationship of a father to a son. There are many, in this place, to whom I stand in this most hallowed connection. You recognize it, I know, and I desire to express my intense and fervent love to the many of you who have been born unto God by the preaching of the Word here. I do not know of anything that has more greatly comforted me, during the last week or two, in the time of sharp contention for the faith, than the reception of so many letters, from persons of whom I have never before heard, saying, "You do not know me, but you are my spiritual father; and now, at such a time of trial as this is to you, I must write and send you a word of good cheer." It is always a cause of thankfulness to me when my testimony is blessed to the conversion of a seeking soul; but when I think of the hundreds, and the thousands,—ay, I am not exaggerating when I say thousands of converts,—whom I have met with here on earth, and the many more, at present unknown to me, whom I hope to meet with either here or in Heaven, I do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice; and I cannot help expressing my great love to all those who have been brought to the Saviour by the words which I have preached and published.—C. H. S., in a sermon delivered at the Tabernacle, November 6, 1887.



IN one of the sermons preached in connection with his pastoral silver wedding, Mr. Spurgeon called attention to the fact that, during his twenty-five years' ministry in London, more than nine thousand persons had joined the church; while, probably, an equal or still larger number had been converted through hearing or reading his sermons, although they had not become members at the Tabernacle. The previous volumes of the *Autobiography* have contained many

references to these converts, and records of the means blessed to their salvation ; but it appears necessary to devote two chapters in the present volume to the same subject in order adequately to set forth this most important part of the dear Pastor's service, and to show how abundantly the favour of God rested upon it from its commencement to its close. It is a cause for devout thankfulness that, in a great measure, a similar blessing still accompanies his published words, both in our own tongue, and in many of the languages into which they have been translated. The first part of the following narrative is given in Mr. Spurgeon's own words ; the latter portion consists of the instances of usefulness which various friends have described ; and, to make the chapters as varied and as complete as possible, there are included in them several specimens of the beloved soul-winner's methods of dealing with anxious enquirers and sinners seeking the Saviour. The cases of blessing here recorded are selected from the whole of his London ministry ; and are, therefore, all the more representative of the continued usefulness of his work for the Lord during the long period from 1853 to 1892.

There are some passages of Scripture which have been more abundantly blessed to the conversion of souls than others have, they may be called salvation texts. We may not be able to discover how it is, or why it is ; but, certainly, it is the fact that some chosen verses have been more used of God than any others in His Word to bring men to the cross of Christ. They are not more inspired than other parts of the Bible ; but I suppose they are more noticeable, from their position, or from their peculiar phraseology they are more adapted to catch the eye of the reader, and are more suitable to a widely prevailing spiritual condition. All the stars in the heavens shine very brightly, but only a few catch the eye of the mariner, and direct his course ; the reason is this, that those few stars, from their peculiar grouping, are more readily distinguished, and the eye easily fixes upon them. So I suppose it is with those passages of God's Word which especially attract attention, and direct the sinner to the cross of Christ. One of the chief of those texts is Isaiah xliii. 25 : "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." I have proved it to be a most useful one ; for, out of the thousands of persons who have come to me to narrate their conversion and religious experience, I have found a very large proportion who have traced the Divine change which has been wrought in their hearts to the hearing of this precious declaration of sovereign mercy, and the application of it with power to their souls by the Holy Spirit.

Some who come to see me, with the view of joining the church, cannot say much, and they think that I shall be very dissatisfied with them because they make



a great muddle of their narrative ; but the people with whom I am least satisfied are those who reel off their yarn by the yard ; they have it all ready to repeat, and everything is arranged as prettily as possible. As I listen to it, I know that someone has told them what to say, and they have learned it all for me to hear. I like far better the testimony that I have to pick out in little bits, but which I know comes fresh from the heart of the trembling convert. Sometimes, it costs the poor soul a tear or a real good cry, and I have to go round about in all manner of ways to get hold of the story at all ; but that shows that it is true, and that the man never borrowed it. I like to hear the experience of a believer, when he comes straight out of the world, and out of the ways of sin, to confess his faith in Christ. He does not know anything about the terms that Christian people use, he has not learned our phrases ; and it is a great delight to hear it all fresh and new. Yet it is always the same story in all the essential parts of it. However strangely he may narrate it, it tallies with that of others in the main points. Take the experience of a Christian man who has been brought up in the sanctuary from his childhood, and extract the pith and marrow of it. Now take the experience of a man who has been a horse-racer, a drunkard, a swearer, but who has been truly converted, and extract the essence of that. Talk to a peer of the realm who has become an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, and take the substance of his experience. Now speak to a chimney-sweep who has been brought to the Lord, and get the gist of his experience ; put them all side by side, and you will not know one from the other. There are always the same essential marks,—death, birth, life, food,—Christ in the death, the birth, the life, the food,—repentance, faith, joy, the work of the Spirit of God. But it is very sweet to hear the story told in the many different ways in which the converts tell it. The true child of grace is ever the same in heart, although the outward appearance may continually vary.

