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Individual Soul-Winning
Its Obligations and Its Methods

By
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The Summons to Christian Service

By R. A. Torrey, D.D.

One of the important conditions of growth and strength in the Christian life is work. No man can keep up his physical strength without exercise, and no man can keep up his spiritual strength without spiritual exercise; that is, without working for his Master. The working Christian is the happy Christian. The working Christian is the strong Christian. Some Christians never backslide because they are too busy about their Master's business to backslide. Many professed Christians do backslide because they are too idle to do anything but backslide.

If you wish to be a happy Christian, if you wish to be a strong Christian, if you wish to be a Christian who is mighty in prayer, begin at once to work for the Master, and never let a day pass without doing some definite work for him. But how can a young Christian work for him? How can a young Christian bear fruit? The answer is very simple and very easy to follow. You can bear fruit for your Master by going to others and telling them what your Saviour has done for you, and by urging them to accept this

NOTE:—This article by Dr. Torrey is taken from the same author’s book entitled “How to Succeed in the Christian Life,” which is copyrighted (1906) by Fleming H. Revell Company and is sold by them at 75 cents, net. The article is used here by permission of the publishers.
same Saviour, and showing them how to do it. There is no other work in the world that is so easy to do, so joyous, and so abundant in its fruitfulness, as personal hand to hand work. The youngest Christian can do personal work. Of course he cannot do it so well as he will do it later, after he has had more practice. But the way to learn how to do it is by doing it. I have known thousands of Christians all around the world who have begun to work for Christ, and to bring others to Christ, the very day that they were converted. How often young men and young women, yes, and old men and old women, too, have come to me and said, "I accepted Jesus Christ last night as my Saviour, my Lord, and my King, and to-night I have led a friend to Christ." Then the next day they would come and tell me of some one else they had led to Christ. When we were in Sheffield, a young man working in a warehouse accepted Christ. Before the month's mission in Sheffield was over he had led thirty others to Christ, many of them in the same warehouse where he himself worked. Make up your mind that you will speak about accepting Christ to at least one person every day. Early in his Christian life Mr. Moody made this resolution, that he would never let a day pass over his head without speaking to at least one person about Christ. One night he was returning late from his work. As he got near home it occurred to him that he had not spoken to any one that day. He said to himself, "It is too late now. I will not get an opportunity. Here will be one day gone without my speaking to any one about Christ." But a little way ahead of him he saw a man standing under a lamp-post. He said, "Here is my last opportunity." The man was a stranger to him, though he knew who Mr. Moody was. Mr. Moody hurried up to him and asked, "Are you a Christian?" The man replied, "That is none of your business. If you were not a sort of a preacher I would knock you into the gutter." Moody spoke a few faithful words to him and passed on.

The next day this man called on one of Mr. Moody's business friends in Chicago in great indignation. He said, "That man Moody of yours over on the North side is doing more harm than he is good. He has zeal without knowledge. He came up to me last night, a perfect stranger, and asked me if I was a Christian. He insulted me. I told him if he had not been a sort of preacher I would have knocked him into the gutter."

Mr. Moody's friend called him in and said to him, "Moody, you are doing more harm than good. You have zeal without knowledge. You insulted a friend of mine on the street last night." Mr. Moody went out somewhat crestfallen, feeling that perhaps he was doing more harm than good, that perhaps he did have zeal without knowledge.

But some weeks after, late at night, there was a great pounding on his door. Mr. Moody got out of bed and rushed to the door, supposing that the house was on fire. That same man stood at the door. He said, "Mr. Moody, I have not had a night's rest since you spoke to me that night under the lamp-post, and I have come around for you to tell me what to
do to be saved.’’ Mr. Moody had the joy that night of leading that man to Christ.

It is better to have zeal without knowledge than to have knowledge without zeal, but it is better yet to have zeal with knowledge, and any one may have both. The way to get knowledge is by experience, and the way to get experience is by doing the work.

