

CHARLIE COULSON—

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 surgeon in the United States Army and after the battle at Gettysburg there were many hundred wounded soldiers in my hospital. Among them were twenty-eight who had been wounded so severely that they required my services 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 take 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 the 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; He will support me while you amputate my arm and leg."

I then asked him if he would allow me to give him a little brandy. Again he looked me in the face, saying: "Doctor, when I was about five years old my mother knelt by my side, with her arm 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's death, 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 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 my God, would you send me there with brandy in my stomach?"

The look that boy gave me I shall never forget. At that time I hated Jesus, but I respected that boy's loyalty to his Saviour; and when I saw 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 wanted to see his chaplain. "Oh, yes, sir," came the answer.

When Chaplain R— came he at once knew the boy, having 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 Sav-

our 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 my 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 dear Saviour to bless my dear old superintendent; that is all."

Turning towards 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 into the next 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 his 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 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 there I was informed by the night steward that sixteen of the hopeless cases had died and been carried to the dead house. "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 up to the bed where he lay, one of the nurses informed me that about nine o'clock two members of 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 upon their knees, the sweetest of all hymns: "Jesus, Lover of my Soul," in which Charlie joined. I could not understand how that 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 has 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 my

Saviour to the last moment of my life?" I tried to stay but I could not, for I had not the 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 hands 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 Saviour 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 twelve 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 on me. I was rich at that time so far as money is concerned, but I would have given every penny I possessed if I could have felt towards Christ as Charlie Coulson 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 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 Saviour. After several of them had spoken, an elderly lady arose, and said: "Dear friends, this may be the last time that it is my privilege to testify for Christ. My family physician told me yesterday that my right lung is very much affected, so at the best I have but a short time to be with you; but what is left of me belongs to Jesus. 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 Christ. He was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg, and fell into the hands of a Jewish doctor, who amputat-