

The Banker's Daughter



The Banker's Daughter

by Dr. Max Louis Rossvally
(author of *Charlie Coulson, The Drummer Boy*)

Originally published in *Good News*, Vol. 17, No. 2,
Feb 1926 and in Vol. 17, No. 3, March 1926.

“And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matthew 19:29)

Shortly after my conversion I resigned my position in the United States Army and opened a mission for the conversion of my Jewish brethren in one of the large cities of America. From the very beginning of my work for Christ I met with great opposition. Many who had been my best friends now became my worst enemies. Among these was a man, Moses Bamberg, who had been my schoolmate and companion, having been born in the same town.

When he learned that I had begun a mission he persuaded his son Joseph to start an opposition mission. They called our mission “The Conversion Shop,” and they styled their mission “The Anti-Conversion Society.” Night after night the young Jews came in scores to disturb our meetings, and they threatened to break up the mission inside of three months. They even went so far as to say they would spend money freely to have me tarred and feathered and driven out of the city. My answer to them was, “Dear brethren, if this is my work, it will not take you three days to break it up; but, by God’s help, I mean to prove to you that this is the work of Christ. Though I stand alone with Christ, I am in the majority against the 125,000 Jews in this city.”

For the first few weeks I did not dare to close my eyes during prayer, for the Jews came prepared with rotten apples and potatoes, ready to throw at me the moment I began to pray. I would kneel down with my eyes open, and say, “Brethren, I will pray for you, but I will watch you while I pray.” One Friday evening they knocked over the stove, broke the piano, and insulted a lady when she arose and said she had found Christ in that mission.

The son of my friend Bamberg, jumping upon a seat, shouted, sneeringly, “We know how you get converts!” and, pointing to the lady, “How much did that fellow pay you for saying you are converted?” This same question they asked of every Jew or Jewess who professed conversion. That same evening about 15 of the “Anti-Conversion Society” followed me on my way home. One of them struck me with his cane upon my head and arm, and Joseph Bamberg threw me down, jumped upon me, and bruised me severely, saying, “Now preach your Jesus,” and for the next six days I was unable to leave my room due to the injuries.

Miss Sarah Oppenheim’s Conversion

The little band of Jewish Christians now began to pray that God would convert someone of whom

the Jews could not ask the question, "How much did you get for saying you are converted?" And in a short time these fervent prayers were answered, for Christ, the Jew's Messiah, did convert a young lady, Miss Sarah Oppenheim, the only child of a wealthy Jewish banker. When this gentleman heard of his daughter's conversion he said to her, "Sarah, you either get Jesus out of your head or leave my house." "Father," she said, "Jesus is not in my head, but in my heart, and, God helping me, I mean to keep Him there. I have always been obedient to you and my mother, but I am now willing to give up my home, my carriage, my silks, my jewels, everything, for my newly-found Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God."

So she left her home, and went to work on Grand Street, running a sewing machine for a few shillings a week. Night after night she came to our mission; and on several occasions asked the Jews who came to disturb our meetings, "Dear friends, why do you not ask me how much I received for saying I am converted to Jesus? You know my father's house, you know his bank, and some of you attended the same school with me. Can you believe that I would deceive you? God forbid! I am happier today in my cheap dress, and at my sewing machine, with Christ in my heart, than I ever was in my father's house, with all the riches this world can give, but without Christ."

Miss Oppenheim desired to be baptized by immersion, and it was announced in the papers that Dr. Alman, a converted Jewish Rabbi (but now a Baptist minister), would administer the ordinance on the following Sunday night. As was to be expected, this brought a great number of Jews, and some of the friends and relatives of the Oppenheim family, who were much incensed at the young lady's action. They even refused to recognize her. The father, David Oppenheim, was present in the gallery for a special purpose. He was there to curse his child.

After descending into the baptistry, Dr. Alman repeated, in a silence that could be almost felt, the words, "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29). The candidate was then immersed, and, as she was raised from the water, her father, in a loud voice, shouted in Hebrew a curse, which, translated, would be, "May you instantly drop dead in that water. You are no longer my child. Take your father's curse." He then left the building.