The man who is so afraid of making blunders that he never does anything, never learns anything. The man who goes ahead and does his best, and is willing to risk the blunders, is the man who learns to avoid the blunders in the future. Some of the most gifted men I have ever known have never really accomplished anything, they were so fearful of making blunders. Some of the most useful men I have ever known were men who at the outset were the least promising, but who had a real love for souls, and went on, at first in a blundering way, but they blundered on until they learned by experience to do things well.

Do not be discouraged by your blunders. Pitch in and keep pegging away. Every honest mistake is but a stepping-stone to future success. Try every day to lead some one else to Christ. Of course you will not succeed every day, but the work will do you good any way, and years after you will often find that where you thought you have made the greatest blunders you have accomplished the best results. The man who gets angriest at you will often turn out in the end the man who is most grateful to you. Be patient and hope on. Never be discouraged.

Make a prayer list. Go alone with God. Write down at the top of a sheet of paper, ‘‘God helping me, I promise to pray daily and to work persistently for the conversion of the following persons.’’ Then kneel down and ask God to show you who to put on that list. Do not make the list so long that your prayer and work become mechanical and superficial. After you have made the list keep your covenant, really pray for them every day. Watch for opportunities to speak to them—improve these opportunities. You may have to watch long for your opportunities with some of them, and you may have to speak often, but never give up. I prayed about fifteen years for one man, one of the most discouraging men I ever met, but I saw that man converted at last, and I saw him a preacher of the gospel, and many others were converted through his preaching, and now he is in the Glory.

Go to your pastor and ask him if there is some work he would like to have you do for him in the church. Be a person that your pastor can depend upon. We live in a day in which there are many kinds of work going on outside the church, and many of these kinds of work are good, and you should take part in them as you are able, but never forget that your first duty is to the church of which you are a member. Be a person that your pastor can count on. It may be that your pastor may not want to use you, but at least give him the chance of refusing you. If he does refuse you, don’t be discouraged, but find work somewhere else. There is plenty to do and few to do it. It is as true to-day as it was in the days of our Saviour, ‘‘The harvest truly is plenteous, but the
laborers are few'' (Matt. 9:37), “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest,” and pray that he will send you (Matt. 9:38). The right kind of men are needed in the ministry. The right kind of men and women are needed for foreign mission work, but you may not be the right kind of a man or woman for foreign missionary work, but none the less there is work for you to do just as important in its place as the work of the minister or the missionary is. See that you fill your place and fill it well.

Who Should Do Personal Work?

By Charles M. Alexander
The Singing Partner of Dr. Torrey

ANYBODY who is not doing personal work has sin in his life. I don’t care who you are,—preacher, teacher, mother, father,—if you are not leading definite people to a definite Saviour at a definite time, or trying hard to do it, you have sin in your life. I have never yet found any Christian not leading souls to Christ who, when I got into private conversation with him, did not acknowledge that this was true. You say, “I have been a Christian for twenty years. I have been going to church, been giving a tenth to the missionary collection, have a brother on the mission field.” That is all right, but have you ever led a soul to Christ? “I hope so,” you say? Twenty years a Christian, and still hoping so!

The last thing the Devil will let you do is to win a soul definitely to Jesus Christ. If you don’t believe it, try it. He will let you never miss a prayer-meeting, never miss a Sunday morning service; he will probably let you go up and shake hands with some unconverted person every Sunday morning after church, and let you write him a letter or two of suggestion during the week. He will even
Let you get up and lecture on religious subjects. He will let you be put down on convention programs, and have your name put in the paper, if you will just stop short of one thing: to get face to face with individuals, and bring them to a decision for Jesus Christ, and get them to confess him openly before the world. Did you ever try it?

