



Footprints of Providence

Jeannie McReynolds

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Miracles Today?

A woman selling religious books from door to door feels a strong impression to pray for protection. A few minutes later a large and ferocious dog attacks her. But the dog rears up several feet from her, apparently fighting some invisible, restraining hand. Deep depressions clearly show in the fur of his neck where someone-or something-holds him back.

Do you believe her account of the experience? Does God really perform miracles today? Is He the same as He was in the days of Elisha or the apostles?

I have long been convinced that He works just as remarkably today as in Bible times. But the person who experiences a miracle in his own life tells his friends and neighbors (if he dares tell anyone at all), and then people soon forget the occurrence.

Why does God perform miracles at all? He operates constantly through His natural laws to accomplish His will. But sometimes He allows matters to come to a crisis, then intervenes in so spectacular a way that no one can reasonably doubt that it is His doing.

It seems to me that God can always achieve His purposes without miracles if He so desires. Therefore, when He does work a miracle, it's so we will see vividly, clearly, His love and power. He wants to increase our faith.

So shouldn't we glorify Him by recounting the marvelous things He does and by keeping them in remembrance? "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:8).

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the stories in this book are all true. From Hattie, the English heiress, and Dobry, the Polish peasant, to Bernard Gilpin, the beloved Apostle to the North, they were real people. Only a few of the names have been changed.

But these stories happened many years ago. Does God perform miracles in the twentieth century? I know He does. I am collecting modern accounts of such experiences today. Someday I hope to write another book. In the meanwhile, these stories of God's love and power are far too beautiful to be forgotten.

Jeannie McReynolds



THE BLESSING

"What are you doing?" the childish voice demanded.

William Rogers paused, weed in hand, to look up at his small neighbor. He pushed graying hair from his eyes and smiled at her. The cloud of ruffles and lace she wore proclaimed her a child of England's wealthy class. But she did not smile. Her eyes questioned and flashed impatience.

"I'm helping the good Lord make the flowers grow," he told her. He lifted a pansy face for her to see.

Her voice still disapproved. "My grandpapa would never pull weeds. Pulling weeds is for servants."

"Servants cost money," he answered mildly. He might have said much more. Had her grandfather not caused his expulsion from his pulpit as a "Nonconformist" minister, Rogers might have had money for servants.

"Nonconformist." In these days of hypocrisy and greed one could sell his soul to Parliament by preaching whatever passed for truth at the moment; or one could sacrifice security, liberty, perhaps even life, to preach the message of God. He dropped the last weed into the basket and straightened his tired back. The bench in the shade of the old oak looked inviting. Sitting down, he beckoned the child to him.

"Would you like a story?" he asked. The little girl pressed against him. Putting his arm around her, he began the story of Daniel. Her eyes never left his face. She drank in every word and also his kindly affection with a suppressed hunger. Small wonder that she came whenever she could escape the watchful eye of her grandfather's servants.

Breathless, a liveried servant burst through the gate. "Miss Hattie, Miss Hattie, where have you been? Sir Richard is looking for you!"

She hardly glanced up. "I'll come when I finish talking to my good old gentleman."

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"Please, Miss Hattie," he pleaded. "Sir Richard doesn't like for you to come over here. You know that. He's already furious because we couldn't find you. Please, please come now."

"Oh, all right. Don't worry so about Grandpapa. I'll take care of him." Waving good-bye to her friend, she led the way back across the sun-swept lawn of the estate next door.

With sadness twisting at his heart, Mr. Rogers watched her go. Small as she was, she ruled her household with a passion. Once in an outburst of fury she had injured herself with a knife. Since then her grandfather had ordered his servants not to cross her will in any way.

Yet William Rogers loved the spoiled child. He longed to show her Jesus that she might find peace for her troubled heart.

A few days later found him sitting in his book lined study. The Bible lay open before him, but he no longer saw the well-worn pages. Oak-filtered sunlight fell unheeded across the old desk.

Instead of the familiar room, he saw a darkened street. One by one, two by two, people came through alleys and unfrequented lanes. And one by one, two by two, they knocked quickly at the back door of an old house and slipped in, glancing nervously over their shoulders.

He saw a crowded room, lighted only by candle glow, filled with eager, upturned faces. They hungered for the Word and had risked much for their Saviour. Tears started to his eyes as he read again the text before him. "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. . . (of whom the world was not worthy)."

Today a strange presentiment haunted' him. It seemed that danger, like a threatening cloudburst, hung over his little flock. For hours he sat, absorbed in meditation.

Then, shattering the silence, came the sound of pounding at the door. For a long moment he did not move. It had come.

His heart peaceful, his movements deliberate, he rose, walked down the dark hallway, and opened the door. Outside was a blur of angry faces. Hands grabbed, pushing and' pulling him. Rough ropes hurt his wrists. The mob shoved him across the lawn next door. Only one thing caught his eye in the noisy crowd. Two young men and a woman were prisoners like himself. Tears streaked the woman's face. He threw them a glance of love and encouragement. Thomas Powell, Jeremiah Abbot, and his wife, Sarah-how often they had stood by his side and helped him minister to others.

At Sir Richard Craddock's door a servant met them and hastened to call his master. Sir Richard emerged, rubbing his hands together and smiling. "So, my dear sir, at last you have been found out. How sad that you had to continue preaching to these poor, misguided souls after your license had been revoked. As magistrate of this area, it is my solemn duty to prevent wolves such as you from leading the sheep astray. Perhaps a term in prison will quiet your restless tongue and disillusion these foolish followers of yours. I shall go and make out the papers."

With that he turned and left the room. The prisoners stood just inside the majestic entrance hall. A long stairway curved away into the dimness of the upper story. Hushed, the

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rabble waited outside. Sarah's deep sobs shook the silence. Her husband's eyes reached out to comfort her.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.' 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' " William Rogers' quiet voice rang with courage. The faces of his companions lifted. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps,' " he comforted.

"Forgive us, sir," Thomas said. "For a little while we lost heart. But we will stand for Christ whatever comes." Plainly he spoke for them all.

Suddenly Hattie erupted through an inner door, shouting her excitement over some trifle. Seeing the knot of strangers in the hall, she skidded to a stop. Then she recognized her friend of the flower garden.

"You've come to visit at last!" she cried, darting to his side. He smiled at her but made no answer. "What's the matter?" she questioned the deputy who held Mr. Rogers. "What are you doing to my good old gentleman?"

"Good old gentleman, is he?" the deputy smirked. "We'll see about that. He's a wicked man, but he'll pay now."

The little girl's face grew dark with anger. "What are they going to do with you?" she demanded of Mr. Rogers.

"Your grandfather says that I and my friends must go to prison," he answered gently.

The child flew into a rage. She stamped her foot, and her voice rose to a shout. "You will not go to prison. Grandpapa can't do that to you."

The girl raced down the hall to the room her grandfather had entered. Finding the door locked, she banged her head against it, then kicked it furiously, demanding entrance. Someone opened the door. She charged across the room to stand before her grandfather. "What are you going to do with my good old gentleman out there?" she continued to shout.

"That is none of your business. Go on out and play," her grandfather answered shortly.

"But I will not. He says you are going to send him and his friends to jail. If you send them to jail, I will drown myself in the pond as soon as they are gone! I really will!"

Sir Richard stared at his granddaughter in astonishment and concern. For a long moment he didn't answer. Finally, picking up the paper from the desk, he walked down the hall to the group who stood waiting for him.

"I had intended to send you all to jail, but my granddaughter has requested that I show you mercy. You are all released, See that you do not repeat the offense."

The deputies muttered, but they released them. With deep emotion the prisoners thanked Sir Richard. Then Mr. Rogers turned to the child whose intervention had saved them much suffering. Laying his hand on her head and lifting his eyes to heaven, he said, "God bless you,

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my dear child. May the blessing of that God whose cause you now plead, though as yet you know Him not, be upon you in life, at death, and throughout eternity."

Many years went by. William Rogers went to his rest, loved and honored by many for the saint he was. His son, Timothy, became a worthy follower in his father's footsteps. A sincere Christian in an age when there was far less danger in pursuing such a course, he became a well-known writer on religious subjects.

One evening he sat in the parlor of a lovely home in London, visiting a friend famous for her hospitality to those who loved the Lord. Now he spent a pleasant hour telling the story of the deliverance that God had given to his father by means of a little child.

Mrs. Tooley listened with deep interest. "And are you that Mr. Rogers' son?" she asked.

"Most certainly I am."

She shook her head in wonder. "As long as I have known you I never realized that. I am the little girl your dear father blessed. It made such an impression on me that I could never forget it." She leaned back and smiled, her face tender with memories. "Now let me tell you a story," she said.

And here is the story she told:

At the ancient Roman town of Bath in western England a fashionable young woman paced the floor with restless tread. The eyes of the old man in the great armchair followed her up and down the room.

"I can't go on this way, Doctor!" she exclaimed. "How many young ladies would give anything to be in my place. I have everything I could ever wish for. I have so much money that I need never concern myself about it as long as I live. I have more beautiful gowns than I could wear in a year. I am invited to every fashionable party and courted by every eligible young man, and yet all of it means nothing to me. I am miserable. I go back to my luxurious lodgings and cry myself to sleep. I have been considering suicide. After' all, if I don't find some satisfaction, some happiness in life, what's the use of my living at all?" She halted for a moment, her eyes challenging him.

Deeply serious, he met her gaze. "What you need is religion. That's the only way to find the peace you seek."

"Oh, my good doctor, please don't be ridiculous. I'm, not a child." She waved away the suggestion.

"No, you are not a child. But you have not lived so many years as I have, and you asked my counsel. Now you can take it or leave it, but that is what I think."

"Well, what do you suggest I do?"

The doctor hesitated a moment. "The very best thing I could suggest for you, Miss Hattie, is to read the New Testament for yourself."

The girl nodded slowly. "Very well, I will try it. I'm desperate, and it can't do any harm."

"Do you give me your word you will finish it?"

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"I give you my word."

In the days and weeks that followed, Hattie kept her promise. But she found no peace. Rather, her uneasiness deepened. Still an intense conviction took root in her mind that the answer might lie in that direction after all.

One morning after her return to London she called to Jane, her companion. "Get ready, Jane. We're' going to church today."

Jane looked at her in amazement. "Very well, Miss Hattie, but that's a strange thing for you to do."

Putting on appropriate clothing, they began walking up one street and down another. At last Jane's curiosity reached the bursting point. "Where is this church we're going to, Miss Hattie?"

Hattie put off her answer as long as she could. Finally she confessed, "I don't know. During the night I had a vivid dream. I was sitting in an old church. It seemed as if . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Jane's face reflected her feelings that Miss Hattie was a strange one. But Hattie didn't notice. Her eyes searched every church they passed.