Miss Oppenheim recognized her father's voice, and before leaving the baptistry she brushed her long black hair back from her face, and with folded hands, and eyes cast heavenward, looking more like an angel than a human being, she said, "Jesus, lover of my soul, I pray Thee, do not charge my dear father with this blasphemy, but turn his curse into a blessing and convert his soul."

Joseph Bamberg Makes a Confession

Joseph Bamberg's sister and Miss Oppenheim had always been dear friends, and therefore Sarah Oppenheim took a great spiritual interest in the young man. She frequently conversed with him about his soul, and he now began to be less troublesome, for he could not help observing that there was something very remarkable in the Christian character of that young lady. She had succeeded in persuading him to read the New Testament, a copy of which she had presented him with; but he read it secretly, and the more he read the more interested he became. We noticed his absence from the mission for nearly five weeks (he had always occupied the same seat close to the door), and some of his companions began to inquire, "What has become of Bamberg; is he sick, or has he left the

city?" All this time the young man had been secretly reading the New Testament, and the more he read the more he became convinced that Christ was indeed the Messiah.

One Tuesday evening Bamberg came early to the mission. He entered quietly, with a smile upon his face, and bowed to me before taking his seat—not where he had usually sat among his companions, but on the other side of the house, among the Christians, and I noticed he had a hymnbook open, in his hand, and sang with the people. Previous to this he and his companions had either torn up the books that were given them, thrown them under the seats, or closed them, and began to talk, laugh or sneer when we began to sing. All through that service the Jews kept looking at Bamberg and wondering why, after so long an absence, he was not sitting with them. One elderly lady, a Jewess, was converted that evening, and after she and several others had testified to the love of Christ, Miss Oppenheim made a most touching appeal to her young friends. She knelt down in the aisle, and offered a soul-stirring prayer on behalf of every unconverted Israelite.

While she was still upon her knees Bamberg jumped to his feet, and, facing his Jewish brethren, said, "*Boys, no doubt you are surprised to see me on the opposite side of the house this evening. You all know me, and also know that I was the first to start the 'Anti-Conversion Society.' I have persuaded you to join me. I have spent my own and my father's money to break up this mission. I threw my hat in Dr. Rossvally's face for daring to ask me to be a Christian. Instead of resenting it, and knocking me down as I deserved, he said, 'Young man, if you had done that before my conversion, and I had been in possession of a loaded pistol, I would have put a bullet through you; but tonight, thank God, I can give you your hat back without a harsh feeling, knowing that you are blind. I shall pray to Christ to open your eyes and soften your heart.'*"

At another time, you remember, we followed Dr. Rossvally on his way home from the mission, I knocked him down and injured him severely; for several days he was not able to leave his room. We all expected to be arrested and punished, and if that were to happen, we agreed to stand by each other and to give false testimony against the meshumed (bastard, a name applied to a Jew who embraces the Christian religion). But he did not accuse us before the law. All this, in connection with what I have seen and heard in this mission night after night, and carefully reading the New Testament, comparing it with the Old, has fully persuaded me that Jesus is the true Messiah. And I am ready this evening to testify to that fact, and defend with my life all who call upon His name."

As Bamberg finished speaking, the Jews hurriedly put their hats on and left the mission, saying, "We will see you on your way home, you meshumed. Just wait until you get home, and see what your father and mother will say!" As they passed out of the door he called after them, "For God's sake, do not leave this house, but do as I have done—come to Jesus!"

After receiving his parents' curse, Joseph Bamberg left all his former associates and identified himself with God's people. He worked very hard in our mission, and prepared himself for the ministry, and is now one of the most successful evangelists in the States. His wonderful conversion, and his earnestness in God's work, has been the means of leading scores of Jews and hundreds of Gentiles to Him "Who is altogether lovely." What a wonderful change! This man, who at one time would have spared no expense to have me tarred and feathered for preaching Christ, is now a faithful worker for the Master himself, and one of my dearest earthly friends. Of the many letters which I have received from him since his conversion, the following will show the good work he is doing, and how the Lord is blessing his labors:

Philadelphia, Feb. 6, 18--.