I worked in the Moody Bible Institute, Chicago,—and if there is any place in the world where they do teach personal work, it is there,—for two years without doing personal work. Do you know how I did it? I would get up on the platform and lead the singing, and then go home with the perspiration rolling down my face, and think I had done my duty. I went out into evangelistic work, and stood up and led the people in singing, but as soon as that was over I would slip away, and good people would say, "You are working yourself to death." I knew down in the bottom of my heart that I was moving my arms too much, and not using my tongue enough. I was doing everything but the one thing. I used to have the doctor examine me every so often. I would dodge the question of anything troubling me. I knew that personal work was the one thing that I ought to do. Often when people think they are sick it is nothing at all but some pressure on the nerve which ruins the whole body. That is just the way with you—you are not a sane, healthy Christian unless you are doing personal work in soul-winning.

The sanest man I ever knew was D. L. Moody, and he was always doing personal work. It is sanity itself. These people who go off on a tangent do so because they shut themselves up in their study to prepare for the next Sunday, and then forget to go down and get right with God by personal work.

If you have sin in your life, give it up now. What if somebody should come to you and shake you in the night, and ask, "What are you living for?" would you know? When I went to London, I called on Mr. Stead, the great interviewer, a man who interviews people, and in a few hours can write up the story of their life. I said, "I have always wondered how in the world you interviewed these people. Start on me, I want to see how you do it." He is a great big fellow, and has rather wild eyes. Turning around suddenly, he said, "What are you in London for?" It made me shake, but I have never forgotten it.

What are you living for? I will tell you what you ought to be living for—to win people definitely to Jesus Christ! Some of you say, "Well, I try to do it by my life. So far as I have seen people, their life is largely made up of talking. But I believe that the last thing we give to God is our tongue.

Doing personal work makes you live a clean life. When you begin to talk about Jesus Christ to a friend, the first thing he may do is to tell you about some of your faults: "Yes, and you got angry yesterday." Then you say to yourself, "I am not fitted for personal work." Do not stop doing the work, but give up the thing that hinders the work.

In Marshalltown, Iowa, there was a young girl who saw other people doing personal work. She
wanted to do it. So she talked to another young girl. While the religious meetings were going on there, a play came to the town, and the next night they both went to the theater. The unconverted girl leaned over and touched the other, who was sitting just in front of her, on the shoulder, saying, "Oh! you are here, are you?"

"Yes."

"What made you come?"

"I thought it was a nice, clean play," was the answer.

"Yes," replied the other girl, "but don't you ever talk to me again about Jesus Christ. I think you had better get down in the straw in the Gospel Tent with the rest of them yourself." You have got to live straight when you do personal work.

The brother of a young woman who was engaged to be married, said to her, "Nellie, is Will a Christian?"

"I don't believe he is," she replied.

"You belong to the Christian Endeavor," said her brother, "and you are engaged to him; you ought to find out about that and have a word with him."

"I am going to the ball to-night, and I will speak to him about it," said the sister. That evening she said, "Will, are you a Christian?"

"Why no, of course not," was the answer; "are you?"

"Yes, I am a Christian."

"Then what are you doing here?" And that was quite right. You see there are lots of little things that you have to stop if you do personal work, and some people don't want to pay the price.

My Bible says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." I think the verse is true the other way too: "If you are not a fisher of men, you are not following Jesus." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, and so shall ye be my disciples."

The man from whom I learned more about personal work than from perhaps any one else was a young man named Fred, who used to go with us in our revival meetings to take care of the tents. When he would come into a town, he would hunt up a dray, put the tent on the dray, then climb up beside the driver, and without any preliminaries he would try to lead the man to Christ. When Fred became a Christian, he could not read a verse of Scripture, if it was at all long, without making mistakes. He came from a drunkard's home; his father had died a drunkard. The boy had seven brothers, three sisters, and a mother, all unsaved. He was spoken to by a worker in a meeting, and was thus led to Christ. After his conversion, he went home and started family prayers. He got down on his knees with all his brothers and sisters laughing and dancing around the room, and uttered just one prayer, "Lord, save mother." He prayed there every day with the boys making all that noise. At the end of a year and a half he had won his mother to Christ. At the end of two years two of his brothers went to a meeting and said, "We want what Fred has got." They got it. The last I heard he had led four of
his brothers and two of his sisters and his mother to Christ.

