

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

One of the best-known prisons in the United States was the Tombs, located in New York City. Many notable prisoners have spent gloomy days behind its cheerless grey walls. A prominent New York society woman, converted to Christ, was impressed to do something for the prisoners at the Tombs. She thought of visiting all the prisoners every Sunday morning and presenting each one with a few sweet-smelling flowers. She felt persuaded that the flowers might soften a heart where words would fail to impress it.

On one of these occasions when she had made the rounds, she found that she had one small bunch of flowers left. She asked the warden if there was not some other prisoner left to whom she might give them. He replied that there was a woman prisoner whom she had never seen in her visits to the prison. "But," he added, "I would advise you to stay away from her cell. She is the worst prisoner who has been inside this prison since I came here years ago. She will curse you in the vilest language imaginable."

But this discouraging bit of news did not dissuade this earnest Christian woman. She said resolutely: "I must see this woman."

So the warden showed her to the cell. He opened a small door that had been made in the large heavy iron door that led into the woman's cell.

The wealthy woman put her hand through the opening, waving the flowers while she said: "I have some flowers for you. I give them to you with God's blessing." She suddenly felt a hand snatch the flowers, but not a sound did the unfortunate creature utter from behind that massive iron door. The missionary woman went on her way home, thinking seriously upon what had just happened. She could still feel the touch of that hand which so swiftly snatched away the flowers that she had extended to her. She could not help praying earnestly for God's blessing to rest upon that prisoner for whom no one seemed to have any sympathy, and who was considered "the lowest of the low."

The prisoner, however, did not trample the flowers under her feet, as might have been expected, but sat down upon the little stool in her cell with the flowers clutched in her hands. As she looked at the flowers, her heart took on a strange feeling akin to homesickness, for this very same kind of flower grew around the doorway of her father's home. She had often played under the sweet fragrance of these flowers when she was an innocent child.

As she sat there gazing at the flowers, the one soft spot that it is claimed can be found in the hardest heart began to melt. The vision of the old home and the recollection of the carefree days when love was young and innocent, kept penetrating deeper into her heart and soul until she again longed to be pure and innocent. She recalled how, as a beautiful girl, she had come to New York; how she had been betrayed; how the strong, swift current of the underworld quickly carried her down. She remembered how one night, while she was singing in a cabaret, an intoxicated man threw a beer bottle at a companion, but missed him. The bottle had smashed against the wall near where she stood, and a jagged piece of glass cut a deep gash in her cheek, destroying her beauty. With her beauty gone, she had descended quickly to the lowest levels. Crime became her chief source of support. Finally she was sentenced to imprisonment in the Tombs.

The roses handed her in her prison cell did not fall on barren soil. The flowers not only led her to think of the days of her childhood and to long to be pure as she once was, but made her feel that even yet something might be done for her by the God she once loved.

She sent for the woman who was interested enough in her to bring her flowers and speak a "God bless you" to her discouraged heart. The missionary woman went immediately when she learned of the prisoner's desire to see her. She sat beside her in the cell and talked to her about God, the loving Father who was waiting to be gracious. The prisoner broke down, sobbed out her repentance, and prayed for forgiveness from the heavenly Father.

She was marvellously converted, and before long was released from prison and went forth to live for him who died for her. She went everywhere telling the story of her conversion and glorifying the name of Christ. Hundreds were helped to accept Jesus by her devoted life and wonderful testimony. One of the largest audiences ever gathered in the great auditorium of Carnegie Hall, New York, listened with rapt attention to her testimony of deliverance from sin, and to her wonderful story of victory through Christ. Eternity alone will reveal how great a harvest came out of the sowing of a rose with a prayer in a prison cell that afternoon by the millionaire missionary.

However, she lived only a short year after her conversion, because physically she had been burned out by the life she had lived while in sin. This again illustrates the certainty of the text, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"; for conversion does not do away with the fact that we must reap what we sow. God forgives us fully, but the harvest of our past sowing is still to be reaped. We cannot suddenly face about and cross off the slate the past life of evil sowing. You say: "What good is conversion, then, if it does not give you a clean slate?" It gives you a full forgiveness as far as God is concerned, and if you should pass away, you would be saved. But as you live on, you reap what you have sown. However, if you have a true conversion, you immediately throw your life into reverse. You stop sowing the wrong kind of seed. You start sowing in your life the gifts of the Spirit. You stop sowing to the flesh. Figuratively speaking, you stop sowing briars, thistles, and onion weeds into your life, and sow lilies, roses, and violets. Your life will after a time be a glorious garden of sweet-smelling flowers of the beautiful virtues of Christ to bless and gladden your heart.

Many are discouraged after their conversion when they are bothered by things which they hoped would never trouble them again. They fail to recognize the principle we have stated. The certainty of the sowing and reaping is what makes wrong sowing such a tragedy. That is the reason why this subject should receive attention especially from young people. It is rather late to tell a person about sowing and reaping when he has been sowing the wrong seed for almost a lifetime, and the reaping ahead of him is mostly of the wrong kind. Now while you are young is the time to sow the right kind of living into your life; then beautiful reaping will await you. It is as true in the sowing of good things as in the sowing of wrong things, that you reap more than you sow. A farmer puts in one grain and expects to reap manifold. So it is with the right kind of sowing in the spiritual life. You sow a rose and reap a garden. For this reason the apostle enjoins us: "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

But do not think there is a short cut to a glorious harvest. God has never been known to change, by a miracle of His power, a brier into a lily. You must sow for the good things of the Christian life and wait patiently for the harvest. No one knew better than Paul the certainty of what he himself wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He had found it out not only by divine inspiration, but by practical experience in his own life.

But the glory of all is that Paul immediately saw his past mistakes and began sowing on the side of love and righteousness. Instead of getting sullen and discouraged, he reversed the whole programme and was soon reaping a joy and peace that passeth all understanding. No longer did he speak about himself as exceedingly mad against those who named the name of Christ, but he became one of the greatest lovers of mankind that the world has ever known. His thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is so full of sweet flowers of charity and grace that the like of it has never been penned before or since his time.

Instead of being a persecutor, he became a friend of all persecuted people and wrote, in the twelfth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." "Recompense to no man evil for evil." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Paul emphasizes the fact that it pays to sow on the right side. "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

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