



## *Blankets and a Prayer*

There was once a poor woman who lived with her husband and ten children in a mews in the west end of London. Those of you who have never seen London, must remember that the stables belonging to London houses were all built together, somewhere behind or near the houses to which they belonged, and all these stables joined together are called mews. So that a mews was like a little town of stables and coach-houses, with rooms above, where the coachmen and other stablemen lived, with their wives and children.

The families living in the mews were hardly ever visited or looked after by their rich neighbours, and the children ran about and played in front of the stables from morning to night, never going to school, and learned only to be rude and wicked.

The poor woman of whom I am telling you, wished to bring her children up well. That means that she wished them to be well-behaved and clean, and she did her best to make them so. But it never crossed her mind that they had souls to be saved, or even that she herself had a soul. If she knew that there is a God, she thought no more about him than of some heathen idol whose name we might have heard.

No wonder that poor Mrs Clare was a very unhappy woman. She was seldom well, and she had hard work to look after the children, and to



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find means to feed and clothe them. Her husband was only a helper in a gentleman's stables, and his wages were small.

And at last one day there came a sad piece of news to Mrs Clare. The gentleman told her husband that he was going away immediately to America, for a long time, and that he should want him no more, for he would sell his carriage, horses and furniture. But he said that Clare might stay on in his rooms in the mews till another job arose or another gentleman bought the house and stables, whichever came first. But some of the furniture in the family's rooms, which belonged to the master, would be taken away at once, to be sold with the furniture of the house.

Mr Clare did not much mind losing these few bits of furniture, for the rest, which was his own, was enough for the time at least. But Mrs Clare thought at once of a part of the Master's property, which she would be very unwilling to lose. All the blankets belonged to him. And now winter was coming, and her husband would be unemployed and they could never afford to buy new blankets. Mrs Clare's only hope was that, as the blankets were old and thin, the master would not think it worthwhile to take them away. But the very thought that he might was terrible to her.

Mrs Clare was not accustomed to having visitors, and as she sat there, feeling very sad and forlorn, she was startled by the sight of a strange woman who stood at the door, asking if she might come in. This woman was employed in



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selling Bibles. But it was of no use to offer one to Mrs Clare. In the first place she had no money; in the second place she could not read and, alas, in the third place she had never had any desire to know anything of the word of God. So she refused the Bible very civilly.

‘You look unhappy,’ said the Bible-woman.

‘I may well be unhappy,’ said Mrs Clare, ‘for I don’t know how we are all to live now my husband has lost his job, and I’m always ill, and I have such a number of small children,’ and poor Mrs Clare began to cry.

‘Do you ever pray about it?’ asked the Bible-woman.

‘Pray!’ said Mrs Clare, opening her eyes very wide. ‘No, I never prayed in my life. It’s the parsons that pray.’

‘But everyone may pray,’ said the Bible-woman. ‘Do you really mean to say you never knelt down on your knees to pray to God?’

‘Well, I do remember I knelt down once,’ said Mrs Clare, after thinking a moment.

‘I knelt down in the church the day I was married; but it was the parson that prayed.’

‘Have you never been to church since?’

‘No, neither before nor since.’

‘Nor to chapel, nor to a meeting?’

‘No I don’t go to anything of the sort. I haven’t time for that, like the gentry.’

The Bible-woman seems not to have known where to begin in explaining matters to a woman who was plainly so ignorant as Mrs Clare. So, after thinking in





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vain how to enlighten her, she only said – ‘Praying is just speaking to God, and telling him what we want. So if you have never done it before, I advise you to do it now.’ And as there were many more houses to visit, the Bible-woman went on her way, and left Mrs Clare with a new thought in her mind.

‘Praying is speaking to God, and telling him what we want. Why I think I could do that. It would be like speaking to a friend. It would be a comfort to tell him. I will tell him about the blankets.’

And then and there Mrs Clare knelt down and told the Lord quite simply about the whole matter, and she said – ‘O Lord, do not let the master take away the blankets, for we do want them so much.’

The next morning, quite early, the men came who were sent to take the master’s furniture to the sale. Mrs Clare said not a word about the blankets, but she watched them anxiously. She felt sure that the Lord had heard her prayer, and yet her heart misgave her when she saw them take off the bedclothes. One by one they rolled up the six old blankets, and carried them away with the other things.