What I specially learned from him was to go straight at it and not be always waiting to get ready to get ready,—you never do anything that way. Fred was with us for five years, and always sat on the platform. He used to watch the audience all through the sermon, and just the moment the speaker would give the invitation, he would go down and climb over the seats, if necessary, to get hold of his man. Other people would wait to get ready to get ready. Sometimes even a Sunday-school superintendent would walk down the aisle as if he were going for a stroll. You could see them walking around while Fred was bringing his man up to the front. He brought seventy-five young men to Christ in a college town in Iowa, and to a public confession of Christ. Sometimes Fred would have to be up all night with the tent on account of the cyclones of the West, but he never was so tired that he could not talk to men about their souls. He used to say, "I am not going to stay in any town fifteen minutes before they know where I stand."

The way to learn to do personal work is by doing it. No man ever learns until he begins. The place to begin is the first place you find open. Do the thing next to you, and other opportunities will be found. Carry your Bible with you always.

Learn a very few texts to begin with, texts which have taken hold of you, and which seem clearer than any others. Use them tactfully, but always use at least one. The first text I would give you is one that suits any case you will meet, John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." There is something about the Word of God which convinces men, even though they claim to be infidels. Never argue. Remember what Paul teaches us in his thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians: "Love suffereth long, and is kind."
WANT to tell in this article the simple story of my experience in personal work, and how it has completely transformed my spiritual life. About a year and a half ago I went over to England to report the revival work of Dr. Torrey and Mr. Alexander for a syndicate of American journals. I found the evangelists working in the city of Bolton. A few days after I began reporting the meetings, Mr. Alexander came to me and urged me not to be content with describing the proceedings, but to get right down into the audience and do personal work in soul-winning night after night. I thought at first that my forte was writing articles about the revival, and leading people to Christ in that way. I had led not a few in my Sunday-school class to Christ, and had given all sorts of gospel and religious talks for many years; but I had not made a practice of doing personal work among strangers as well as friends.

As Mr. Alexander pleaded with me to do personal work, I saw that it was my duty, and although I shrank from the ordeal, I declared that I would begin at once. I did so, and it was hard work. Night after night I went up and down the aisles in the revival meetings pleading with men and boys to take Christ, showing them the way of salvation the best I could. For weeks, however, I dreaded the work, and did it merely from a sense of duty. Gradually I grew to love it, and to realize that it was my duty to do personal work not only in the revival meetings at night, but on the street-cars as I rode down town, in the shops where I made purchases, on the streets, and wherever I went. You see I had had a taste of the work, and was beginning to love it.

About this time I heard Dr. Torrey tell how D. L. Moody, early in his career, made up his mind that he would never let twenty-four hours pass without speaking to some one about his eternal welfare. I said to myself, "If Moody could do that, I can," and I commenced to practise it. At first I would sometimes forget it until perhaps eleven or twelve o'clock at night, when I was preparing to go
to bed. But I would don my overcoat and go out on the street to fulfil my promise of speaking to somebody about taking Christ as his Saviour. Perhaps I would not speak to the first one who came along, but, with a prayer to God for guidance, I would enter into conversation with the second or third man I met, and quickly lead up to the subject of his salvation.

Through this resolution of never letting a day pass without speaking to some one, I have had the joy and privilege of leading people to Christ in unusual and unexpected places. In England they ride on the tops of the tram-cars, and one day in Oxford, during the last Torrey-Alexander campaign in England, I had the joy of leading the conductor of the car to Christ right on top of the car as we rode along one of the main streets of the city.

