

**THE USEFUL CHRISTIA : A
MEMOIR OF THOMAS
CRANFIELD, FOR ABOUT FIFTY
YEARS A DEVOTED SUNDAY-
SCHOOL TEACHER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649256310

The Useful Christia : a memoir of Thomas Cranfield, for about fifty years a devoted Sunday-school teacher by Various

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VARIOUS

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SCHOOL TEACHER**

THE
USEFUL CHRISTIAN;

A MEMOIR

OF

THOMAS CRANFIELD,

FOR ABOUT FIFTY YEARS A DEVOTED SUNDAY-SCHOOL
TEACHER.

"Poor, yet making many rich."—2 Cor. vi. 10.

REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION, OF THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-
SCHOOL UNION.

PHILADELPHIA:
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
1122 CHESTNUT STREET.

New York: | Boston:
599 BROADWAY. | 741 WASHINGTON ST.

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MEMOIR
OF
THOMAS CRANFIELD.

CHAPTER I.

FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS MARRIAGE.

THOMAS CRANFIELD, the subject of this memoir was born near London, on the 12th March, 1758. He was the only son of Thomas Cranfield, a journeyman baker, at that time totally unlettered, and ignorant of the great truths of Christianity, although outwardly moral. His mother was able to read pretty fluently, and this was then considered no ordinary acquisition for a woman in her sphere of life.

His father had but two children—a son and a daughter; and being sensible of the disadvantages under which he laboured from the want of proper education, he was resolved that they should receive the benefit of early instruction. Accordingly, at seven years of age, Thomas was sent to a parochial school, and continued there until he was fourteen. He was, however, averse to instruction and impatient of control; and being naturally of

a fiery temper, he could ill brook the discipline and restraint necessary for a well-regulated school; he therefore frequently absented himself, without the knowledge of his parents, for two or three successive weeks. For these offences he was severely punished, both by his master and father, without effect. As he grew older, his aversion to books became still more manifest. He was generally last in his class, while in fights and contentions he was always foremost. Many were the pugilistic encounters which took place among his schoolfellows through his influence; and often has he induced them to sally out, in a body, for the purpose of attacking the scholars of a neighbouring school.

At this time he was addicted to the most vicious habits. In a letter to a friend, written shortly before his decease, he states—"I can say, with Mr. Whitefield, that I was froward from my birth. I was so brutish as to hate instruction, and shun all opportunities of receiving it. I can date very early acts of lying, filthy talking, and foolish jesting. I used to curse and swear, break the Sabbath, and steal money out of my mother's pocket. Indeed, it would be impossible to mention all the sins and offences of my younger days; my heart would fail me in this recital, were I not assured that Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for me."

He was likewise very cruel in his disposition, especially towards the brute creation. To torment horses, sheep, and pigs; to hang cats and dogs; and to wring the necks of ducks, fowls, sparrows, &c., afforded him merriment and delight. His father's cellar was his slaughter-house, where many such revolting scenes were exhibited. In

deed, one day, he hung, in sport, one of his play-fellows, and but for the interference of a labouring man, who providentially came to the spot at that juncture, and saw the lad suspended by the neck, he would have been strangled. At another time, merely from a love of mischief, he set fire to his father's house; but as it happened in the day time, the flames were extinguished before they occasioned much damage.

In his youth, he experienced some remarkable instances of providential deliverance. Once he fell into a deep muddy ditch, from which he was extricated with much difficulty, and apparently lifeless. At another time, when crossing the river in a boat, he fell overboard, but was picked up by a fisherman.

None of these things, however, suitably affected him. He grew more hardened in sin, and manifested a still stronger hatred to every thing like instruction. The consequence was, that, when removed from school, he was scarcely able to read the New Testament, and could write but very indifferently.

On attaining his fourteenth year, his father apprenticed him to Mr. Poole, a respectable tailor in London, who took great interest in his youthful charge, and laboured to the utmost of his power to promote his moral and spiritual improvement. He took him twice every Sabbath to a place of worship; but the service to him was so extremely wearisome, that he often endeavoured, though in vain, to prevail on his master to excuse his attendance.

Fifteen months passed away in this manner, during which time he had made considerable pro-

gress, not only in his business, but also in reading and writing; but being weary of restraint, he resolved to leave his master's house, and an accident soon occurred which induced him to put his design into execution. His master had a favourite bird, and Thomas was ordered to clean out its cage. In an unguarded moment, the door of its prison was left open, and the bird quickly made his escape. For this negligence the youth was threatened with punishment; and being predetermined to abscond from his situation, he thought this the most fitting opportunity; therefore, immediately packing up his clothes, and a few other articles, he left his home and travelled towards St. Alban's, where he arrived the same evening. At a lodging-house in this place he found an asylum for the night, for which he paid two-pence. He arose early the next morning, and set forward towards Northampton, a distance of about forty-five miles from St. Alban's, and reached that town in the evening of the same day. Notwithstanding the fatigue occasioned by so long a journey, the following morning found him on his way to Coventry; and here his scanty stock of money being exhausted, he sold his new suit of clothes for half a guinea. At this city he rested one day, and then pushed forward to Birmingham, where he hoped to obtain employment.

Mr. Poole, his master, upon hearing that his apprentice had absconded, immediately made the circumstance known to his parents, who sent in all directions to ascertain the place of his concealment, not doubting that he was somewhere about town; but after fruitlessly searching for him many days, they gave up all hopes of ever seeing him again, believing that he was drowned.