Mrs Clare now felt that there was a trouble even greater than the loss of all her blankets. It had seemed to her such a beautiful thought that the Lord cared for her, and that she might speak to him and tell him of all her wants. And she had really believed that he heard her, and would be her friend. Yet it now seemed clear as the day that it was of no use to pray to him and she felt all alone in the great wide world in a way she had never





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felt before. She seemed not only to have lost the blankets, but to have lost the Lord too.

At that moment Mrs Clare was roused from her sad thoughts by a loud, quick knock at the door. She opened it, and to her utter astonishment she saw the very last person in the world she could have expected to see.

This person was her sailor brother. He had gone to China not long before and though Mrs Clare was not learned in geography, she had made a good guess in thinking that China was quite the other side of the world, and she knew Jem was to be there a long time.

‘Oh, Jem, I’m so glad to see you,’ she said.

‘So am I glad to see you, Sukey,’ said Jem, ‘but it’s how d’ye do and goodbye, for I only came ashore in the East India Docks this morning, and I’m off by the next train from Waterloo Station to Portsmouth. But I said, “I shall just have time to go round on the way to see Sukey,” and I’ve brought a whole cab full of blankets in case you want them, and they’re down at the door below. So now, Sukey, if you care to have them, we’ll go down to the cab and clear out the cargo.’

‘Why, Jem, how could you know that was just the very thing I want?’ said Sukey. And she ran downstairs after him, and helped him to carry the huge parcel up to her little room, where Jem undid it and pulled out one blanket after another - large, beautiful, thick blankets, such as Sukey had never before beheld.



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'Perhaps there will be six of them,' she thought. Yes, there were six and six more besides.

'Why, Jem, how did you come by them? And what made you bring them?'

'It's just this,' said Jem. 'You know there's a war in China, and I and five of my mates were wounded, and wouldn't be any good for weeks to come. So they just put us on board an East Indiaman, and sent us home, and they gave us each a pair of navy blankets, because we should have to be in our hammocks for most of the way home. And they told us when we went on shore we might have the blankets for our own. And when we landed this morning, the first thing we heard was that we were to go on to Portsmouth if we were fit for service. And then my mates said, 'What shall we do with the blankets, for they won't be any good to us on board another ship?' and I said, 'Well, I've got a sister in London, with a lot of small children, and maybe she'd like to have mine, so I'll just take them to her and go on to Waterloo.' Then they said, 'You'd better take the whole lot, for we haven't sisters in London, nor anyone who'd care to have them.' So here they are, and now I must be off.' With these words Jem drove off in his cab, and left Mrs Clare happier than he had any idea of.

It was a fine thing to have twelve beautiful blankets in the place of six old thin ones. But it was a greater thing to know that there is a living God, who not only hears prayers, but who does for us far more than we ask or think.





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Mrs Clare now knelt down again to thank the Lord. And when she had thanked him, she said to him, 'O Lord, thou knowest we have another trouble. Thou knowest we want nineteen and sixpence. O Lord, please let us have it in time to pay the baker on Saturday.'

Whilst Mrs Clare had been so unhappy about the blankets she had almost forgotten that the baker had said he could no longer go on letting them have bread without being paid for all the bread that they had had for weeks past.

'So,' he had said, 'on Saturday next I shall leave off letting you have any more bread, and I shall send you a summons, if you don't pay me nineteen and sixpence by twelve o'clock that day. For that's what the bill will come to by Saturday.'

Mrs Clare felt sure the Lord would send her this money. But her husband came home very sad and hopeless, saying he had been everywhere to try to get a job, and could hear of nothing. So it was the next day and the next.

Then came Saturday morning. 'I'll try again,' her husband said; 'and though it's only five o'clock I'll start and see what can be done.'

It seemed strange to go out at five o'clock in the morning, when everyone was in bed, to try to get a job. But the Lord had put this thought into Mr Clare's mind. But he didn't know then that it was God who was guiding him.

In an hour's time he came back. He put a sovereign into Sukey's hand, and said, 'Go and pay the baker.'



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Now Sukey had not said a word to him about the baker, not about her prayers. But she was sure that the money would come in time.

‘How did you get it?’ she asked.

‘Just as I went out of the mews,’ said her husband, ‘I saw a gentleman’s carriage upset in the Knightsbridge Road, and I went to help; and when it was all done the gentleman gave me a sovereign. I suppose they were coming home from a party somewhere so it’s well I went out so early.’