"If only I could find it!" The pent-up yearning of those years of frustration threatened to explode.

They passed the fashionable part of town and turned down a narrow lane called The Old Jewry, off Cheapside. Numbers of people here all seemed to be going to the same place. Following the crowd, they found themselves outside a little church.

"It's the one!" Hattie cried. She pressed through the door and down the aisle to a front seat, her face glowing. Jane's eyes disdained the simple chapel, but she followed Hattie to a seat. A man entered the pulpit.

"Oh, Jane," Hattie exclaimed in a whisper. "That's the very man I saw! If it's all true, he'll preach on the text 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.'"

The minister prayed, lifting his hands to heaven. He poured forth adoration and praise in words that brought tears to Hattie's eyes. Then, as both girls listened in amazement, he announced his text: " 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' "

"That day I met my Lord and found the rest my soul so long had sought," Mrs. Tooley concluded. "God heard your father's prayer. That blessing has followed me all my life, and I doubt not that it will accompany me to the world to come."



THE PRISONER OF GLATZ

High on the cliff, outlined against a somber sky, the fortress of Glatz stood frowning down. At the foot of the precipice the river Neisse rushed in cataracts and rapids, foaming over jagged rocks, boiling its way to quiet pools far below. The Count of Montague stood at a window high on the forbidding wall of the fortress. With dark, intense eyes he watched the angry river as he had every day for months. For hours he stood there, his hands on the bars.

How long could a man bear the loneliness, he wondered. How long before his mind would snap? How long before he would lose track of time, even forget who he was? Not a human face had he seen; not a human voice had he heard. He dared not let his mind wander, must not think of home and loved ones. In that way lay madness.

He turned back into the bare little room and paced with restless feet. For the first time in months he went to the old oak table and picked up the only book in the room. Until then he had sworn he would never read it. Religion was not for him. He had no regrets for the life he had led or for the plotting that brought him here. His only regret was his failure.

Even the attempted murder of the king did not trouble his conscience. If only he had foreseen everything, if only he had not miscalculated, he would have had riches and honor instead of a lonely fortress and hopeless despair.

But anything was better than his emptiness, his loneliness. Perhaps even the despised Book, could stave off insanity a little longer. So for the first time in his life he held a Bible in his hands and opened its pages.

For days and for weeks he read. Slowly his bitter despair and skepticism changed to interest: Still he read. Strange new thoughts tormented him. New feelings haunted him. Yet he returned to the Book with a fascination he couldn't understand.

One dark night he found himself once more 'by the window. Outside a November gale howled round the fortress. The rain fell as if the Deluge had returned. The river, far below, was a raging torrent, its terrible roar joining the screaming of the winds.

The count paced with a fierce restlessness. After a time he lay on the narrow cot and tried to sleep, but the storm within was as terrible as that outside.' Finally, with a despairing cry, he

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threw himself to the floor and wept. For the first time he saw himself a sinner. He saw the ugliness, the treachery, the selfishness of his life. Now he wished he could live it over again. This time he would give himself to God.

Getting to his feet, he took the Bible in his hands. Opening it, his eye fell on this passage: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

He fell to his knees and cried to God. Tears of genuine repentance washed away the sorrow and despair. The Sun of righteousness had broken through the clouds of guilt. The storm might rage without, but peace had finally come to the prisoner of Glatz.

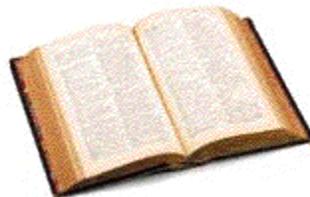
That night many miles away in his palace in Berlin, King Frederick William III was extremely ill. The court physician tiptoed in and out but could bring no relief to the tortured monarch. Servants hovered near. His wife, Louisa, sat by his bed trying to soothe away his pain. Nothing could avail. Helpless and exhausted, he turned his face to the wall and prayed, pleading for even an hour of sleep.

Shortly the king fell into peaceful slumber. When he awoke, he found his faithful wife still watching by his bed. "Louisa, my dear," he said, "God has been very merciful to me. He has given me the favor I asked of Him. Now I wish to do something to show my gratitude. Who in my kingdom has injured me the most?"

"The Count of Montague," his wife answered.

"You are right. Let him be pardoned."

So it was that before the day broke over Berlin a messenger left, bearing the forgiveness of the king to the prisoner of Glatz. The God who heard his cry and gave him freedom from his guilt and sin, extended to him also that which he did not ask pardon and release.





RESCUE AT SEA

Annette leaned against the rail of the ship, her eyes on the distant horizon. She tried to imagine she saw a sail, but she knew it wasn't true. The hot sun sparkled on the water all around her. Desperately she wished she could drink it. Never had she imagined that anyone could be so thirsty. Her tongue was like a lump of cotton in her mouth.

Not a breath of wind stirred. If only a whisper would fill the sails. But they hung limp and useless. Mother said two days of good sailing would bring them to New Orleans. Instead, it seemed they had been here on this endless ocean forever.

The girl scarcely remembered the United States. Her mother and father had traveled as missionaries to Jamaica when she was a tiny child. But the years had brought increasing sickness, especially to Mother. Father said they must go to a cooler climate so she could get well.

With delight Annette had looked forward to the trip, her mother having told her so much about the interesting things they would see. But when they carried their baggage aboard the *Star* and set sail, none of them could have guessed what the voyage would bring.

Only a night away from port a storm fell with crushing force on the little vessel. Frightened and seasick, Annette clung to her mother in the cabin. The whole world seemed in motion. Nothing would hold still for even a moment. The sea raged and roared. Its fury drove them far from their course.

Then a deadly calm settled over the sea. They could make no progress at all. The ship carried food and water for only a few days, but the days of calm lengthened into weeks.

Mornings everyone lined up on deck. Each one received half a ship's biscuit and a cup of water. They would get nothing else for the rest of the day. Annette thought nothing had ever tasted so good — especially the water. Some people gulped theirs at once. Others hoarded theirs. Fearful, suspicious, they guarded it, treasuring each drop.

And food — the thought of it followed Annette day and night. In desperation she even chewed on one of Mother's kid gloves. It wasn't any help. Every day she grew weaker. Most of the time

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she didn't want to do anything at all. Apparently the others felt the same way, because nearly everyone sat around and didn't even try to talk.

But hardest of all was the thirst. She had trouble understanding why. they couldn't drink the water from the sea. But Mother said it would be terribly dangerous. Mother dipped handkerchiefs in the ocean and tied them, dripping wet, around their throats. That helped. But their mouths were so dry and their tongues so swollen that talking was painful and difficult.

Several times someone saw a sail in the distance. They watched with agonizing interest, but it never came near. It just passed by and disappeared. Gloom settled, dark and heavy, after each such disappointment.

One evening Captain Jordon called them all on deck. He looked sad and haggard. A pitiful sight they all were-pale, thin, hollow-eyed. "We've been four weeks on this voyage," he said, "and we had supplies for only a few days. Until now we have managed to stretch them out, but they're nearly gone. We all face starvation. But we have a plan. So that some may live, some of us will have to die. Tonight we'll cast lots to choose which ones it will be. However, we won't announce the results until tomorrow morning just before time to hand out the food. Let's hope and pray that help will come before then. If it doesn't, those chosen will be thrown into the sea."

Annette couldn't believe her ears. She clung to her mother's hand and felt it shaking in hers. She saw tears in her father's eyes, too, as they made their way back to the cabin. They just wanted to be alone for a little while.

Once in the cabin, Mother cried out in anguish, "Has it really come to this? O God, have mercy!" Father put strong arms around them both. "We'll pray again, my dear. 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver.' "

Together they knelt on the rough wooden floor, pouring out their fear and sorrow to the One who alone could send help. When they finished, Mother said, "Hans, I'm going to pray all night."

"Marta, your strength won't allow it. Don't you think God will hear us now? Is there any advantage in such a sacrifice?"

But she insisted. He went to his cot on the deck and Mother tucked Annette into her berth. After she turned out the light Annette could still see her. She knelt on the hard floor beside her bunk. For a while Annette stayed awake and prayed too. As she slipped off to sleep she knew that Mother was still pleading with God.

All night Mother prayed until at last, dawn broke over the smooth Atlantic. Then she fell exhausted across her bunk and went to sleep. Only a little later Father awoke them both with an excited cry. "They think they see a sail!"

Mother raised herself on one elbow, still half asleep. "I'm afraid it will pass by like all the rest," she said. Then remembering her long hours of prayer, she suddenly added, "God, forgive me! It must be the answer to my prayers! It will surely come to our rescue."

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Father put a loving hand on her shoulder. "If it's God's will, it will come to our rescue," he cautioned.

But Mother was certain now. "It is God's will. Help has come," she declared.

Annette's heart soared with hope. She sprang from her bed. Dressing quickly they followed Father up the narrow hatchway and out on deck. Every person on board crowded the railing, looking with anxious expectancy at the far horizon.

Since they could see nothing with the naked eye, they passed the ship's spyglass down the line so that each one might watch the speck on which their hopes hung. Annette shook with suspense. Would this ship pass them, too, leaving them to their fate?

No, still it came closer. Soon they could see it without the telescope. Hope lighted every face as the object grew and grew. At last they saw it was a small steamer such as then searched the sea near a harbor to help any ship in difficulty.

As it drew near it hailed the Star but not a man on board had enough strength to answer. Undaunted, it came on. Finally a small boat was lowered from the deck of the steamer and four men climbed into it. One of them appeared to be the captain. Rowing to the Star they climbed aboard. The captain stepped on deck first. Looking around at the walking skeletons that surrounded him, he took off his hat and exclaimed, "Now I believe that there is a God in heaven!"

The crew of the steamer shared what rations they had. With gentle fierceness they restricted the starving people to small portions. Too much now could make them sick:

But when Annette held a cup of water in her hands, knowing she would soon have more, her heart nearly burst with joy and gratitude. She began to sob. Mother put an arm around her shoulder. God had been good to send rescue. But Annette was curious about the captain's exclamation when he first stepped on deck.

Before LeHavre, captain of the steamer, went back to his own ship to tow them into port, he called them all together on deck. Annette leaned against the rail beside her parents as he told his strange story:

"For many years I have commanded this small steamer. Our task is to search the waters just out of the harbor for vessels in distress and bring them into port. We are only supposed to go out for a certain distance. In fact, we face a heavy fine if we exceed the limit. But for some reason, on this occasion when I had sailed the full distance, I felt an unaccountable urge to go on.

"My mate argued and pleaded, reminding me of the fine. I couldn't explain to him. I didn't understand it myself. But I knew I could not turn back. We sailed far out beyond the limit. Although we could see nothing, something drove me on.