While returning to America on the steamship "Carmania" a few weeks ago, I found two young men at my table who were from Plymouth, England. They had attended the Torrey-Alexander revival meetings in that city, but had not been greatly impressed. They were shipwrights, and had been out of work for months, and were going to America to seek positions. One evening, at the close of a concert, I entered into conversation with them, quickly turned it to the question of salvation, and for an hour pleaded with them to accept Christ as their Saviour, They did not surrender that night, but I arranged to meet them again, and the following evening, in the dining-saloon, we again had a long talk. Finally, one of them reached across the table, grasped my hand, and said, "Yes, I will take Jesus as my Saviour." The other one followed, and a joy that cannot be described surged up in my heart as they uttered those words. Sitting in the saloon at that time were two Cambridge University graduates with whom I was making the voyage, both earnest Christian men. Motioning them to come over, I told them that the young men from Plymouth had taken Christ, and right there in the dining-saloon we had a wonderful little prayer-meeting. The Cambridge men prayed, I prayed, and the two young shipwrights offered beautiful prayers, telling God that they surrendered themselves to him.

I told the young converts that salvation was the most practical thing in the world, and that they should as Christians take everything to God in prayer. I told them that if they prayed earnestly to God for work, he would quickly give it to them. When I reached Toronto, I received a beautiful letter from them saying that within two days after their arrival in New York each had secured an excellent position, and that they were spending their leisure time at the Young Men's Christian Association. And this after they had been out of work for many months in England.

A striking sequel to this incident occurred only a few Sunday nights ago here in Philadelphia. As I was sitting in a front seat near the close of the revival meeting, one of the converts leaned over and said to me, "Don't you remember me? I was with you on the 'Carmania.' It was your words, spoken to two young men who had taken Christ,
that resulted in my conversion to-night." After the meeting had ended, he told me that, sitting in the saloon of the "Carmania" one Sunday evening, seven-eighths drunk, he heard me quote a verse of Scripture to the two young converts. It was a favorite verse of his mother's, and he said that it had haunted him ever since he had landed in America. He had come to Philadelphia where he had a brother, and had drunk and led a worldly life, but finally God's spirit strove so strongly with him that he went down to the mission determined to give his heart to God. As the young man told me his story, I don't know which was the happier, he or I. He declared that before he slept that night, he would send the good news home to his old mother in the north of Ireland.

I could multiply instances showing how it is possible, and our bounden duty, to lead people to Christ in all sorts of places wherever we go. During the last few months, in Canada, and here in Philadelphia, four street-car conductors have told me that they would begin the Christian life. One day, in an elevator in New York, the colored lad who was running the elevator said he would accept Christ, and that he would carry his Bible right with him and read it every day.

In doing personal work, I have found it absolutely necessary to carry a Bible with readable type in my pocket constantly. We cannot possibly lead people to Christ unless we show them the way from the Word of God, and how can we fight in this great warfare unless we have our sword with us, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? It was in Liverpool, about a year ago, that I first began to carry my Bible in my coat pocket. One day I heard a man who had been a great sporting man in the city—an amateur boxer and a referee at the biggest prize fights, who had been converted in the Torrey-Alexander meetings—testify that whenever he changed his coat he changed his Bible from one coat to the other. As I heard him, I said to myself: "Well, I'm ashamed of myself. Here I've been a Christian from boyhood, have been a member of the church since I was nine years of age, and I do not carry my Bible, while this man, who has been redeemed only a few months, is so loyal that he always carries it." I determined then and there that I would carry my Bible wherever I went, and during the past year I cannot express in words what a marvelous blessing the practise has been to me. I have God's Word always at hand for reading on the street-cars and trains and for committing verses to memory. By the way, I commit a verse to memory every day, and I wish every reader might do the same, for the habit has been of untold benefit to me.