Sukey went to pay the baker, having thanked the Lord for his goodness. And now she felt that the time was come when it was wrong to keep silence about all that he had done for her. So she told her husband all about it; and when the Bible-women came again a few days after, she told her, too, and she asked if there was no place near where a poor woman like herself could go and hear more about God. ‘For now,’ she said, ‘I want to learn all about him. But I can’t go to any grand place, where people go with fine clothes, for I’ve nothing but my old gown, and I shall have to take the baby with me.’

Then the Bible-woman told her that a room had been opened in a mews close by, where there was preaching every Sunday afternoon - nothing to pay, and all might go in just as they were, and find a comfortable seat, and hear about the Lord Jesus in plain words that they could understand.

So Mrs Clare went there the very next Sunday, and there she heard the wonderful story that was to make her happy all her life long, and for ever afterwards. She heard that God not only cares that



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men and women and children should have food and clothes and beds, but that he so loves his dear people, even long before they love him, that he sent his own Son from heaven, to take upon himself the punishment of all their sins, of all their ingratitude and forgetfulness of him, and their despising him and esteeming him not.

Now Mrs Clare felt for the first time that she was a guilty sinner. She had lived all her life, till the day the Bible-woman came, without one thought of this good and loving God. And it was indeed blessed news to her that, instead of a punishment for all this sin, there was nothing for her in the heart of God but love and tenderness. So that she might have no punishment he had sent his Son to bear it himself and to pay all the great debt and had given her besides the endless riches of his love to be hers forever.

‘I have something better than blankets to thank him for now,’ she said to the Bible-woman.

It is always a sure mark that God has poured into our hearts the riches of his love, when we wish to share his joy and happiness with those around. For this wonderful happiness is like a flame of fire, which does not grow less but greater as it spreads from one to another.

Mrs Clare became very anxious that her husband should go with her to the preaching. But no, he always had some excuse, and it was plain that he was displeased at hearing all this new sort of talk. It made him feel very uncomfortable, for his eyes were beginning to be opened to see that he was a guilty sinner also.





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Mrs Clare, however, went on beseeching him to go to the preaching and at last he said, 'Very well; I'll go next Sunday if only you can get my coat out of the pawnshop, for I can't go without a coat.'

He felt quite sure when he said this that it was a very safe promise, for he knew well Sukey had never so much as a penny to spare when the end of the week came. She had got some work as a charwoman at a gentleman's house, and every Saturday morning the housekeeper paid her ten shillings, but then there was all the bread and everything else to be paid for out of that ten shillings, and there was never a farthing over when that was done.

Mrs Clare knew this too, but she knew also to whom to go for the money she needed to get the coat out of the pawnshop. She went to tell the Lord all about it, and then she said to the Bible-woman, 'You'll see my husband at the preaching next Sunday.'

Sunday came and there was Mr Clare in his best coat, and looking, too, as if he was glad to be there.

'How did you get the coat, Mrs Clare?' asked the Bible-woman afterwards.

'When the housekeeper paid me on Saturday morning,' said Mrs Clare, 'she said, "You must give me change for I have nothing but a sovereign," and I said I had no change, and never had so much at a time, nor was likely to have. Then she said, "You must take the sovereign, then, and remember next Saturday that I've paid you." So then I went to the pawnshop and got the coat, and the Lord will see that I'm none the worse off when next Saturday comes.'





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After this Mrs Clare was better off, for her husband got some work. He did not tell her that he had also got a Bible from the Bible-woman. He was rather afraid and ashamed lest this should be known, but he went on going to the preaching, and all his spare time he went into the loft where he had hidden the Bible amongst the hay, and he read it for hours.

At last he could keep his secret no longer, and he told his wife that 'a change had come over him,' and that he saw she was right, and that the Lord who had opened his eyes had saved him from his sins.

I can tell you no more about Mrs Clare and her husband. Many years have passed since I last heard of or saw them. It may be that she has had many, many more answers to her prayers; and now that she knows the Lord Jesus, as she did not know him at first, she no doubt understands that all is well when he does not give her exactly the thing she asks for. He showed her when she was ignorant of him that he is the living and true God by giving her just the very thing she asked for. But when we know God and his great love, he is able to treat us as a kind father often treats his children. He will sometimes have to say, 'I know you can trust my love, if I refuse to give you the thing you want, and you may be sure I do so that you may have something better, though you may have to wait for it.' So, if we have believed in the love of God, we can be quite happy and peaceful, leaving all in his hands. 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'