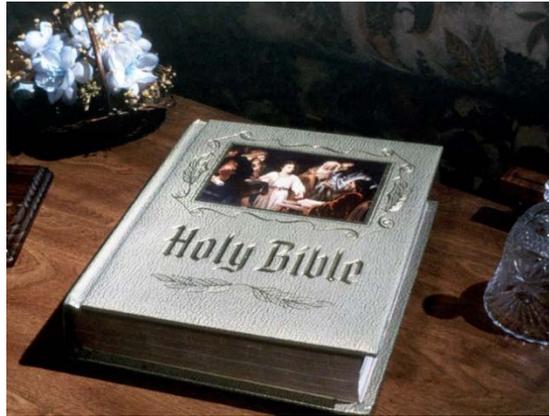
"Then, after years at sea, for the first time I got seasick. It was terrible. I had to take to my bunk like a 'landlubber.' My mate told me we were low on provisions. The crew grew mutinous. They were all convinced that I had lost my mind. I could hardly be sure myself. Could I be going mad? Yet the thought of turning back was agonizing.

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"I pleaded with the mate to continue for just one night. In the morning, if we still couldn't see anything, I promised to turn back.

"At early dawn the watch raised a cry that they had spotted a ship on the horizon. I staggered to the bridge. 'Make for it!' I ordered. 'That's what we came for.' Immediately my seasickness left me.

"I have been an unbeliever for many years. But it was not chance that brought me to your rescue. Now I am fully convinced that there is a God in heaven who guides with His hands the affairs of men."



THE STOLEN BIBLE

Deep in the forest of the dark Silesian mountain, nestled a little cottage. It belonged to Grimez, the forester or keeper of the wild tract of woodland. Night fell, but a warm glow of candlelight shone out through the cottage windows.

Inside, Stephanie, Grimez's wife, sat sewing, her nimble fingers fashioning a coat for her husband. Her mother read by candlelight. The hours wore on and the darkness deepened. Stephanie's face grew anxious with the passing of time. Finally she broke the silence. "Mother, I wish he'd come. It's unlike him to stay out so late. The woods are not safe a night."

The grandmother looked up. "Are you worried my dear? Grimez is a capable man. Don't you think he can protect himself from wild beasts?"

"It's not beasts I fear so much as men!"

"Didn't he capture the robbers that troubles people on the roads?" Grandmother queried. thought they were all safely behind bars."

"They are, except one. Their chieftain escaped I try so not to think of it, but he's furious with Grime: for catching his band. They say he's sworn revenge. If it were not that I know the God of heaven is with us to protect us, I wouldn't be able to sleep at all. I only wish Grimez would pray too. All I can do is plead that God will have mercy on him, even in his unbelief and rebellion."

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Grandmother picked up the big family Bible. "Let's worship together, dear, and read the promises of God. Then you'll find peace for your soul. You can safely trust your husband to the care of our merciful Lord."

Stephanie opened the big Book to one of her favorite passages: "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust," she read. "Be thou my strong habitation.... Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man."

Finishing the seventy-first psalm, the two women knelt together. "O God, have mercy on my poor husband," Stephanie prayed. "Protect him, and may he come to trust in Thy almighty hand. Protect us as well, as we lie down to rest. And have mercy on this robber chieftain. Turn him from his wicked ways, and may he also find peace in serving Thee."

As they rose from their knees Stephanie's eyes shone with hope and courage. "Now 'I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.' "

She was still quoting the Bible as Grimez opened the door. "My dear husband," she cried, "I'm so glad to see you. I wish you wouldn't stay out so late, especially with this robber at large. We were just praying for your safety."

Grimez laughed, sweeping his small wife into burly arms. "Pray if you wish, my dear, but I'm glad my safety doesn't depend on your prayers. I'll put my trust in well-trained dogs and fine weapons."

He went to each window, examining the locks and making sure that all was secure. Then he checked his weapons. Having put his defenses in order, he bade Grandmother good night and retired with Stephanie to their small loft bedroom.

Next morning Grimez came down as usual to build the morning fire. Seeing a window open, he exclaimed in amazement. Stephanie flew down the stairs. They scrutinized the window and lock, but nothing was broken. Something had simply opened it. Puzzled, they searched for anything else that might have been disturbed. Suddenly Stephanie cried out in terror. "Oh, look!" There on the table, where the old family Bible always rested, lay a gleaming dagger, and the Bible had vanished. Stephanie sank in a chair, half fainting.

"The good Lord had mercy on us, or we would surely have been murdered in our beds," she gasped. "Oh, thank You, gracious Father, for your protection!"

"I don't understand it!" Grimez muttered. "I just don't understand it. How could he have gotten in? Small good my weapons did me! What on earth did he want with the Bible? Let's look to see if he took anything else.

They searched carefully but found nothing else missing. They talked and puzzled over the matter for weeks, but it remained a mystery.

Many months later the three of them sat together at a quiet evening meal. Grimez ate in silence, his face troubled. At last he spoke. "I fear I'll have to be gone for a time. You women will be all right. There's the money hidden in the cubbyhole. That will keep you in food for some little time, and I've stored plenty of wood in the shed."

"Oh, Grimez, whatever can you mean?" protested his wife. "Where are you going?"

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"War has broken out on the French border. I hate to leave you alone, but I'll have to go and help with the fighting. At least you should be safe. There's little or no chance the war will come this far, and we've had no trouble with robbers since the night the Bible was stolen. I should pack up and leave tomorrow. I don't know just when I'll be back, but the fighting shouldn't last long."

His wife clung to him in sorrow. "If you come back," she murmured. Then, with tears in her eyes, she gathered her courage to face the emergency. "May God, who protected us on that terrible night, go with you and keep you, and bring you safely back to me," she said.

For once Grimez didn't laugh.

The days and weeks that followed were grim. Fighting was intense along the border. Step by step they drove the invaders back until the enemy made a stand beside a sun-drenched lake.

All day the battle raged. The boom of cannon, the shouts of warriors, the cries of the wounded, mingled in terrible confusion. At last the sounds subsided, and the smoke cleared away. The living were gone; evidently only the dead remained.

After a time of silence the soft splash of oars came over the water. Almost noiselessly a fisherman guided his small boat along the shore of the lake. As he neared the battlefield his ears caught a whisper of sound. He lifted his oars to listen. Yes, he heard it again-the low moan of someone in pain.

His eyes searched the shoreline for danger.

Seemingly satisfied, he eased his boat up onto the sand. Walking with mournful steps among the dead, he examined each apparently lifeless form. Ah! This one was warm, and moaned softly at the fisherman's touch.

Standing, he put his hands to his mouth and shouted to his companions around the bend. In a moment two more small boats appeared. Together the fishermen lifted the injured man-a captain by his uniform-and bore him gently to a boat. Two miles away, across the lake, stood a row of neat cottages. Into one of them the fisherman carried the wounded stranger.

"Katrina," he called softly, "we have a guest."

A pretty, round-faced woman appeared. Wiping work-worn hands on her snowy apron, she took charge immediately. "Here, bring him in and lay him on the bed. I'll fetch water to wash his wounds. Poor man, he seems scarcely alive. We must work quickly."

With tender touch she washed him and bound his wounds. Her husband built a fire to warm the cabin. Together they nursed him through the long night. In morning light his pulse beat stronger, and by the afternoon he awoke.

"Where am I?" His eyes searched the simple cottage.

"I found you nearly dead on the battlefield and brought you home," the fisherman told him.

"And who are you?"

"My name is Grimez," the captain answered. "I am a forester from the mountains. If you would send for my wife, she could care for me."

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And so they arranged it. A messenger went for Stephanie, who came at once to nurse her husband. The fisherman and his wife moved in with a neighbor and told Grimez and Stephanie they might use their cottage until the captain was well enough to go home.

Grimez suffered agonizing pain, but Stephanie nursed him day and night, soothing him in every way she could. On one such occasion he caught her hand in his while his eyes caressed her face.

"My dear wife," he said, "how often these days I think of your prayers for my protection. It's remarkable that anyone came to my aid when I lay wounded. My own friends had left me for dead. And then there was the night someone stole the Bible. Whatever happened that night, I'm certain that some stronger hand than mine was guarding us. I fear that you've been right, and I've been wrong. There is a God in heaven who has heard your prayers. He's had mercy on me despite my unbelief and wickedness. From now on I mean to serve Him."

Stephanie could only weep for joy.

At last Grimez was strong enough to go home. He and Stephanie went to find the fisherman and his wife. Grimez clasped his hand. "Friend, I owe you more than I can say. But for you I would not be alive today. I can never repay you sufficiently, but I do wish to offer you something for your trouble. Here is _____..

But the fisherman would not let him finish. "No, no, I will take nothing. I'm only glad I could help you. Now go to your home in peace."

But Grimez persisted. Again and again he urged him to accept the money.

At last the man replied, "I can't take your money. I owe you much more than you owe me. In fact, I have a great treasure of yours that I want to return to you."

He went to a closet and came back with something in his arms. Stephanie cried out and caught it to her, hugging it with joy. "My precious Bible!" she exclaimed.

The fisherman turned to Grimez. "I see that you don't recognize me," he said. "But I'm the robber chieftain whose band you captured. I hated you bitterly and swore revenge. One day I crept into your home and hid, intending to murder you and your family during the night.

"You were late returning, but your wife read from this Bible. I had no choice but to listen. Never had I heard anything like it before. It made a great impression on my heart. Then she knelt and prayed for protection. She even prayed for me!

"After that I couldn't carry out my plan. But I wanted that book. I took it, leaving my dagger in its place. For weeks I hid and did nothing but read. It made a new man of me, and I've begun a new life. My wife, Katrina, is helping me. We've all we need for this life, and a hope for the life to come.

"You trusted in your guns and your dogs, but they couldn't save you. It's the Word of the living God that has saved us both."



THE DARK CLOUD

Paula paused for a moment in the shade of the maple tree. Already the morning sun fell with breathless warmth across the little Minnesota farm. Dust rose from the hooves of a neighbor's horse bearing his master on some early errand. Beyond the road to the north and east lay Benson Lake, its waters catching the blue of the cloudless heaven.

That is, it had been cloudless only moments before. Now a dark swirling mass like smoke boiled over the eastern horizon. The girl froze, puzzled, fear tickling her spine. She spun around and dashed for the house, the eggs in her basket clattering dangerously.

"Mamma, Papa, something's coming! Come look, quick! Something's coming!"

Two small boys tumbled through the doorway, nearly tripping her. She set the egg basket on the table and caught Mother's thin hand in her own.

"Come on, Mamma. I don't know what it is!"

Mother left her biscuit making to follow Paula outside. There the four of them stood watching the growing, swirling cloud that shadowed the landscape like an omen of doom.