My Beloved Brother in Christ,

No doubt you will be rejoiced to hear of the glorious revival in this city, and the wonderful things which the God of Abraham is doing for us here. Many of our Jewish brethren and ungodly Gentiles try to disturb our meetings (as I used to disturb yours), but I hold on to Jesus, and I must tell you something of the dear Lord's work here. You know, dear brother, that many people come from the church the same as they go to it; the Word does not touch their consciences, and they remain under the power of sin and Satan. This I find to be the case in most places when first I commence the work; but the dear Master visited us at Philadelphia, and manifested the power of His life-giving Spirit upon the souls of men and women.

My two lady cousins, who gave their hearts to Christ last year, while I was holding meetings in Brooklyn, are very happy. My Aunt Clara has bestowed her curse upon both of them, and also Rachel, the eldest, is engaged to marry the Reverend Culvert, a missionary to the Sandwich Islands. They are to be married next month, and she goes with us to labor for Christ. And now, may the God of all bless and keep you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus,
JOSEPH BAMBERG

Herman Wolf Cast Out

Among Joseph Bamberg's associates, before his conversion, was a young man named Herman Wolf. He was also one of my most bitter opponents. He was the messenger that carried the news of Joseph's conversion, on that memorable Tuesday evening, to Moses Bamberg, the father. He declared that "he would like to see the man that could make a fool of him, as they had of Joseph, and convert him." Just three weeks after he had made this little speech he was converted at our mission, while Miss Oppenheim knelt on one side of him and another Jewish convert on the other. I shall never forget the expression upon the face of that young Hebrew when he arose from his knees; he fairly shouted for joy, and said, "I shall go home at once and tell my father and mother I am ready to receive their curse, for I have found the Messiah, Who said, 'When my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up.'" Some of his companions who heard him at once left the mission, and hurried to his father's house. When Herman Wolf arrived at home he found his father at the open door with a shotgun in his hand, and his mother standing by his side.

They were both very excited, and the father said, "Herman, if you attempt to enter this house, I will blow your brains out, even if I should die upon the gallows for it. You have disgraced yourself, your parents, your religion, and your God. And now may you be accursed! May the earth swallow you up, like Dathan and Abiram! You are no longer a child of mine. Go!"

Herman had been for a long time employed at his uncle's, who was a wholesale clothing manufacturer on Broadway. When he arrived at his place of business the next morning, he found his uncle awaiting him. The news of a Jew's conversion is soon spread all over the Jewish community.

He addressed him as follows, “Walk into the office and get what is due you up to last night, and never do you darken my doors again. I have heard all about your doings last evening, and I wish you and everything connected with that Conversion Shop were in Gehenna (Hell).” Herman was now accursed and cast off by his parents, discharged by his employer, and shunned by his relatives and former companions, but he had found His most precious Saviour, and his whole trust was in Jesus.

Like Joseph Bamberg, Herman Wolf’s greatest desire, after his conversion, was to become a preacher, but he was out of employment, and the little money he had saved was soon gone. No Jew would employ him, and among Gentiles he was unknown. He walked the streets of New York daily, seeking employment, and was present at the mission every evening. After many days he accepted the only situation offered him—that of a brush-boy in a barber’s shop on Wall Street. When his former companions heard where he was, and what he was doing, they came every day at noon, and, standing before the shop, said, “Herman Wolf, is that all your dear Jesus can do for you? We can do better than that ourselves, and not half try.”

Nearly every time he led in prayer at the mission Herman would ask, “Oh, God! take this brush away from me, that my Jewish brethren may not triumph over me; but if I must be a brush-boy, give me grace to bear it, and help me to say, ‘Thy will be done,’ and in Thine own good time open the way for me to preach Thy Gospel.”