A few years ago, in Toronto, I gave a pocket Bible to a newspaper reporter who is a college graduate, on condition that he would always carry it with him, read at least three chapters a day and five on Sunday, and learn a verse each day. I have recently received a beautiful letter from him, telling what a blessing and help it has been to his life to have the Bible always with him, and that
the daily committing of a verse to memory had given him increased victory over temptation.

Reader, I don't say that this personal work is easy, but I do say that it is your duty. It will seem to you oftentimes, as you get on a street-car or railway train, that it will take all the pleasure out of your journey if you have to be speaking to people about their souls' salvation, but it is just an illustration of the truth of Christ's words, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." Are you willing to give up your own selfish pleasure for the sake of winning a soul from death to life? If so, you will find a joy unspeakable and full of glory springing up in the depths of your heart, and flowing forth as a joy-bringing and joy-giving stream. Oh, it pays a thousand times to be always watching for opportunities to win souls to Jesus. Dr. Torrey recently declared that he never boarded a railway train without asking God to give him a message to some one about his soul before the journey ended.

About how to begin. The best way is to follow the advice of D. L. Moody which he gave to Dr. Torrey and other theological students years ago, when they once asked him how to begin. He told them in three words, "Go at it!" Dr. Torrey says that he went at it, and has been at it ever since. The two texts I most frequently use are John 1:12 and Romans 10:9, 10. The last tells of the two things which it is necessary to do in order to be definitely saved: first, believe in one's heart; second, confess with one's mouth. To-day I con-
The Art of Taking Men Alive

By Charles Gallaudet Trumbull

IT IS well for every professed follower of Christ to face two facts, and to face them squarely: first, that unless he is personally seeking to win individuals to Christ, there is sin in his life; second, that the winning of individuals to Christ is an art, and is the most difficult art in the world. We must resolutely keep these two facts always together, for to think on the second only is to miss the duty enforced by the first. Merely because this supreme duty of our lives is so difficult that it taxed to the uttermost the perfect power and skill of the Son of God, is no reason for the lowliest follower of his to shirk that duty. For we have the man Christ Jesus as our teacher, and the strength of the glorified Christ as our present help.

Jesus had the whole world to choose from, when he began the special training of the few men with whom he was to entrust the beginning of the winning of the world to himself. Several of these chosen few were fishermen. That was not an accident, nor was their fishing a mere incident in their previous life. One of their earliest lessons in soul-winning was taught through a miraculous fishing experience that Jesus gave them. Still more clearly there was no accident in this. A study of Christ's methods of winning men to himself, and a study of what Christ's followers have been permitted to do in this same work, reveal something of why Christ chose fishermen to be his apostles, and how he trained fishermen to become fishers of men.

The quaint old New England character "Fishin' Jimmy" had convictions on the subject of his occupation. "'To his simple comprehension," writes Mrs. Slosson, the author of that story, "the fisherman's art was a whole system of morality, a guide for everyday life, an education, a gospel. It was all any mortal man, woman, or child, needed in this world to make him or her happy, useful, good ... And he always spoke of his pursuit as one speaks of something very dear, very sacred." His first real interest in Christ was when he learned that here was "'Some One that was dreffle fond o' fishin' an' fishermen. Some One that sot everythin' by the water, an' useter go along by the lakes an' ponds, an' sail on 'em, an' talk with the men that was fishin'. An' how the fishermen all liked him, 'nd asked his d'vice, an' done jest's he telled 'em about the likeliest places to fish; an' how they allers ketched more for mindin' him ... An' so fust thing I knowed I says to myself, 'That's the kind o' teacher I want. If I could come acrost a man like that, I'd jest foller him, too, through thick an' thin' ... I tell ye, his r'liging's a fishin' r'liging all through.'" Were Fishin' Jimmy's views extreme?
The successful fisherman embodies the very characteristics which it is a duty for every soul-winner to have,—and that means every follower of Christ. Patience, knowledge of the interests of his fish, knowledge of the bait that will attract fish, faith in things unseen, skill, delicacy of touch, refusal to be discouraged, unlimited perseverance, conviction that he has not yet exhausted the possibilities of his art,—all these and more make the true fisherman. And it is important to note that not a single one of these essentials is beyond the power of any one to attain. If one is not a "born" fisherman, he can learn how; and he must. Christ's demands are always reasonable. He never enjoins the impossible without making it possible.