Father appeared behind them in the doorway, leaning on his cane. His eyes narrowed as he surveyed the scene before him and spoke one word: "Grasshoppers!"

How long they stood there Paula didn't know. For once even six-year-old Roger didn't ask questions. The young ones, too, seemed to sense the threat that hung over them. Finally Father called them in, and they shut the doors and windows. It was hot inside, but the heat was better than sharing their home with thousands of grasshoppers.

The biscuits lay unbaked and dry on the table. No one felt like breakfast anymore. Roger and Carl stood by the front window. Father sat in the old wooden rocker.

"Come to worship," he told them, his voice sounding husky.

The boys reluctantly abandoned their observation post, and Mother surrendered her attempt to rescue the meal. They gathered with solemn faces around the table on which Father's Bible lay.

"What will grasshoppers do, Papa?" Carl asked. "They'll lay eggs, Son. Millions of 'em. I reckon they'll eat about everything in sight. And when the eggs hatch in the spring ..." his voice trailed off. He seemed to be looking at something a long way off.

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"But, Papa, can't we kill 'em? I mean if everybody around here—if we all help. Can't we do something?"

"Oh, we will. Everybody who can will fight 'em But I reckon there are more of 'em than anybody can kill. I never saw it so bad."

Father opened the big Bible to one of his favorite chapters, the ninety-first Psalm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Paula's lips formed the comforting words as Father's choked voice continued to read: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

Now his voice gained power. "Surely he shall deliver thee . . ." Paula watched the worry-wrinkles smoothing on his brow. He might be old and ill, but her heart glowed with pride. Papa wasn't afraid.

When he closed the Bible and they knelt to pray, it was as if he seized hold of the gates of glory and wouldn't let go. "Thou art our God!" he exclaimed. "All Thy promises are ours. We have no fear, for Thou wilt protect us. We are helpless, but we belong to Thee."

The strength of that prayer warmed Paula's heart over the months that followed. All that Father said about the grasshoppers was true, and fear haunted the little community. The war they waged on the invaders seemed to make scarcely a dent in their numbers. Prospects for the spring looked bleak indeed.

And on the little Christopherson farm, despair might well have settled. Father was old and Mother often sick. Every year they battled for survival. But in their little home glowed hope and courage that few of the neighbors shared.

The long cold winter melted into spring. Food supplies dwindled. Buds burst in the trees, and all nature rejoiced. But out of the ground crawled a myriad of insects. The earth moved with them. To plant seemed useless. But Father Christopherson hired a neighbor to plow the garden plot. The neighbor muttered about wasted effort as he worked, but he turned the soil, took his pay, and left.

Early the next morning Father called the family together. "It's plantin' time," he announced cheerfully. Before they went to their task, they knelt together and prayed. Then, pushing aside the hopping, crawling pests, they hid the precious seed in the earth. Without a crop they might well starve. And only a miracle could save the crop.

Each morning Paula inspected the garden. She stood and watched the grasshoppers and waited for the first green shoots. Hope and fear battled in her heart. The day the first sprouts appeared was a day she would never forget. She stood for a moment at her usual spot, and then with a shriek of delight, turned and fled to the house.

"Papa, God has answered! God has answered! Come and see!" The whole family hurried to view the garden, then stood transfixed by the sight. The tiny green shoots thrust up from the ground. And while all around the garden the grasshoppers crawled as thick as ever, inside it they saw none. An invisible wall—a barrier the insects could not penetrate seemed to restrain them.

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All that spring Paula loved to walk in the garden. It seemed like holy ground. She tiptoed down the rows and touched each growing thing with gentle reverence. Never had their garden looked more beautiful, while for miles around, on every side, devastation reigned.

As the grasshoppers matured and grew their wings they flew in swirling clouds, making a sound like fast-falling hail. And where they settled, they lay in great heaps on every side. For miles around scarcely a green thing survived. Trees lifted arms as bare as winter, and fields lay deserted. Those who passed on the road stopped to gaze in wonder at the little oasis of fruitful beauty on the Christopherson farm.

As harvest came the earth yielded her bounty from the little garden plot: from a small patch, fifty bushels of beets; eighty-three large squashes from three vines; and much more. Paula and the boys carried in mountains of produce. It had never been such a happy task before.

Joyfully they filled the cellar with food for the winter months and sent basketfuls to the neighbors. But on a morning of late August something occurred that greatly impressed Paula.

As they sat at the breakfast table a loud knock boomed through the little house. "Someone else to buy food," Father thought as he rose to answer.

"Come in, come in, Orville." He ushered in a black-bearded neighbor.

"I reckon, Norris, that ye might have some food I could buy. Ye know we ain't got a thing after them grasshoppers got done with us. We'd a starved, I guess, if I hadn't a had a little money put away."

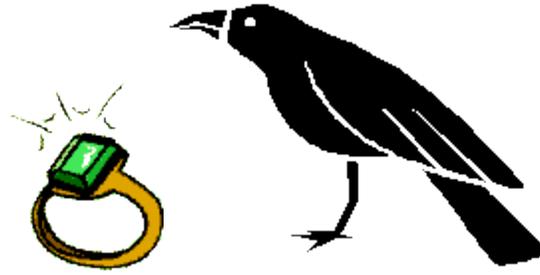
Father's face looked sober. "The good Lord musta known we hadn't any put away," he said. "It's only the mercy o' God that we've food to eat. And He's given us all we need and some for sharin'."

Orville Nelson stood silent for a moment, his face working in a strange way. "I never took much stock in God adoin' anythin' fer us here and now," he said. "But I never seed nothin' like that garden o' yours afore. I reckon the whole neighborhood's convinced we got us a miracle here. Seems like I heard a preacher read somethin' like this afore—about rebukin' the devourer—Malachi, I think it was. Do you folks give a tithe to God?"

Mr. Christopherson looked a little puzzled. He went and got the big Bible and put it in Mr. Nelson's hands. "Can ya show me what it says?" he asked. "I been payin' tithe fer about a year now 'cause I saw it in the Word, but I never saw what yer talkin' about."

Mr. Nelson turned the big pages awkwardly, looking back and forth. With some difficulty he located Malachi. Then his face lit up. "Here it is in Malachi 3:10-12. Listen to this: 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground.... And all nations shall call you blessed.'

For a long time Father stood without speaking. He opened and closed his mouth twice. Finally he took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "Well, I never," he said. "I shore never saw that. Neighbor Nelson, won't you, stay and worship with us? I think we better thank God all over again."



THE RAVEN AND THE RING

Dobry hesitated, his hand on the latch. He leaned his head against the door, bracing himself for Cara's reaction. With a deep breath he pushed it open.

Cara stood bending over the little cradle. The sound made her turn. "Dobry, did he ..." His face was answer enough. With a cry she crumpled on the bed. He closed the door and sat beside her. Helplessness smothered him like a blanket. When he tried to soothe her, she pushed him away, burying her sobs in the bedclothes.

A pale child climbed on the bed and tugged at her mother's blouse. Dobry caught her up and held her to his heart. "It's all right, Mandy, he said, soothing her fright.

Cara raised her head. "All right?" she flared. "It's not all right. How can it be? What will we do tomorrow? Where will we go? What will happen to the babies?" And she buried her head once more.

Dobry stood up and paced the floor. What would they do, indeed? What were landlords made of anyhow? Did they have hearts of stone? Dobry and his wife had no one to turn to-no one. He groaned aloud. If he could only find work-if only they had some money. But they had none, and the landlord would have no mercy. He covered his face with his hands. No one to turn to-or was there? Hope crept into his heart.

"Cara!" Dobry lifted his wife's tear-stained face. "Cara, we can pray. Maybe God will help us."

She looked at him doubtfully. They knew little of praying. But he knelt and pulled her down beside him. With one arm around little Mandy, he closed his eyes and searched for words. Words never came easily to Dobry, and he hadn't prayed for many years, but love and concern for his family lent him a simple eloquence. When he had finished, he and Cara both remained, unmoving and silent, busy with their own thoughts.

"I was just remembering," Dobry began, "a song my mother sang. It always made me feel safe and warm." And he began singing softly:

"Give to the winds thy fears; Hope and be undismayed;

God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears, God shall lift up thy head.

"Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears thy way;

Wait thou His time; so shall this night Soon end in joyous day."

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Before he finished, Cara was humming too. A spark of hope lighted her face. Suddenly a rapping at the window caught their attention.

"Ingram," Cara sighed and opened the sash. A great black raven strutted through the opening and flew to the table. There he walked back and forth muttering over something he held in his beak. Dobry looked at the raven's prize curiously, then with growing excitement. He took the object from the bird's grasp and held it up to the light for Cara to see. She caught her breath in a gasp.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" The rays of the setting sun caught the many facets of glittering jewels on a magnificent ring. "God has answered our prayers." Cara fairly shrieked with delight. "That ring is worth lots and lots of money. We can sell it and never worry anymore. God really does hear our prayers!"

His face clouded. "But, Cara, the ring isn't ours. I don't know whose it is, but we should try to find out."

Her eyes exploding anger, Cara faced him. "How can you say such a horrible thing? Do you want our children out in the snow? What if our babies die? It would be all your fault. God sent us help, and you want to give it away!"

Dobry closed his eyes to shut out the picture of her angry face. For a moment he stood unmoving as a rock in a storm. Then he picked up his coat and walked out into the gathering night. A cold wind whipped around him. He pulled on his coat and walked along the road, struggling with the burden within.

Had God sent the ring? Was that the answer to his prayer? But would God want him to keep something that belonged to someone else? Wasn't that stealing? Poor he might be, but a thief he was not. Of course he hadn't stolen the ring; his raven had. But if he kept it, wasn't it the same thing?

The snow crunched under his feet as he walked, recalling his fears for the morrow. Would Cara and the babies really be out in the snow with nowhere to go? He had heard of it happening to others. Oh, why couldn't he find work? What could he do for them? Would God really help them? Did God expect him to be honest even if it meant his family must suffer? On the other hand, if he kept the ring, how could God bless a thief?

His thoughts whirled round and round in agonizing circles. How long he walked he really didn't know, but by the time his feet crunched up the path to his own cottage, he had made his decision. With a long sigh he opened the door. Cara and the children were asleep. That was good. It would be a relief not to have to explain to her just yet. He slipped into bed, thankful for the peace in his heart at last, and soon he slept.

Next morning the sun had scarcely slipped over the eastern horizon and lighted the roofs of Warsaw before Dobry trudged into the city. He had determined to take the ring to his pastor. Sir Giles would surely know what he should do with it. So he stamped the snow from his feet on the steps of the rectory and lifted the great brass knocker. A servant opened the heavy oaken door and invited him in.