This prayer was answered in a very striking manner in a very few months. George Sterry (of the firm of Sterry Bros.), a wealthy and benevolent Christian man, one who took a great interest in the conversion of Jews, and who had often visited our mission and listened to the prayers of the young converts—among them the prayers of the brush-boy, Wolf—had in his employ a great many clerks. About this time his shipping clerk left him, and Mr. Sterry wrote me a note asking if I had a young man at my mission whom I could recommend to fill that position. I at once thought of Herman Wolf, and that evening I told him, “Herman, I think the Lord is about to answer your prayer, and take that brush away from you. Here is a note; take it to Mr. Sterry tomorrow, where you will find good employment.”

He did so, and entered Mr. Sterry’s office at a salary of 15 dollars per week. Herman continued to come to our mission every evening, and seemed to be perfectly happy, spiritually and socially; but in the midst of his happiness he was called upon to pass through deep waters, for the Lord tried his faith very severely.

Accused of Stealing

After Herman had been in his new situation about six months, Mr. Sterry sent for me one day, and astonished me by saying, “My friend, I am afraid that you and I have been misled by the young man, Herman Wolf. This morning my banking clerk, after returning from the bank, placed a 50-dollar bill in the bookkeeper’s desk; he then, with the other clerks, went to lunch. No one was left on the premises but Herman Wolf. When they returned, the 50-dollar bill was missing.

Our bookkeeper has been with us for 19 years, and all the other clerks have been with us for years. We have always found them to be perfectly trustworthy. They handle thousands of dollars every week, and we have never before missed a dollar. The money is gone, and I am assured by all my clerks that no one could have taken it but that young Jew, Herman Wolf.”

“Mr Sterry,” I asked, “what do you intend doing about this?”

“I shall simply discharge him, say nothing about the money, but let his own conscience be his accuser.”

“Do you think this is right, Mr. Sterry? And would Jesus, if He were on earth, pursue this course? If you will not accuse the young man yourself, permit me to do so in your presence.”

With that I went to Mr. Sterry’s office and called Wolf in. Taking his hand, and looking him in the eye, I said, “Herman Wolf, I have a very painful duty to perform. Mr. Sterry informs me that a 50-dollar bill has been stolen from the bookkeeper’s desk while the clerks were at lunch, and that there was no one but you could have taken the money. Is it possible that I have been deceived by one who prayed so often to God to make him a preacher? Is it possible that you have taken advantage of Mr. Sterry’s kindness? Is it possible that you have so soon forgotten the Lord Jesus, Whom you professed to love dearly? Have you nothing to say?”

For nearly a minute Herman stood as if transfixed, staring at the ceiling, then he crossed the room to where Mr. Sterry was sitting at his desk, and fell down upon his knees. Raising both hands, and looking Mr. Sterry in the face, he said, “Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, my dear Saviour and new-found Messiah, if I am guilty of what I am here charged with, let my benefactor see it in my face.” While Herman was uttering these words, Mr. Sterry never took his eyes from his face, and when he had finished speaking, he seemed convinced, for he arose and said, “Herman Wolf, I am satisfied that you are innocent .”

While we were yet talking in the office, a telegram came from Mr. Henry Sterry, a brother and partner of George Sterry, “I have taken a 50-dollar bill from the bookkeeper’s desk.” He had received a telegram from Pittsburgh, informing him that his son, who was skating, had broken through the ice, and was drowned and was told to come on at once. Not having any money with him he rushed into the office, and, there being no one there to whom he could explain, took the 50-dollar bill and started by the first train for Pittsburgh. When he arrived at Jersey City he thought someone with the office might be wrongly accused, and so telegraphed at once that he had the money.

After George Sterry had read the telegram he put his hand on Herman’s head, saying, “Herman Wolf I have often heard you ask the Saviour to open a way for you to preach the Gospel. Your prayer will be answered. I will pay for your education.” For nearly four years Mr. Sterry paid annually \$450, while Herman was at college in Massachusetts; and now he is minister of the Gospel, in charge of a very large congregation in the State of Delaware.

Copies of this account in booklet form are available from the Middletown Bible Church. Also available from the same author is the highly recommended booklet *Charlie Coulson, the Drummer Boy*.

The Middletown Bible Church

349 East Street

Middletown, CT 06457

860-346-0907

www.middletownbiblechurch.org