

This sermon delivered by Russell Conwell to his Grace Baptist (Temple) church congregation in 1912 is presented here due to inquiries about this story based on a slightly inaccurate version which some people have read elsewhere. Please note that the portrait referred to in the text is the property of the current Baptist Temple congregation which is located in Blue Bell, PA. An image of the portrait can be found at the end of this sermon. The portrait itself is not on the campus of Temple University. Note also, that the Samaritan Hospital referred to in the text is now the Temple University Hospital. The Baptist Temple building referred to in the text is now owned by the University. Although it is not currently in use, it is undergoing extensive renovation. It is not open to the public at this time, but should eventually be open once again when all the renovations are completed. The Wiatt Mite Society house referred to in the text was replaced by a new University building some time ago.

"THE HISTORY OF FIFTY-SEVEN CENTS"

Sermon By Russell H. Conwell

Sunday Morning, December 1, 1912.

We are here to unveil this picture of Hattie May Wiatt, a little girl who died in 1886. Years have gone rapidly by, but she still speaks. We intend to put this picture in the pastor's study, in the most prominent place, and keep it there through the years to come, that people as they pass through may ask: "What meaneth that picture?" And the story, simple and wonderful, may be told.

Little Hattie May Wiatt lived in a house near the church in which we then worshipped, at Berks and Mervine, which is now occupied by the Christian Church. It was a small church and was crowded, tickets of admission were obtained sometimes weeks in advance for every service. The Sunday school was as crowded as the rest of the congregation, and one day when I came down to the church, to attend Sabbath school, I found a number of children outside. They were greatly disturbed because they could not get in, on account of the crowd of children already in the Sunday school rooms of the church, and little Hattie May Wiatt, who lived near by, had brought her books and a contribution, and was standing by the gate, hesitating whether to go back home or wait and try to get in later. I took her up in my arms, lifted her to my shoulder, and then as she held on to my head - an embrace I never can forget - I carried her through the crowd in the hall, into the Sunday school room, and seated her in a chair away back in a dark corner. The next morning as I came down to the church from my home I came by their house and she was going up the street to school. As we met, I said: "Hattie, we are going to have a larger Sunday school room soon", and she said: "I hope you will. It is so crowded that I am afraid to go there alone". "Well", I replied, "When we get the money with which to erect a school building we are going to construct one large enough to get all the little children in, and we are going to begin very soon to raise the money for it". It was only in my mind as a kind of imaginary vision, but I wished to make conversation with the child. The next that I heard about it was that Hattie was very sick, and they asked me to come in and see the child, which I did, and prayed with her. I walked up the street, praying for the little girl's recovery, and yet all the time with the conviction that it was not to be.

Hattie May Wiatt died. She had gathered 57 cents - some have written 54 - which was left as her contribution towards securing another building for the children. After the funeral the mother handed me the little bag with the gathered 57 cents. I took it to the church and stated that we had the first gift toward the new Sunday school building; that little Hattie May Wiatt, who had gone on into the Shining World, had left behind her this gift towards it. I then changed all the money into pennies and offered them for sale. I received about \$250 for the 57 pennies; and 54 of those cents were returned to me by the people who bought them. I then had them put in a frame where they could be seen and exhibited them, and we received by a sale of the \$250 changed into pennies money enough to buy the next house north of the church at Berks and Mervine. That house was bought by the Wiatt Mite Society, which was organized for the purpose of taking the 57 cents and enlarging on them sufficiently to buy the property for the Primary Department of the Sunday school. In the Wiatt Mite Society was Mr. Edward O. Elliott (now one of our trustees) who has charge of this picture, and was then a member.

Then when the crowd became so great we could no longer get in there, the thought impressed itself upon our congregation, "We ought to have a larger church and a larger Sunday school room". Faith in God was the characteristic of this people, and they said, "We can do it", notwithstanding the fact that the church had a mortgage on it then, I think, of \$30,000, and that we had no money in advance. Yet the conviction was strong that we ought to build a larger church, and some ventured so far, though then it seemed absurd, to say that we might "build on Broad Street somewhere". But the Wiatt Mite Society, using the influence of Hattie May Wiatt's first deposit, raised the money to pay, as I said, for the house, and then the undertaking was before us, whether we would go out and try to build a large church. I walked over to see Mr. Baird, who lived on the corner where the German Athletic Association now has its meetings, and asked him what he wanted for this lot on which the Temple now stands.