"Sir Giles will be out in a little while. Could you wait, — please?"

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Dobry found himself in a beautiful room, furnished with lovely, old pieces. Looking for a place to sit, he decided the chairs were too delicate for the likes of him. So he stood by the great window and marveled at the clear glass, the velvet drapes, and the view of the city below. He started at the voice behind him.

"Yes. Dobry, isn't it? What can I do for you?"

The feeling of being out of place left him as he turned and looked into Sir Giles' kind eyes. He drew out the ring and held it out on the palm of his hand. It glistened with a thousand fires in the sunlight from the window. Sir Giles' eyes widened. Picking it up, he looked at it carefully.

"Wherever did this come from, Dobry? Won't you tell me all about it?"

Something so understanding in his manner caused Dobry to pour out the whole story. Tears stood in his eyes as he told of the struggle of the night before. "But I knew God couldn't bless a thief," he finished. "And I need His blessing more than I need the ring. I thought you might have some idea where Ingram could have gotten it."

Sir Giles hesitated for a long moment. "I think I do. I could be wrong, but it looks like one I saw King Stanislaus wear. There are not many men who could afford it. It's just as well you didn't try to sell it. Someone could have recognized it. Dobry, you're an honest man. God will reward you. I'm sure He won't allow your family to suffer."

The reassurance of those words sounded in Dobry's ears as he walked toward home. Whatever God was going to do, He'd better do it soon. Even now the landlord might be on his way to put them out.

Cara waited for him, having gotten over her anger. Now she clung to him, still weeping. She didn't understand, and her faith was too weak to see any hope. Dobry could find no words to explain to her the peace in his own heart. God seemed far more real than He ever had before.

About two hours had passed in anxious waiting when a heavy knock sounded on the door. The time had come. The landlord was there, hardfaced, unyielding. He had brought two men with him. "Carry everything out," he told them. Cara started to scream. Mandy let out a long wail of fear and clung to her father, but Dobry didn't move. He watched with mingled hope and despair as the men began to move their few possessions out into the street.

The sound of pounding hooves interrupted them. A man in the livery of the king dismounted and strode up the footpath.

"I have a message for one Dobry," he said.

Dobry stepped forward. "I'm Dobry," he answered simply.

"The king wants to see you immediately."

"I'll come at once."

The messenger swung around, mounted, and rode away, and the landlord gazed after him in wonderment. Dobry turned to him. He couldn't believe the change on the man's face. The hard lines had relaxed. The landlord actually smiled.

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"Now you men put Dobry's things back. He must go at once to see the king; so we won't delay him. We can settle our business later. I'm sure we'll work something out." Dobry stared at the man in disbelief. But he hadn't time to respond. Squeezing Cara's hand, he hurried off down the road toward the city.

He had never been to the palace before. Of course, he knew where it was—one could see its spires from a great distance. But as he neared the imposing gates he became suddenly conscious of his ragged clothing. The guards looked dubious, but when he gave his name, they let him pass.

At the majestic portals another guard called a servant. "Dobry?" the servant questioned. "Oh, yes, the king left orders to bring you in." Tall and thin, with black hair and piercing dark eyes, he wore the same green and gold livery the messenger had worn.

Dobry followed him down majestic hallways past great arching doors. He caught breathtaking glimpses through the openings—glimpses of a world beyond his dreams.

They passed another guard. Suddenly Dobry found himself standing on the plush velvet carpet of the king's inner apartment. The great room, obviously a sleeping chamber, was furnished in deep shades of red and purple.

At the far end stood the king. Dobry recognized him from glimpses he had caught as the royal coach passed in the streets. King Stanislaus stood before a mirror. The royal tailor was fitting him with a magnificent suit. For the moment they seemed oblivious to the entry of Dobry and his guide.

"It's just a bit tight across the shoulders," the king remarked. "And it should be a trifle longer. All in all, I think it's quite becoming. Don't forget, it must be finished by tonight."

Turning, he caught sight of Dobry and the servant standing inside the door. "What is it, Vladimir?"

"Your Majesty, this is Dobry." The servant pushed Dobry forward and whispered, "Go near and kneel."

Dobry found himself walking toward the king. It relieved him to collapse on his knees. His legs surely wouldn't have carried him much farther.

The king looked him over carefully. Although Dobry felt his gaze, he couldn't raise his eyes. "So this is the man who would let his family be put out in the snow rather than keep a ring of mine."

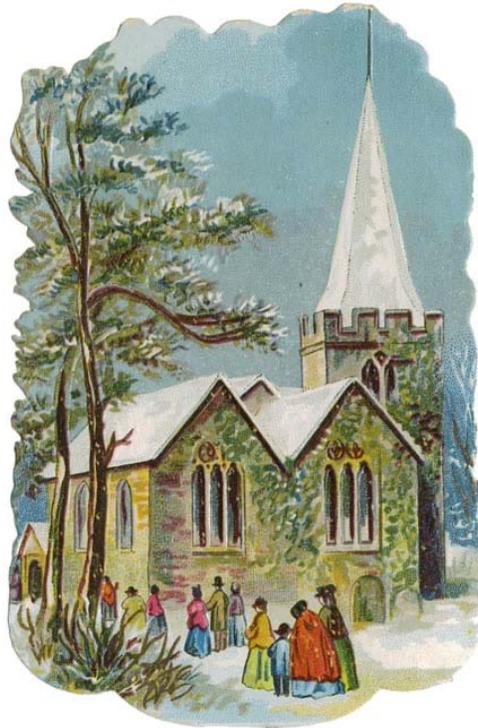
Dobry felt a blush warm his cheeks and neck. So Sir Giles had told the king everything. The king laughed aloud. "You blush, my man. But you have no cause for shame. I wish I had more subjects like you. Now look here, I have something for you." Dobry lifted his eyes. The king held out a bag. From its weight, it must be gold.

Taking the bag, Dobry stammered his thanks, but his heart was glowing with a strange new fire. God really did care and had answered his prayers. He was thankful he hadn't kept the ring.

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Yes, God touched Dobry's life, providing for his pressing need. The bag of gold was only the beginning. The king gave him cattle from his own herds, and when the winter ended, he built him a home of his own. It is said that if you go to Warsaw today you may still see the house that King Stanislaus built for Dobry. Over the door is an iron tablet with a raven holding a ring in its mouth. Engraved below is another stanza of the song Dobry sang on his knees that bleak winter night:

"All means always possessing, Invincible in might; Thy doings are all blessing, Thy goings are all light."



AMBUSH

Miles Higbee leaned forward, his hand gripping the arm of the chair until his knuckles were white. But his face remained a smiling mask as he faced Pastor Kaufmann.

"Now, there, Pastor, you don't believe gossip like that, do you?"

The minister shook his head. "I wish it were only gossip, Miles. You know I wouldn't bring up something so serious if I didn't have very good evidence indeed."

"But Pastor, you've known me for years. I've been a deacon in the church almost as long as you've been here. Me and Hannah never miss a Sunday. You know I wouldn't do a thing like that!

Kaufmann sat silent for a moment. His eyes contained the hint of tears. "Miles, if you'd only confess your sins, they could be forgiven. You know the Lord can't overlook these things just

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because you go to church every week. While you may fool men, you can't fool Him. Why don't you confess like a man? Hannah loves you. She'll forgive you. And the Lord loves you far more. Miles held up his hand to stop the flow of words. His face was hard. "I'm sorry you have chosen to believe such lies. But there isn't any truth in what you say, and I don't appreciate your lack of faith in me at all." He stood up. "Now, will you please leave?"

Pastor Kaufmann rose but made no move to go. Instead he said softly, "Does the name Antoinette mean anything to you?"

The color faded from Miles' cheeks. He made no reply, but his eyes glared.

"I have a responsibility to you," Pastor Kaufmann went on, "but I also have a responsibility to the church and to the honor of the Lord. You can't go on this way. Either you must confess and make everything right, or the church will have to remove you from its fellowship. I have no pleasure in exposing the sins of professing Christians. But to allow such to go on in wickedness within the church only weakens the church, dishonors God, and gives the sinner a false sense of security. You must make the decision, and soon. I'll expect to hear from you before next Sunday."

The minister's words were measured and sad, but he didn't flinch before the unveiled hatred gleaming from the eyes of the other man. He picked up his coat and walked to the door.

Miles never moved until the pastor opened the door. But the visitor stepped out, and the whisper followed him, "If you tell, I'll kill you." Giving no sign that he had heard, Pastor Kaufmann closed the door behind him, leaving Miles to glare at the oak paneling.

The rest of the week inched by. At night Miles slept but little. Many times after Hannah was asleep, he wandered around the house muttering to himself. With each passing day his tension grew.

Early Sunday morning he called to Katie, the maid. At the moment Hannah, in the other room, prepared for church.

"Katie," he whispered, "I have an important message for you to carry to the pastor this morning. Make sure you reach him before he gets to church, and deliver it in private. Remind him not to forget what I told him just before he left, for I'll surely keep my word."

"I'll tell him, for sure. You can count on me, Mr. Higbee," she answered. As he turned away, her eyes followed, gleaming with curiosity.

Moments after Katie left, Hannah appeared in her Sunday best. "Miles, why aren't you ready for church? We have to leave right away!"

Her husband shook his head, struggling to make his face look natural. "I'm feeling all strange and sick, Hannah. I don't think I can go this morning. Maybe I'll go back to bed."

Hannah's face clouded with worry. "What's the matter, dear? Something must be very wrong. You haven't missed church in years, unless you were out of town. I'll be happy to stay home and care for you."

"Oh, no." Miles shifted uncomfortably. "I don't want you to miss. I'll be all right."

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His wife still hesitated. "Well, all right, if you say so. Maybe you've caught what Mr. Moore has. He's been real sick for several days."

Finally he persuaded her to leave. Miles watched her walk down the little country road. Then he went to a closet and drew out a long rifle. He sat for nearly an hour by the fire, his hand caressing the smooth metal.

Katie had found Pastor Kaufmann as he strode up the path toward the church. It was still early, and no one else was near. She delivered her message and waited for a response. But the pastor only paused for a moment to look searchingly at her face, then turned and walked away without comment. She shrugged and watched him go.

Pastor Kaufmann spent many minutes that morning behind the curtain in front of the little church. He prayed as the congregation gathered. When he came out, his face was relaxed and gentle.

After the preliminaries he stood up to speak. He chose for his text John 15:12: "Love one another, as I have loved you." His sermon on practical brotherly love left few untouched. By its close many eyes in the congregation glistened with tears. Then, leaving the pulpit, he walked down closer to the congregation.

"And now, my brothers and sisters," he said, "we have among us a brother in special need of our love, patience, and prayers. The devil has taken him in his snare. He must surely be delivered, or he will die. I have labored with him in private, but to no avail.