Among the many thousands of souls who have been brought to know the Lord under my instrumentality, I have often noticed that a considerable proportion of these, and of the best members of our church, too, were won to the Saviour, not by legal terrors, but by gentler means. Sitting, on one occasion, to see enquirers, I should think that there were as many as twelve out of the twenty-three whose convictions of sin were not distinctly marked with the terrors of the law. I asked an excellent young woman, “What was the first thought that set you really seeking the Saviour?” “Oh, sir!” she replied, “it was Christ’s lovely character that first made me long to be His disciple. I saw how kind, how good, how disinterested, how self-sacrificing He was, and that made me feel how different I was. I thought, ‘Oh ! I am not like Jesus !’ and that sent me to my room, and I began to pray, and so I came to trust in Him.” “The first religious impression I ever had,” said another,

"that set me seeking the Saviour, was this ; a young companion of mine fell into sin, and I knew that I was likely to do the same if I was not kept by someone stronger than myself. I therefore sought the Lord, not so much at first on account of past transgression, but because I was afraid of some great future sin. God visited me, and I then felt conviction of sin, and was brought to Christ." Singularly enough, too, I have met with scores of persons who have trusted in Christ, and then have mourned their sins more afterwards than they did before they believed. Their convictions have been more terrible after they have known their interest in Christ than they were at first. They have seen the enormity of the evil after they have escaped from it ; they have been plucked out of the miry clay, and their feet set upon the rock ; and then, afterwards, they have seen more fully the depth of that horrible pit out of which they have been snatched. It is not true that all who are saved suffer such convictions and terrors as some of us had to endure ; there are very many who are drawn with the cords of a man and the bands of love. There are some who, like Lydia, have their hearts opened, not by the crowbar of conviction, but by the picklock of Divine grace. Sweetly drawn, almost silently enchanted by the loveliness of Jesus, they say, "Draw me, we will run after Thee."

A young woman came to me, one day, after a service, to ask me whether I really meant what I said when I declared that he that believed in Jesus Christ was saved there and then. "Yes," I replied ; and I gave her the Scriptural warrant for the statement. "Why !" she exclaimed, "my grandfather told me that, when he found religion, it took him six months, and they had nearly to put him into a lunatic asylum, he was in such a dreadful state of mind." "Well, well," I answered, "that sometimes happens ; but that distress of his did not save him. That was simply his conscience and Satan together keeping him away from Christ. When he was saved, it was not by his deep feelings ; it was by his believing in Jesus Christ." I then went on to set the Saviour before her as our sole ground of hope in opposition to inward feelings. "I see it," she said ; and I rejoiced as I noticed the bright light that passed over her face, a flash of heavenly sunshine which I have often seen on the countenances of those who have believed in Jesus Christ, when peace fills the soul even to the brim, and lights up the countenance with a minor transfiguration. Scores of times, when I have been talking with those who have been utterly bowed down beneath sin's burden, they have looked as though they were qualifying for an asylum through inward grief ; but as soon as they have caught this thought, "Christ stood as the Substitute for me ; and if I trust in Him, I have the proof that He did so, and I am clear," their faces have been lit up as with the very glory of Heaven.

Some persons have come to me for spiritual guidance because they have been misled by others. One lady, who called upon me, said that she had not heard me



preach, but she had been reading my sermons, and God had been pleased to bless them to her, not only to her conviction, but to her conversion. She went to the clergyman of the parish, full of joy at having found the Saviour, and began to tell him of her gladness, and how she rejoiced that all her sins were blotted out. He stopped her, and said, "My good woman, that is all a delusion; you have no right to believe that your sins are pardoned, till you have led several years of piety and devotion." She went away sad, and she came to ask me if what the clergyman said was true; and when I quoted that verse,—

"The moment a sinner believes,  
And trusts in his crucified God,  
His pardon at once he receives,  
Redemption in full through His blood;"—

"Oh!" she said, "I see it clearly now;" and when I went on to tell her that many, who had believed in Christ, had been black sinners one moment, and white as snow the next, by casting themselves simply on Christ, they had instantly found peace, she could not but take to her heart the precious promises of Christ, and, believing in Jesus, being justified by faith, she had the peace of God that passeth all understanding, and she went away rejoicing in Jesus.