He said that he wanted \$30,000. I told him that we had only 54 cents toward the \$30,000, but that we were foolish enough to think that some time we would yet own that lot. Encouraged by what he said, and with no opposition on the part of the Board of Deacons, I went around again to talk with him, and asked him if he would not hold the lot for five years. Mr. Baird said: "I have been thinking this matter over and have made up my mind I will sell you that lot for \$25,000, taking \$5,000 less than I think it is worth, and I will take the 54 cents as the first payment and you may give me a mortgage for the rest at 5%. I went back and so reported to the church, and they said: "Well, we can raise more money than 54 cents", but I went over and left the 54 cents with Mr. Baird and took a receipt for it as a part payment on the lot. Mr. Baird afterwards returned the 54 cents as another gift. Thus we bought the lot, and thus encouraged of God step by step, we went on constructing this building. We owed \$109,000 when it was done, but we had courage and faith in God then. We could hardly have dreamed then that in the number of years that followed this people, without wealth, each giving only as he could afford from his earnings, could have paid off so great a debt without any outside help. The only outside help that we really received was from Mr. Bucknell. Although our church was then called the Grace Baptist Church, he was not willing that we should call the new building a church until the mortgage was paid. He gave us \$10,000 on the condition that we call this building by some other name than the Grace Baptist Church, and that accounts for its being called The Temple instead of the Grace Church. Afterwards, when we did pay off the mortgage accounts, we dedicated the building and have a right now to call it whatever we choose, but after 21 years of being named as it is, there is no reason why we should change it, and there is no hope of doing so if we should undertake it. It will always be known as The Temple. I must state

here also that in the house purchased by the sale of the 57 cents was organized The Temple University.

Now, giving simply that brief introduction to the history of Hattie May Wiatt, I wish to call your attention to two or three important lessons in connection with it:

Who are the really great of this world? Who are the mighty? Is it the king, the emperor, the president, the famous, estimated by the kingdom of heaven and on the books of God? How little we know. Our nation has given credit to Washington, to Jefferson, to Lafayette, to the great Pitt of England, to the great generals and writers, and to great financiers like Morris, but there is one person hardly ever mentioned in our history who had so much influence in our affairs that as a nation we ought to have her picture in every public hall and in every school; yet because she was a young woman she seems to have been lost to the sight of the world. That was the Princess Elizabeth, sister of Louis XVI, of France. That little woman who was a treasure of feminine loveliness, with a heart as pure and bright as any that ever beat in the breast of woman; she who lived in the aristocracy of that time, but who plead for the starving, common people and protested again against Marie Antoinette's use of the public money as she did at Versailles, and spent her life in charity and loving kindness. She laid the foundation for the victory of this nation. Those who read history know that we could not have hoped for freedom if Rochambeau had not come to this country, if the French had not indorsed us, and if the French had not fought England on the waters and lands of Europe while we were trying to fight our battles here. If it had not been for Yorktown and its surrender we could never have hoped to obtain our freedom from what was then the tyrannous king of England. Who sent Rochambeau, who used the influence that brought his coming about? In some of the correspondence of Benjamin Franklin, who represented us at the Court of France, we find that the princess, a lovely young woman, was well acquainted with him and liked to talk with him upon philosophy and upon American ideas. She served as a "go-between" with Franklin and the queen, who used her influence with the king; for Louis XVI reminds one of Henry Ward Beecher's statement with reference to his church in Ohio, when he said: "It had only 19 members, 18 were women and the other one was nothing". Louis XVI was really nothing, and Marie Antoinette was the power indeed behind the throne, and behind Marie Antoinette was the Princess Elizabeth. It was she who opened the way for Franklin to reach the ear of the king. It was she who went to the Prime Minister of France and secured from him the condemnation of the arms, which were sold for a few cents apiece to America, yet were just as good as the best made in the world. It was she who secured the influence of the king to declare war on England in order that he might help America to her liberty. It was that young woman, acting all the time with continued energy, with prayer as well as with her social influence as one of the royal family, who really secured to us our liberty. Yet how little is said of her. In the great records of the history of mankind she should occupy a leading place. When I think of that innocent, sweet woman going to the guillotine on that morning in the old cart, encouraging all the humbler ones in the cart with her to keep up their courage, to hold their faith in God and to believe in a future world; when I see that noble, patriotic martyr going to that great square where she was beheaded, I see one of the great martyrs of earth. Yet in history, I say, we find our nation remarkably silent concerning her. And so in the history of Hattie May Wiatt - the name is new to some of you. She was a school girl, living in one of the homes of the industrious, honorable, upright and saving classes of society, not of the wealthy and great, yet think how her life was used; think what God did with her and the great, yet think how her life was used; think what God did with her and the 54 cents that was used of hers. A glance at it would put many to shame. Think of this large church; think of the membership added to