"Now I must appeal to the people of the Lord to pray for this brother that he may make free confession of his sin and be forgiven. If he will not do this, then we must surely remove this evil from among us, or we will not stand free before God. The man of whom I speak is our dear brother, Miles Higbee."

A sudden intake of breath raced throughout the congregation. Hannah stiffened, her face drained of blood. The minister saw her reaction. He hesitated painfully, then continued.

"Brother Higbee has been living a double life. Brothers Harris and Larson saw him on the streets of Williamsport with a young woman. They made careful inquiry and found that he is well known there under a different name. He frequents a certain tavern when he visits that city and is often seen with this young woman of dubious reputation."

Hannah sprang to her feet. "Is this true, Brother Larson?" White faced, she looked at him across the congregation. His eyes full of pity, he stood up slowly.

"It is true," he said. With a cry she turned and ran from the church.

"As his brothers and sisters, the minister continued, "it is your duty to pray for this man and for his family. Let brotherly love draw him back from the land of the enemy." With that he quietly dismissed the congregation.

That afternoon a furious and shaking Miles Higbee strode along a certain forest path. The rifle over his shoulder spoke of his intention. Well he knew that Pastor Kaufmann would travel the path that same afternoon to visit the sick Mr. Moore. He vanished into the undergrowth beside a large rock.

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An hour crept by. He twisted and turned restlessly. Still Pastor Kaufmann didn't come. Was it possible he suspected? The minutes dragged. A footstep crunched in the silent forest. Miles stiffened. He pushed his rifle forward and sighted down the barrel, his heart pounding. It was the minister, but two men accompanied him. Who would be going along with him on his visit this afternoon? Certainly they were strangers to Miles, who prided himself on knowing everyone in the area.

The three men passed safely down the pathway and out of sight. But Miles didn't move. Maybe the pastor would come back alone. All might still work out.

The next hour was more unpleasant than the last. Waiting in an agony of suspense, fear, and unrest, he could not keep still. At last the returning footsteps came, but again he saw three men instead of one. When they had gone well out of sight, Miles crawled stiffly from his hiding place. The evening shadows were lengthening. He started home, his step heavy and his shoulders sagging.

When he arrived, he saw no one about. He walked through the house. Sobbing sounds came through the closed bedroom door. Quiet movements in the kitchen suggested that Katie was preparing the evening meal.

"Katie?" he called softly.

"Yes, Mr. Higbee." She came out wiping her hands on her apron. Her eyes did not meet his, but he noticed an amused lift to the corner of her mouth.

"I want you to go visit Pastor Kaufmann again. Do you have any good excuse to talk to his maid?"

"Why, yes, I could borrow a couple of eggs."

"Good. Then find out from her who went with him on his visit to Brother Moore's this afternoon."

"All right, Mr. Higbee. But what about dinner?"

"I don't think we're very hungry," he answered dryly.

While Katie was gone Hannah never stirred from the bedroom. Glad he didn't have to face her again, he paced up and down, his fists clenched white. Hearing Katie return, he swung around eagerly.

She came in and closed the door. "Well?" He couldn't hide the urgency in his voice.

"Susannah says he never goes with anyone. Only had his Bible."

"Bah!" he exploded. "There were two men with him. I saw them myself, with my own eyes. Why would Susannah lie about it? I've got to know, I tell you. I've got to know."

"You go right back and talk to the pastor himself. You can tell him I sent you if you like. Tell him I know there were two men with him this afternoon; I saw them myself. Ask him who they were." Katie went out again without comment. Miles sat down, but he could not rest. He resumed pacing, his face contorted by an inward struggle.

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Pastor Kaufmann was sitting in his study when Katie arrived. Susannah ushered her in. Katie stood before him, fingering a button on her blouse, but her eyes were defiant and bold.

"Well, Katie?" The pastor tipped his chair back.

"Mr. Higbee sent me. He said to tell you he saw two men with you this afternoon when you went to visit Mr. Moore. He wants to know who they were."

Pastor Kaufmann didn't immediately reply, but he seemed to be weighing her words. Then he stood up and walked to the window. For a time he stood looking out into the night. Finally, with a solemn smile, he turned back to Katie. "Go tell Mr. Higbee that I know of no man who went with me this afternoon. But I am never alone. The Lord whom I serve is always with me."

Katie's eyes looked dazed. She didn't answer but went out the door. Pastor Kaufmann locked it behind her and sank to his knees. He was still there an hour later when a loud knock roused him. It was Miles himself. "Come in, my brother," the pastor invited kindly. Miles entered, his face stiff and white as if he had seen a ghost.

"Aren't you afraid to ask me in? How can you call me brother? Don't you know I tried to kill you?" He sank down on a chair and hid his face in his hands. Great sobs shook his body. "I would have shot you today in the woods, but the Lord sent His angels to protect you. I'm an adulterer and a murderer. God help me, or I'm lost forever!"

Pastor Kaufmann put his arms around the man's shaking shoulders. "Be of good comfort, my brother. You need not be lost. Jesus will forgive your sins just now if you'll only ask Him. We all love you and are praying for your salvation."

Miles Higbee lifted tear-filled eyes. "What about Hannah? Poor Hannah. She didn't deserve to be treated this way."

"You must go home like a man and make your peace with her. She's a kind woman and a Christian. I know she'll forgive you. You can build a marriage on the solid rock of love, without all this pretense."

"Will you pray with me, Pastor? If you can forgive me, maybe the Lord will too."



A PRAYER IN THE DARK

Pastor Travis St. Clair turned restlessly in his sleep. He groaned and opened his eyes. Outside the storm raged through the night. Lightning flashes lighted the windows, and thunder rolled. But it wasn't the storm that disturbed the peace of his slumber. A pressing sense of emergency weighed on his mind.

He turned over and buried his head in the pillow. But sleep would not return. Rather the feeling of urgency grew. Sighing, he crawled out of bed and knelt on the rug.

"What's the matter, Lord? What do You want me to do?" He prayed intensely for a few minutes, but got no relief. The strange feeling that all was not well with two elderly members of his congregation haunted him.

"Lord, are You trying to tell me something? Is there something wrong with the Gabrielsons? They seemed perfectly well last Sunday. If they are in any kind of trouble, please watch over them." Feeling somewhat better, he crawled back into bed. The covers wrapped him in warmth, and drowsiness crept over him. He yawned and relaxed.

But the discomfort came again. Something was wrong with the Gabrielsons, something serious. With a deep sigh he sat up in bed.

Jenny turned over and opened her eyes. "Whatever's the matter?"

"I don't know. I can't sleep at all. And I feel like something's terribly wrong."

"It must be the storm. All that wind and rain and thunder's enough to wake the dead."

"No, I really don't think it's that. Storms never bother me. I think God's trying to tell me something. I have this strong impression that something is wrong with the Gabrielsons."

His wife rubbed her eyes and yawned. "Well, why don't you pray for them, then go back to sleep?"

"I tried that. It doesn't work. I think I'll go over to their house and see if there's a problem."

"Oh, no." She pushed up on her elbow. "In this rain? That doesn't make any sense at all. Don't you think you're being fanatical? You really can't trust impressions, you know."

"I know, but I just can't help it. Since I can't sleep anyhow, I might as well run over and see if something's the matter."

"Oh, well. If you want to--but be careful." And she turned over and went back to sleep. Travis slipped out of bed and pulled his clothes on. The rain descended in torrents. Drenched before

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he ever reached the stable, he harnessed the horse to the buggy and urged him out into the rain. It did seem like a foolish errand. He hoped no one would see him out on such a night.

The Gabrielson home was all dark. He pulled the horse and buggy into a shed for shelter. Now what to do? Probably the old couple were sound asleep.

It would be silly to wake them. Still there might be some danger near. Maybe he should get out and look around.

Tying the horse, he walked around the yard. The rain had let up a little. All seemed quiet and in order. He started back to the shed, but the impression returned with new strength. All was not well, no matter how peaceful everything appeared.

He tiptoed up on the porch. Should he knock and awaken them? Surely they needed their sleep. Trying the door, he discovered it unlocked. Why didn't they fasten their door at night? It would be much safer.

Without really knowing why, he opened the door and slipped in. It seemed a ridiculous thing to do. What if someone caught him in here? He could just imagine the gossip—the pastor found at midnight in a neighbor's home! Even the sheriff might not understand impressions that got one up in the middle of the night and sent him prowling around in the dark.

But there in the living room he fell to his knees again. Without conscious planning he began to pray aloud.

"Father, I don't know why You sent me here. These folks seem to be just fine. But You know a lot of things that I don't. If there is any danger threatening these dear old people, please protect them and paralyze any hand lifted against them. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

Relief flowed over him. He had not realized how pressed he felt until the burden lifted. With a light heart he slipped out the door and back to his horse. Ever so quietly he turned the horse toward home. It had been a strange experience. He couldn't dismiss it entirely, neither could he understand it. All he could do was put it in the hands of God. Someday He would make it plain.

Months passed, and the memory of that night ride faded. The pressures of caring for his flock and of evangelism almost erased it from his mind.

One day Dale Nelson, a member of his congregation and a long-time friend, stopped by for a chat. After the usual pleasantries he came to the purpose of his visit. "Pastor St. Clair, I have a cousin who is in charge of the large prison at St. Andrews. He is deeply concerned about the condition of the prisoners. They have no spiritual help. Many of them are young and in prison for the first time. They might well respond to the gospel. Could you go over there and hold meetings for them?"

Pastor St. Clair sat, his chin in his hands. He had never thought of working for the prisoners. Perhaps hearts might respond there. Then he smiled at his friend. "Tell him I will come at the first opportunity."

So on a crisp morning in early fall Travis drove his buggy up to the prison at St. Andrews. Captain Hanks welcomed him pleasantly. "I'm so glad you could take time from your busy

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schedule to minister to the needs of these unfortunate men. Come, I'll show you through the prison and introduce you."

The great stone wall, iron bars, and long gray halls depressed the pastor. His heart filled with pity for the men who must spend years of their lives in such a place. Sinners they were indeed, but did not Christ pity and love sinners?

As Captain Hanks and Travis walked across the prison yard the prisoners crowded around the pastor, who stopped to talk to one and then another. As the captain had said, many of them were still in their teens. Most responded to a warm tone, a kind smile.

One older man in gray prison garb came up and gazed intently at Pastor St. Clair's face. "This is Claude Hanson," the captain told him.

"Pastor, I know you from somewhere," blurted the prisoner, still staring with a puzzled expression. Travis looked the man over carefully. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't recall you at all."

A light dawned in the man's eyes. "No wonder you don't remember me, Pastor. You've never seen me, but I certainly can never forget you. Do you remember a night several months ago when you went into the Gabrielson house at midnight and prayed aloud for their protection?"