Two great fishing principles stand out in the record of Christ's winning of his disciples,—and the manner of their winning was part of their training for their winning of others. Yet those two first principles of the art of taking men alive are rarely emphasized by personal workers, and the ignoring of these principles in practise is a common cause of failure. To put them in fishing terms, they are these: the use of bait, and the choice of bait that will appeal to the fish.

The best human bait in the world is honest, sincere commendation. The surest way to drive men from us is to condemn or criticize. Is it reasonable to suppose that we can win men to ourselves or to Christ if we begin by telling them of their sins? Christ did not work that way. He did not hesitate to denounce sin, nor to expose the wrong in those who were attacking or denouncing him. But when he set out to win a person to himself, it seemed to be his set purpose to find something in that one which he could commend, and then to commend in all heartiness.

The men whom Jesus first invited to follow him undoubtedly had as glaring sins and as obvious defects as most of us have to-day. Those imperfections must have been quite as much of a trial to Jesus as our fellows' shortcomings are to us. But he did not commence by telling them of this, nor did he seek to help them at the outset by showing them what was wrong with them. His first recorded word to faulty Simon was, "Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Rock," as though to say, "for you deserve a stalwart name." So with another of the disciples: there is no reason to suppose that Jesus could not have found, and did not see, any sin in Nathanael; but instead of condemning that which was there, Jesus' first word was in outspoken, hearty admiration of the fact that this man was particularly free from craftiness or deceit.

The Gospels do not record our Lord's first words to each of the twelve, but there is reason to believe that this method of approach was his method with them all, not excepting Judas Iscariot. Even apocryphal tradition preserves this deliberate intention of Christ to see the good in others, when it tells of a dead dog lying by the roadside, kicked aside and scorned by priest and Levite, until Jesus of Nazareth, passing by, looked at the little animal and said gently, "His teeth are very white."
We must learn to work in that way, if we would take men alive as Christ did. We shall never lose, but always gain, in our influence for Christ, if we determinedly seek that which can be commended in one whom we would win, and speak heartily of it. An incident in H. Clay Trumbull’s “Individual Work for Individuals” well illustrates how he, in a difficult case, applied this secret of success in such work.

“Entering, one November morning, at the Grand Central Station in New York, a crowded train for Boston, I found the only vacant seat was one alongside of a pleasant-faced, florid-complexioned, large-framed young man, and that seat I took, and began to read the morning paper. After a few minutes my seat-mate took from his valise a large case bottle of whiskey and a metal drinking-cup. Before drinking himself he proffered it to me. As I thanked him and declined it, he drank by himself. I still read my paper, but I thought of my seat-mate, and I watched for an opportunity. In a little while he again turned to his valise, and, as before, took out his whiskey bottle. Once more he offered it to me, and again I declined it with thanks. As he put away the bottle, after drinking from it the second time, he said:

“‘Don’t you ever drink, my friend?’

“‘No, my friend, I do not.’

“‘Well, I guess you think I’m a pretty rough fellow.’”

Most of us, if we had felt any responsibility at all for speaking a word for Christ to this seat-mate, would have already pointed out the danger and the wrong of his drinking. Or if not, we would have felt that he had himself now made the opening for a word of honest reproof, and with that we would have begun. Surely there was no opportunity to commend anything in this whiskey-drinking stranger. But Dr. Trumbull had learned the first principle of man-fishing, and here was his friendly, honest answer, based on the one admirable quality in this man that loving penetration had discovered:

“‘I think you’re a very generous-hearted fellow.’”