it - over 5600 - since that time. Think of the influence of its membership going out and spreading over the world. Think of the influence of the Sabbath school carried on in this great building for more than twenty years. Then think of the institutions this church founded. Think of the Samaritan Hospital and the thousands of sick people that have been cured there, and the thousands of poor that are ministered to every year. I received the report of the Samaritan Hospital for October last Saturday and find that during the month 2540 had visited the dispensary. By multiplying that by twelve to get the average for a year, we find that over 30,000 people every year go to the dispensary of that one hospital, and that does not include the inner wards for the poor or the private rooms. Then there is the other hospital, the Garrestson, also taken up by the people of this church. Without this church, it could never have been started. There they ministered in one single year to over 14,000 workmen, wounded and broken and dying. When we think, I say, of the ministrations of these hospitals that were started by the influence of this church and supported in the in the beginning by members of this church, what a long roll it is of the deeds of Christian kindness. Think of how in that Wiatt house were begun the very first classes of the Temple College. The Wiatt Mite Society provided the seats, the books and the teachers. Thus it began as an evening school, and it has gone on growing and developing through the years. That house, bought for 54 cents in the first place, was sold and the proceeds given to the Temple College in order that it might open on Park avenue, and when we moved out of the original church that was given bodily to the Temple College, and the college sold it to the Christian Church and used the money to erect a building next door to us on Broad Street. Think of the influence of that 57 cents just for a moment. Almost 80,000 young people have gone through the classes of the Temple University, and think where they are. A year ago we estimated that there were 500 young men and women in the business department who earned nothing before they went there and who, after six months' instruction, were earning from \$5 to \$15 a week. Think of the added income, of the added comforts, which even the smallest departments had given, and then think of the Departments of Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Theology, Household Arts, the Normal School and the Teachers' College - nearly 4000 are now going in and out its various doors in various parts of the city. Just estimate how they will go and teach thousands more, and how those thousands will in turn teach many thousands more in their lifetime; think how it sweeps the world in a century with one teacher, multiplying himself or herself a hundred times, perhaps, nearly every year. Two years ago - the smallest year of that work, - we took statistics of the Temple University students to learn their religious connection, and, of course, we found all kinds of religions because it is an undenominational institution. We ascertained that 504 young men of all denominations were studying for the Gospel ministry, in a single year. Now, if we graduate - and certainly we do - at least a hundred a year into the ministry of the various denominations, think what must have come to pass in twenty years. Think of it - two thousand people preaching the Gospel because Hattie May Wiatt invested her 54 cents; because she laid the foundations and gave her life for it.

I wish I had time to extend these remarks until you could realize more than one can without details. But I want to draw one or two more lessons and at once. In the first place, the people had faith in God, and they went ahead, trusting Him, and He has followed all the way. He has kept and protected us through every step with great care, and the future is just as safe, certainly, as is the past. Hattie May Wiatt was being used to do a mighty work. We sometimes think that when a life stops in eight years, or in ten, it is a shortened life, and that it is a broken life, that it was never completed. But in God's sight, every life is complete. Whether taken at eight, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, or seventy years, every life is complete, when God takes it; hence, that is the case with the life of Hattie May Wiatt. Think of the sorrow that was in that home. I shall never forget the broken-

hearted state of the family and friends who came to the funeral. Think of that mother sorrowing through all these years. I am making her heart more tender every moment as I speak, I am arousing within her the memory of those days which a mother can never forget. But Hattie died at the right time, she was called of God at exactly the moment when it was best for earth and for the kingdom to come that she should go. Her life was filled out, it was complete, and when we think of the influence of it upon the world, upon all the ages, we feel as though she was one of the greatest of earth who had accomplished that which leaders of armies had failed to do, and that which kings upon their thrones could not accomplish. Her life was just as long as any other.

The other thought that I would have dwelled upon if I had the time, is that being dead she yet speaks. Men may have powers of eloquence, they may sing with all the sweetness of angelic voices, and yet they may not speak as Hattie May Wiatt speaks tonight, as she will speak through your life as you go out and do differently from what you would have done if you had not been here. Hattie May Wiatt is speaking in tones of eloquence, sweet, divine and powerful, moving on upon the ages. Many men are counted great, many men are given credit for that which they do not do, but here is a life filled with motive power that sweeps on for all time. Twenty years and more have gone, and is she twenty years older in Heaven? When her mother meets her there will she be twenty years older than she was when she went?

When that little lad brought five loaves and two small fishes to be used of Christ for His great work of feeding the five thousand, it was precisely the same thing that Hattie May Wiatt did when she brought her 57 cents, and that lad and Hattie May Wiatt are now in the land on high. Does she see us? Yes, she does. It is one of the great comforts of life that every person is used of God, that every individual is loved just as closely and in careful detail as though he were the only person on this earth. Think of that, my brother, my sister, if there were not another person living on earth God could not take any more individual care of you than He now does. He sees and knows you; though you may think your life is humble, unknown, hidden, yet God sees all, and your life has probably just as great an influence for the uplift of mankind and the progress of His kingdom as has been the life of those who are seemingly great, seemingly famous in this world. There is no difference before God. The humblest of His Christian servants is doing just as much for His kingdom, when waiting, or doing faithfully their little duty, as are the seemingly great; and Hattie May Wiatt looks down from the towers of Heaven upon this world and sees all these myriads of powerful influences moving out upon the earth and shaping the course of the world beyond anything we can dream. She is happy on high with the thought that her life was so full, that it was so complete, that she lived really to be so old in the influences she threw upon this earth.

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The portrait of Hattie May Wiatt has been added to this page by the courtesy of the Baptist Temple Church in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.