"I'm not likely to forget," replied the pastor.

The prisoner nodded. "I had heard they kept quite a sum of money in their house, and I went there that night to steal it.

"You drove up, and thinking you were Mr. Gabrielson, I intended to kill you. But you spoke to your horse, and I realized that you were a stranger. I followed you into the house and heard your prayer. Do you remember what you said?"

Pastor St. Clair shook his head. His eyes never left the man's face.

"You prayed that the old people be protected from danger and that any hand lifted against them might be paralyzed. Do you see this arm? He pointed to his right arm which hung unmoving at his side. "I have never been able to move it since. I left without doing anyone any harm."

The pastor could not speak for a moment. "How strange and wonderful are the ways of God," he exclaimed. "I never knew why He sent me there that night. And what about you, my friend? Perhaps He has taken away your arm that you might gain your soul."



HELP FROM AN ENEMY

"Emily" Carter Davidson knelt by his wife's bedside "Emily, please listen to me. God has not forsaken us."

She turned a pale, tear-streaked face to his. "Then why, oh why, did He let Mr. Tomlinson steal our money? We're ruined, completely ruined, and you can't even find work."

Carter bowed his head. For a while he couldn't answer. Why, indeed? And yet should he not trust a heavenly Father's hand? "He'll never leave us, Emily, how can I say why He let these things come upon us? I'm the one who foolishly signed the note for Aaron Tomlinson. How can I expect God to work a miracle to protect me from the results of my own mistake? And yet I believe He'll have mercy on us and provide for our needs. Surely I'll find work soon."

His wife, too weak to answer, squeezed his hand. But looking into her eyes, he saw his own faith reflected there. Quickly he turned away so that she wouldn't notice the tears that rose unbidden.

He couldn't tell her that money was by no means his greatest worry. For several weeks she had been battling a fever which no one understood. Several times it went down, and she seemed on the way to recovery, but it only returned with greater force. Now he feared her weakened body would not survive another attack.

After a time she appeared to sleep. Rising, he slipped from the room. Outside, Jane and little Johnnie waited.

"How's Mommy?" Johnnie's eyes were large with concern. His father put a protective arm around them both. "Not very well, my son. Only God can make her well."

The children clung to their father, drawing reassurance from his strong arms. Jane looked up at him. "Papa, did you know that the wood's all gone? And the candles too. Whatever will we do tonight?' How'll we take care of Mommy?"

Carter sagged from the weight of the new blow. "I don't know what we'll do, Jane." He looked at the older child. Her face showed the strain of burdens far too heavy for her years. "I don't know what we'll do, but I'll pray about it. Surely God will work it out somehow."

As quickly as possible he went out into the winter snow. The sun shone bright and warm, glistening like jewels on every snow-laden branch. But Carter had no eyes for the morning

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beauty. He crunched through the crusted snow to a little shed. Inside, a pile of hay lay loosely spread on the floor. Here he sank to his knees.

For days he had struggled to remain strong for his family's sake. Now the dam crumbled, allowing the pent-up fear and frustration to pour forth. In his refuge he could be a frightened child, coming to his heavenly Father for help and comfort. Helpless, yet hoping in God's mercy, he clung by faith to that hand that holds the worlds on their courses, but above the other things that burdened his heart loomed his pressing, immediate need for wood and candles. Again and again he pleaded with tears for the vital items.

As he prayed he felt the deep peace of God flowing into his soul. The aching fear and longing vanished. In its place welled up the sweet assurance that God heard and would care for his needs. Outside once more, a brighter world greeted him. The weight of centuries seemed lifted from his shoulders. He drew deep breaths of cold air and stood for a moment, enjoying the brightness of the day and the peace in his soul. But the thought of his anxious, fearful children recalled him to present duty. He would share with them the comfort God had poured into his own heart.

"Now you mustn't worry about the wood and candles," he reassured Jane. "God will provide them somehow. I think I'll find work today. If I can't find permanent employment, Mr. Turner may have some work I could do for a day or two to earn a little. At any rate I'm sure we'll have the necessities by tonight. Pray while I'm gone, and take care of Mother. She must not be left alone."

So he set forth with hopeful step to look for any kind of work that he could find. But the day passed in fruitless search. Even a temporary job did not materialize. The hours wore by, and his burden returned. How could he face his children with empty hands? But night was coming. They would need him. He must be there to help them care for Emily. The weight of today's failure fell the more crushingly because of the morning's hopes.

At last his weary footsteps neared his own front gate. He paused just down the road, gazing into the deep blue sky of dusk. The sunset was fading, and one bright star peered down. Drawing a deep breath, he prayed for strength enough to face the night—strength for himself and for his family. A few steps brought him to the gate. Lifting the latch, he pushed it open. Then he stopped, dazed and uncomprehending. A large pile of wood lay beside the front door.

Clapping his hands in glee, Johnnie burst from the house to greet his father with a glad cry. "Oh, Papa, we have wood and candles! We have wood and candles!"

"Whatever do you mean? Where did they come from?"

"A man came and brought 'em to us."

"Are you sure there's no mistake? Whoever could have sent them?"

Jane broke in, her eyes aglow with excitement. "There's no mistake, Papa. A man knocked on the door with a whip. When I opened it, he asked if you lived here. He said he had some candles and a load of wood for you. I asked him if you had sent 'em, but he said, 'I rather guess he doesn't know anything about it.' When I asked him who did send 'em then, he just laughed. 'I mustn't tell,' he said. 'But you may tell your father they're a present.' "

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Carter Davidson was surprised, to say the least, since he hadn't told any human being of his family's urgent need. He had confided only in his heavenly Father. Could the visitor have been an angel? Or had God communicated his need to some human agent? It was a puzzle he very much wanted to solve.

"What did the man look like?" he questioned the children.

"He had a black beard," Johnnie volunteered. "Oh, no," Jane argued. "His beard was brown, not black, and he was just about as big as you, Papa." But Johnnie shook his head. "He was much bigger than Papa."

Carter could see that he was getting nowhere. "What about his horse, or did he have a team?"

Johnnie lit up like a candle. "Not a team, but the most beautiful horse. He was black with a white star and three white feet."

Jane nodded. "And the wagon had red wheels. They looked fresh painted."

"Are you sure?" Carter frowned. Only one horse and wagon in the valley answered that description. It belonged to his old enemy, Hubert Graff.

But the children agreed on the horse's and wagon's description. There was no doubt; it had been Mr. Graff's horse.

"But he hasn't even spoken to you for years, has he, Papa? Jane puzzled.

"Why doesn't he like you, Papa?" Johnnie wanted to know.

"He makes liquor, and he knows how active I've been in temperance activities, trying to persuade people to give up drinking. So he's never forgiven me. If Mr. Graff really did this, then surely the finger of God has touched his heart."

"Weren't you friends before, Papa?" Jane queried.

"Yes, but he wouldn't believe that I've nothing personal against him. I've tried and tried to be friendly, but he won't even speak to me. Something remarkable must've happened to soften his heart. I think I'll just pay him a little visit."

So that night for the first time in years, Carter entered the distillery of his old friend. Something indeed had happened, for its proprietor looked up with a nod of recognition.

"Did you send some wood and candles to my house today?"

"Yes, sir, I sent them."

"I surely do appreciate them, but how did you happen to do it?"

"I'll tell you all about it, but first would you tell me something? Did you need them?" Hubert Graff looked intently into Carter's eyes.

"I can never tell you how much!"

Mr. Graff got up and walked around the bench. He pulled up a chair for his guest. "Well, I really did feel rather foolish about the whole thing. This morning about ten o'clock I was working as usual when a voice seemed to say to me, 'Send some wood to Carter Davidson.' I tried to banish

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the thought and concentrate on my work. I couldn't believe you really needed it, and I didn't want to do you a favor anyway.

"But the voice wouldn't leave me alone. The more I fought the impression, the more vivid it seemed. 'Send some wood to Carter Davidson; he needs it.' It haunted me every moment. Finally to purchase a little peace, I ordered Hal to fill the wagon with wood and leave it at your door.

"For a moment I was at rest—but only for a moment. Then the voice bade me, 'Send some candles.' That was really too much. I determined I wouldn't yield to the ridiculous impression. So I went back to my work. But I was in torment. I couldn't have a moment of peace. At last I handed Hal a package of candles.

"I have been worrying about this experience all day, and I wondered if I weren't losing my mind. And then, again, when I remembered the suddenness and intensity of this unexpected impression and the wonderful peace I got from obeying it, I began to conclude that it might be 'supernatural after all."

"This is, indeed, the wonderful works of God," Carter exclaimed. "At ten o'clock I was pleading with God for the very articles you sent, and the conviction filled me that God had heard my prayer."

Hubert Graff held out his hand to his old friend. "Will you forgive me for the way I've treated you? I'd really like to be friends again."

They shook hands with the old warmth, and Carter took his leave. He started home singing. He still had many more problems to meet, true. But the God who had provided in such a remarkable way would surely see him through.



GOD SAID, "WAIT"

"Bruce?" Jesse's whisper pierced the darkness. Groaning, Bruce turned over. "Huh? Why don't you go to sleep?"

"'Cause I can't. Where we goin' to stay tomorrow night in Centerville?"

"We won't be able to sleep at the hotel, but Pa has a friend with a hayloft."

"Boy, it sure makes me feel big when Pa'll let us go all by ourselves."

Bruce sighed. "Well, go to sleep, or you won't wake up early. We've got to leave before daybreak, and we'll have to harness the horse and load the wagon."

"And make some lunch."

"Trust you to think of that."

Jesse sank into silence, but he couldn't sleep. Always before, Pa'd driven to the mill in the valley to get the cornmeal ground, but this time he'd told the boys they could go alone. Bruce had ridden with Pa before, but Jesse had rarely been to Centerville, and never without Pa. It was too far to make a round trip in a day, so they'd stay overnight and start back next morning—a golden opportunity for two teenage boys to explore the marvels of the town.

Neighbors were few and far between, and not many travelers passed their hilltop cabin. Once in a while one would spend the night, and the boys would listen in wonder to tales of the world outside their peaceful valley.

Bruce needn't have feared that Jesse would sleep in that morning. A good two hours before dawn he found himself in a tug-of-war for his warm quilts. Jesse won, probably because his brother was still half asleep, and Bruce now found himself shivering in the chill morning air.

"Jesse!" he scolded. "Haven't you got any sense? Can't you let a fellow sleep?"

"Who needs to sleep on a morning like this? Get up and get your clothes on. We're goin' to the mill today!"

With a sigh Bruce got up. No use trying to sleep now anyway. The two boys pulled on their clothes and climbed down the ladder from their loft bedroom.