And then a frank suggestion could be made in the same instant, because the first word had won, not repelled, the man. Even now it must be made in a way that should not give offense, so Dr. Trumbull continued: “‘But I tell you frankly I don’t think your whiskey-drinking is the best thing about you.’”

Nor did the whiskey-drinker ever live who was in any doubt on this point, and promptly came the answer:

“‘Well, I don’t believe it is.’”

From that skilful, loving, winning start it was not difficult to have an earnest talk with this young fellow about his need of Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour, and before the two separated the younger man had promised to think on these things.

A striking lesson in fishing that our Lord again taught by his own example illustrates the other fishing principle, that we must use bait that will appeal to the fish; in other words, that we must work from
the other man's interests. Jesus did not take it for granted that men would be interested in him or his message until he had interested himself in them. Why should we expect to do better than he? Of course, we cannot begin with another's interests unless we know what those interests are. And if we do not know, then we must make it our business to find out.

When Jesus was teaching by the lake-side, using the boat of the fishermen who had been at the thankless task of cleaning nets after a night of failure, it did not call for the supernatural knowledge that he had of “what was in man” to realize that the men he was trying to train were more interested in the fish that they had failed to catch, just then, than in anything else in the universe. It is not necessary nor reasonable to suppose that the Master turned aside from his spiritual teaching and caused the miraculous draught of fishes simply in order that he might have a good illustration to use, of what he wanted these disciples to take up as their life-work. They were already fishermen; he could easily have said to them, with their nets empty, “from henceforth thou shalt take men alive ['take alive' is the meaning of the Greek word translated 'catch'],” and they would have understood him.

But they were not interested in taking men alive then; they were absorbingly interested in catching fish. To be sure, this was not nearly so worthy an interest as the saving of men's souls; but Christ took men as they were, not as he would have liked them to be, and he was perfectly ready to give their interests, for the time, his own supreme attention. After he had given such proof of this as they never forgot, and they had taken care of the nets that were breaking and the boats that were sinking from the draught of fishes which he had helped them to catch, they were ready to think of other things than fish. They were ready, then, to be interested in anything that he had to offer, because he had interested himself in them.

How differently most of us would have handled that situation! How we would have stormed and protested and argued with those men, indignantly urging them to forget their fish for a few minutes and turn their attention to something worth while! How surprised or hurt or discouraged we have been, in our own experiences, because those upon whom we have urged the blessings of life in Christ are obviously and persistently more interested in the unworthy affairs of this unworthy world! Have we ever given ourselves in any absorbing way to a study of what we are pleased to consider their “unworthy” interests, in order to be of genuine service to them? If we have not, we are failing in a first principle of the art upon which depends our loyalty to the Great Commission.

Fishin' Jimmy's "wonder was never ending that, in the scheme of evangelizing the world, more use was not made of the 'fishin' side of the story. 'Hain't they ever tried it on them poor heathen?' he would ask earnestly. . . . 'I should think 't would 'a' ben the fust thing they'd done. Fishin' just, an' religion's sure to follow.'"
The art to which the Master gave himself and his best is worthy of our lifetime study and practise. Only let us not forget that it cannot be learned except in practise. The only mistake to fear is the mistake of not trying. Wrote Dr. Trumbull of the blessed outcome of his endeavor to win a young soldier whom he feared he had mistakenly approached: "That experience with my first young convert in the army encouraged me in my individual work with individuals there. I saw that it were better to make a mistake in one’s first effort at a personal religious conversation, and correct that mistake afterwards, than not to make any effort. There can be no mistake so bad, in working for an individual soul for Christ, as the fatal mistake of not making any honest endeavor. How many persons refrain from doing anything lest they should possibly do the wrong thing just now! Not doing is the worst of doing. 'Inasmuch as ye did it not, depart from me,' is a foretold sentence of the Judge of all."