I was going to preach in the country, on one occasion; and before I went, I received a letter from a young man who wrote:—"Dear Sir,—When you come to this town, do preach a sermon that will fit me; for I have heard it said that we must all think ourselves to be the wickedest people in the world, or else we cannot be saved. I try to think so, but I cannot, because I have not been the wickedest. I want to be saved, but I do not know how to repent enough." Of course, I told him that God does not require every man to think himself the wickedest in the world, because that would sometimes be to think a falsehood, for there are some men who are not so sinful as others are. What God requires, is, that a man should say, "I know more of myself than I do of other people; and from what I see of myself, not merely of my actions, but of my heart, I do think there can be few worse than I am. They may be more wicked openly; but, then, I have had more light, more privileges, more opportunities, more warnings, and therefore I am, in my own opinion at least, more guilty than they are." Some friends have really made an obstacle out of the very thing for which they ought to have been most grateful. An excellent and amiable young woman, when converted to God, said to me, "You know, sir, I used almost to wish that I was one of those very bad sinners whom you so often invited to come to Jesus, because I thought then I should feel my need more; that was my difficulty, I could not feel my need of Christ." It is a pity that any should make a hindrance of this matter; yet they do, and others make a difficulty for the opposite reason; they say, "Oh! we could trust Christ if we had been kept from sin."

The fact is, that unbelieving souls will not trust Christ whichever way they have lived; for, from some quarter or other, they will find cause for doubting; but, when the Lord the Spirit gives them faith, big sinners will trust Christ quite as readily as those who have not been great offenders openly; and those who have been preserved from open sin will trust Him as joyfully as the vilest transgressors.

We have had, in the Tabernacle, many very remarkable instances of how God does still bless the outcasts and the very chief of sinners. There was a man, known in the village where he lived by the name of Satan, because of his being so thoroughly depraved. He was a sailor, and as another seaman in that place had been the means of the conversion of all the sailors in a vessel belonging to the port, this man desired to sail with him to try and beat his religion out of him. He did his best,—or rather, his worst,—but he signally failed; and when the ship came to London, the Christian man asked the ungodly one whether he would come to the Tabernacle. He did not mind coming to hear me, for, as it happened, I was brought up near the place where he lived. This “Satan” came, on the Lord’s-day morning when the text was upon soul-murder; and, by the Holy Spirit’s gracious application of the Word to his heart, he sat, and sobbed, and cried under the sermon at such a rate that he could only say, “People are noticing me, I had better go out;” but his companion would not let him go out; and, from that day forth, he became a new creature in Christ Jesus, and he is living and walking in the truth, an earnest believer, singularly clear in his doctrinal knowledge, and doing all that he can for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ.

On another occasion, on a Lord’s-day morning, I preached upon the words of the leper, who said to Jesus, “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” On the following Thursday morning, I received this letter:—“Dear Sir,—I feel so happy to tell you that the Lord has pardoned a poor outcast of society. I got into your place, in a crowd, hoping nobody would see me. I had been out all night, and was miserable. While you were preaching about the leper, my whole life of sin rose up before me. I saw myself worse than the leper, cast away by everybody; there is not a sin I was not guilty of. As you went on, I looked straight away to Jesus. A gracious answer came, ‘Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven.’ I never heard any more of your sermon, I felt such joy to think that Jesus died even for a poor harlot. Long ere you get this letter, I trust to be on the way to my dear home I ran away from. Do please pray for me that I may be kept by God’s almighty power. I can never thank you enough for bringing me to Jesus.” If it had not been for that sentence about going home, I might have had some doubt concerning her conversion; but when a fallen girl goes home to her father and mother, it is a sure case. This letter gave me great joy; to see souls saved, is Heaven to me.



Not only has there been a great variety in the converts during my ministry, but the means blessed to their conversion have been very varied.\* One brother, when he came to join the church, told us that, as an ungodly stranger, he was going into Exeter Hall just as I gave out Charles Wesley's hymn, beginning—

"Jesu, lover of my soul."

He said to himself, "Does Jesus really love me? Then, why should I live in enmity to Him?" There and then, he turned unto the Lord; and, not long after, he came boldly out, and confessed his faith in Christ, and sought to do all he could to lead others to the Saviour.

I remember one friend coming to me, and saying, very earnestly, "I should like, sir, to take a seat in the Tabernacle." I answered, "Well, do so, by all manner of means; I am very glad when people do so." "But," said he, "I may not come up to what you expect of me, for I have heard that, if I take a sitting here, you will expect me to be converted, and I cannot guarantee that." "No," I replied, "I do not want you to guarantee it; I do not mean the word *expect* in that sense at all; but I do hope that it will be so." "Oh!" exclaimed he, "and so do I; I am going to take a sitting with that very view." And it was so; of course, it was so. When the man wished it, God accepted the wish, and heard the prayer, and he was brought to Christ, and joined the church.

One brother, when he was giving his testimony before being baptized, said:—"The first time I came to hear Mr. Spurgeon in the Tabernacle, if you had asked me about myself, I should have told you that I was as religious a man as ever lived in Newington, and as good a man, certainly, as ever formed part of any congregation; but all this was reversed when I heard the gospel that day. I came out of the building with every feather plucked out of me. I felt myself the most wretched sinner who could be on the face of the earth, and I said, 'I will never go to hear that man again, for he has altogether spoiled me.' But that was the best thing which could have happened to me; I was made to look away from myself, and all that I could do, to God, and to His omnipotent grace, and to understand that I must pass under my Creator's hand again, or I could never see His face with joy. I learned to loathe my own righteousness as filthy rags, fit only for the fire, and then I sought to be robed in the perfect righteousness of Christ."

Another man, who came to join with us in church-fellowship, owed his conversion, indirectly, to a Jew. He was on an omnibus going by the Tabernacle, one

---

\* Among the interesting instances of blessing which Mr. Spurgeon did not himself record, was the following, which was reported by a friend:—"Mr. Spurgeon went to preach at a prominent chapel, and, after taking tea at the deacon's house, he walked down to the place of worship under the guidance of the son of the household. 'Do you love my Master?' was the question which, in his clear, manly way, the Pastor put to his young companion. Before replying, he stopped in the street, and, looking his questioner straight in the face, said, 'Mr. Spurgeon, I have walked down to this chapel with the ministers for several years, and not one of them ever asked me such a question before.' That faithful word was the beginning of a new life; and, seeking God, he found pardon and peace through Christ."

Sunday, and a crowd was standing outside, as usual, waiting for the doors to be opened. The person sitting next to him was a well-known Jew. "Ah!" said the man, "that humbug always attracts the people." The Jew turned round to him, and enquired, "Would not you like to see such a crowd as that round your shop? I should welcome them at my place of business. I have ridden past here these twenty-eight years, and have always seen just such a crowd as that waiting to get in. Now, if your shop had been crowded thus for twenty-eight years, and anybody said that you did not sell a good article, what would you reply? You would probably answer that those people were good judges, and that, if you had not supplied goods that were satisfactory, they would not have kept on coming. Now, I am a Jew, yet I am inclined to go in, and listen to what Mr. Spurgeon has to say, because I see these crowds of people going to hear him." The man who had at first made the offensive remark was greatly impressed by his companion's observation, and in telling us how it affected him, he said, "I discovered that I had been buying the wrong article, and I thought the Jew had spoken very sensibly, so I resolved to go, and see and hear for myself." He came, examined the article that was offered for sale, and bought it on the gospel terms, "without money and without price."

One Sabbath evening, while preaching in the Tabernacle, I felt moved to say:—"Dear mother, if you have never talked with your daughter about her soul, do it this very night. 'But,' you reply, 'when I get home, she will be in bed.' If so, then wake her up, but do talk and pray with her to-night; and then let her fall asleep again; begin at once this holy service if you have neglected it until now." One good woman, who was present, went straight home, and did exactly what I had said; she woke her daughter up, and began speaking to her about the Saviour. The dear girl said, "Oh, mother! I am glad you have spoken to me about Jesus; for months, I have been wishing you would do so." It was not long before the mother brought her daughter to see me about joining the church, and then told me how the blessing had come to her.

On various occasions, the Lord has set His seal upon a very simple request that I made to my congregation. I asked those who were present, after they reached their homes, to spend a little time quietly and alone, and then, when they had honestly considered their condition in the sight of God, to take a pencil and paper, and to write one of two words. If they felt that they were not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, I asked them to write the word *Condemned*; but if they were trusting to Him alone for salvation, to put on the paper the word *Forgiven*. Several friends were brought to decision for Christ in that way; amongst them was one young man who, at first, wrote the word *Condemned*; but, as he looked at it, his tears began to flow, and his heart began to break; and, before long, he fled to Christ, put the paper in the fire, took another piece, wrote on it the word *Forgiven*, and soon came to tell



me the good news, and to ask that he might be admitted to church-fellowship. In another case, a man went home, and told his wife that he was going to write the word *Condemned*; she pleaded with him in vain, for he took the pencil, and was just about to make the letter C; but his little daughter, a Christian girl, caught hold of his hand, and said, "No, father, you shall not write it;" and by the united entreaties of his wife and child, the man was brought to the Saviour, and afterwards became a member with them at the Tabernacle.

My experience goes to show that there have been persons converted to God by doctrines that some might have thought altogether unlikely to produce that result. I have known the doctrine of the resurrection to bring sinners to Christ; I have heard of scores brought to the Saviour by a discourse upon election,—the very sort of people who, as far as I can see, would never have been reached if that truth had not happened to be an angular doctrine that just struck their heart in the right place, and fitted into the crevices of their nature. I have often preached a terrible sermon upon the law, and afterwards found that sinners had been comforted by it. God frequently blesses the Word in the very opposite manner to that in which I thought it would be blessed, and He brings very, very many, to know their state by nature by doctrines which I should have thought would rather have comforted believers than awakened the unconverted. I am constantly driven back to the great foundation truth of Divine Sovereignty, and am made to realize that, in grace as well as in providence,—

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform."

I was talking, one day, with an aged minister; and I noticed that he put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and brought out a letter that was well-nigh worn to pieces. As he unfolded it, he exclaimed, "God Almighty bless you, sir! God Almighty bless you, sir!" I said, "Thank you, my dear sir, for that blessing, but what makes you give it to me?" The good man replied, "I had a son, who I thought would be the stay of my old age; but he disgraced himself, and ran away from home, and I could not tell where he had gone, only that he said he was going to America." When the minister had told me so much of his story, he bade me read the letter, which ran thus:—"Dear Father,—I am here in America; I have found a situation, and God has prospered me. I write to ask your forgiveness for the many wrongs that I have done you, and the grief I have caused you; and to tell you that, blessed be God, I have found the Saviour. I have joined the church here, and hope to spend my life in the Redeemer's service. This great change happened thus. I did not sail for America on the day I expected to start; and, having a leisure hour, I went down to the Tabernacle to see what it was like, and there

God met with me. In his sermon, Mr. Spurgeon said, 'Perhaps there is a runaway son here. The Lord call him by His grace!' And He did call me." "Now," said the minister, as he folded up the letter, and put it into his pocket again, "this son of mine is dead, and he has gone to Heaven; and I love you, and shall continue to do so as long as I live, because you were the means of bringing him to Christ." It is very difficult to say which of us was the more happy as we rejoiced together over the wanderer who had thus been brought to the Lord.

On another occasion, a lad, who was just going to sea, came to the Tabernacle, and was converted; and, a few hours after, was in Heaven. He wrote to tell his parents that he had found the Saviour; and, just as they were reading his letter, they received news that the vessel in which he sailed had been in collision, and that he was drowned.

Two enquiring ones came to me in my vestry. They had been hearing the gospel from me for only a short season, but they had been deeply impressed by it. They expressed their regret that they were about to remove far away, but they added their gratitude that they had heard me at all. I was cheered by their kind thanks, but felt anxious that a more effectual work should be wrought in them, and therefore I asked them, "Have you in very deed believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you saved?" One of them replied, "I have been trying hard to believe." I have often heard this statement, but I will never let it go by me unchallenged. "No," I said, "that will not do. Did you ever tell your father that you tried to believe him?" After I had dwelt awhile upon the matter, they admitted that such language would have been an insult to their father. I then set the gospel very plainly before them in as simple language as I could, and I begged them to believe Jesus, who is more worthy of faith than the best of fathers. One of them replied, "I cannot realize it; I cannot realize that I am saved." Then I went on to say, "God bears testimony to His Son, that whosoever trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ is saved. Will you make Him a liar now, or will you believe His Word?" While I thus spoke, one of them started as if astonished, and she startled us all as she cried, "Oh, sir, I see it all; I am saved! Do bless Jesus for me; He has shown me the way, and He has saved me. I see it all." The esteemed sister who had brought these friends to me knelt down with them while, with all our hearts, we blessed and magnified the Lord for a soul brought into the light. The other young woman, however, could not see the gospel as her companion had done, though I feel sure she will do so; but it seemed strange that, both hearing the same words, one should come out into clear light, and the other should remain in the gloom.