Jesse peered through the gloom at Pa's bunk. It was empty. "Where's Pa?" he demanded in a whisper.

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"Prayin' in the storeroom."

"You mean he gets up this early every morning?"

"Yup. I don't often wake up in time to see it, but I never knew it to fail. Any time I get up real early, he's prayin' in the storeroom."

"I guess I never got up that early before."

Bruce laughed. "That's for sure. Usually I have to drag you out, or you'd sleep through breakfast. Now will you get busy and make us some lunch while I get old Gray hitched up? Then we can load on the barrels of corn."

The boys went to work with a will. The first scouting rays of the sun had not yet climbed the horizon when they finished loading the wagon.

"I sure wish Pa'd come out so we could say goodbye to him before we leave," Bruce remarked.

"Don't you think we'd better knock on the door and tell him we're leavin'?" Jesse couldn't think of going without a word to Pa. And at that moment Pa appeared beside them in the darkness.

"Boys," he said, "you'd better unload the wagon. You can't go till tomorrow."

The two boys stared at him in horrified disbelief. "But, Pa -" they began together.

"I know it's hard on you boys, but it's just going to have to be that way." Pa's voice left no room for argument. They reluctantly climbed down.

"What made you change your mind, Pa?" Jesse ventured.

"I really don't know, Son, but the Lord told me you've got to wait till tomorrow."

"Did you hear a voice?" Bruce asked, sounding awed.

"No, just this real strong feeling. I never felt anything like it before."

"Well, come on," Jesse. Quit standin' there and help me unload. We might as well get a day of work in the cornfield. We'll go to bed early and get a good start tomorrow."

Shaking his head, Jesse followed his brother. They unloaded the wagon, ate their breakfast, and headed for the cornfields. The hot sun beat down on the boys as they wielded the hoes. Jesse said little, but his heart burned with disappointed resentment. It seemed so farfetched that God might have spoken to Pa. Surely it must be his imagination. All those hours of praying before daylight must have unsettled his brain.

He chopped at a large clod with undue violence. Was all that praying really necessary? He didn't do much of it, himself, though he could remember praying by his bedside before Mamma died. She used to help him say his prayers every night. Thinking of her made him get all choked up inside. After all those years it still hurt.

Why did God let Mamma die when he needed her so much, anyway? It made him feel guilty to think such things, but he thought them still. He hoed and chopped on and on, his throat tight and his eyes blurred with tears.

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At last the hard work erased the bad feelings and made him comfortably tired at the end of the day. He and Bruce went to bed soon after the sun set, and he fell asleep immediately.

This time Bruce shook him in the early hours of the morning. The realization dawned slowly that the big day had actually arrived. Again they packed their lunch and loaded the wagon. Pa took time from his work to see them off.

Later, as they came around the bend and looked across the valley in the first rays of the sun, their hearts nearly stopped. Columns of smoke rose as far as they could see. The boys pulled up the horse and just sat there without speaking. It looked as if every cabin in the valley was burning.

"I guess it was the Indians," said Jesse when he could swallow the lump in his throat enough to speak.

"I bet they murdered just about every settler in the valley," Bruce whispered. "Wiped Centerville clear out," Jesse added.

"If we had gone down there yesterday, we would have been there last night."

Jesse put his arm across his eyes and sobbed without shame. "And I thought Pa was crazy to pray so much and to think God spoke to him. If he hadn't prayed—"

Bruce wiped his own eyes with the back of his hand. "What say we make an agreement to get up every morning and pray too."

Jesse held out his hand to his brother. "Shake on it," he said.



FLIGHT TO TARSHISH

Rain Cloud sat staring across the blue waters of the little lake. He would not look at Singing Bird, who was fashioning a strong bowl of birch bark as her ancestors had done before her for many generations. At the moment he didn't feel like explaining the dark thoughts that chased each other through his mind.

After a time she stopped to watch him with a puzzled frown, but he pretended not to see. She left her work to come over and kneel at his side.

"My husband. He grunted but didn't answer. Timidly she laid a slender hand on his arm. "Why are you so sad?" Still no answer. She returned to making the bowl, but a frown rested on her face. He felt a twinge of guilt.

"Singing Bird, when the ship sailed away with the white missionary, my heart sailed away too."

"Now my people need us more than ever," she responded. "We are the only ones who can teach them of the great God beyond the stars."

"I don't think they want to learn. No one will listen to us. The white missionary tried, and failed. He sailed away. How can we succeed when he could not?" Rain Cloud walked over to stand beside her.

"What are you thinking of, my husband?" she asked quietly.

"I want to sail back to my own home on the Straits of Mackinac."

She rose slowly to face him, her eyes startled and sad. "Have you forgotten that you promised my people you would remain with them when you married me?"

He turned away impatiently, wishing not to be reminded of that. "Among my people there were many who would listen to the gospel message. It was much easier to preach to them," he said. For a moment he looked into the stricken face of Singing Bird. His heart twisted within him, but he would not relent. "Will you come with me?" he asked.

It was a long time before she answered. Then her voice was low and controlled. "Rain Cloud, I gave you a promise at our marriage. Where you go, I will follow.

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Rain Cloud took her hand and gazed into her eyes. In them he could read only sadness and patient devotion. He smiled at her and stroked her shining black hair, then walked down beside the water's edge.

"How did' Jonah feel when he set sail for Tarshish?" he wondered, then shook his head to rid himself of such thoughts. God had given him no orders to stay among unbelieving Chippewa. If the white missionary could not succeed, how could any reasonable person expect him to continue the hopeless battle to reach their minds? He had best go back where his labors would do good and be appreciated.

A few days later the waters of Lake Superior lay calm beneath the arching blue of the summer sky as Rain Cloud and Singing Bird loaded their few possessions on a ship to begin their journey to the east. A stiff breeze began to blow. "We should land at Sault Ste. Marie on the third day," the captain told them.

The dancing waves reflected the glory of the morning sun. Rain Cloud gazed far away toward the horizon where lay his home and family. "In a few days I shall land on the beautiful shores of my 'Tarshish,' the land of my choice," he mused. He threw a sidelong glance at Singing Bird. Her face had recovered its usual serenity as her faith in God's leading and loyalty to her husband had triumphed.

Busy sailors trimmed the sails, and the captain pointed the ship's bow into the path of sunlight lying across the bosom of the lake. A few hours' sailing brought them far out across the water. Only a misty speck of land was visible, away to the south.

But the force of the wind began to slacken, slowing the vessel's steady progress. In a little while a deep calm settled, and the sails hung limp from the masts. Helplessly the little ship rocked to and fro on the gentle waves. Rain Cloud swallowed his impatience and waited for the wind to freshen.

It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon before the sails began to fill. The captain paused beside them on the deck. "The wind is coming from the wrong direction." His eyes narrowed, and he frowned with worry. "It's going to be a bad wind, very furious."

The captain proved to be a good prophet. At six o'clock the storm broke. The wind roared through the masts of the little ship and dashed sheets of pounding rain across the deck.

Shielding Singing Bird with his body, he pulled her into the little cabin assigned to them. Whimpering, she clung to the bunk, as the whole world seemed in motion. He did his best to reassure her and conquer his own rebellious stomach.

The ship pitched and rolled alarmingly, and above the roar of the tempest he could hear the shouts of the crew and captain as they fought a losing battle to keep her on course. The door of the cabin burst open, and the captain appeared, drenched and weary. "We're in danger, he confessed. "The wind is maddening and determined to send us to the bottom of the sea. I've sailed this great lake for twenty-one years, but no storm has ever impeded my sailing. I've never seen anything like it. My friend, I am afraid something is wrong with us."

The captain left. Rain Cloud tried in vain to swallow the feeling of guilt that rose to choke him. He saw the piercing eyes of Singing Bird on his face, but neither of them spoke.

Footprints of Providence

Another hour passed before the captain returned. Looking exhausted, he leaned against the wall and shook his head. "It's no use. We can't go forward. We'll have to go back to the harbor."

When he had gone, there was silence in the little cabin except for the roar of the elements outside. The vessel swung around slowly and pointed her prow back toward the safety of the harbor they had left. It was late at night before the battered ship tied up once more at the dock.

As Rain Cloud bent to put their possessions together Singing Bird laid a gentle hand on his arm. "Husband, I must say a few words. He straightened and looked down into her pleading eyes. "Husband, as surely as I believe in God, I believe that we were the cause of all on this ship nearly perishing this night. It is true, as you say, that this is a country full of darkness and idolatry. But I believe God wants us to stay and do something for my people. He has shown us by many signs.

Rain Cloud laid an affectionate hand over hers. "I have thought of this, but surely it cannot be. Surely our heavenly Father has not taken note of our journey and sent the storm to hinder us. We are too small, too poor, to notice. It's impossible. If the white missionary with means, education, and experience has found the work here useless, what can God expect of us?"

"Then you still mean to leave?" Her hand trembled on his arm.

"Yes."

"Then I shall go with you."

Rain Cloud found the captain on the bridge talking to a member of the crew. When they were finished, he approached. "When are you planning to set sail again, sir?"

"As soon as we have a good wind."

"We will sail with you."

Rain Cloud took Singing Bird ashore to find shelter and rest at the house of an acquaintance. The following afternoon they boarded once more, somewhat refreshed. About two o'clock a good wind came up and the vessel again set sail for Sault Ste. Marie.

They had good sailing until they reached the place where they had been becalmed before. Once more the wind fell, and the ship could make no progress. Rain Cloud and Singing Bird sat resting on the deck, watching with anxious hearts the lifeless sails. From the blue, unclouded heavens the sun beat down with breathless warmth.

An hour passed. The sun sank. As it dropped toward the horizon those on board could see a small dark speck of cloud rising in the west. Rain Cloud's heart beat faster. The cloud grew and spread, black against the sky.

"The wind is coming," the captain shouted. "It's going to be worse than before!" The crew burst into activity.

Rain Cloud stood and watched in wonder as the tempest descended upon them. He and Singing Bird found refuge in the little cabin before it hit in all its fury. Above the shriek of the wind they could hear the captain ordering the crew to throw over all the barrels of fish to lighten the ship.

Footprints of Providence

Overcome by emotion, Rain Cloud looked out the tiny porthole. Furious lightning tore the ink black sky. The winds lashed the boiling seas without mercy. There was a terrible roaring and howling as of a thousand demons.

He staggered to the door of the cabin and opened it, bracing against the wind.' From there he could see the captain rushing about, talking to his men. It seemed as if he could hear the captain saying, "'Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.'" In his heart he knew that if they did, the lot would surely fall upon him, guilty Rain Cloud.

Again he heard the captain's voice, lifted above the storm. "Surely there is something wrong with this vessel, and we must all perish!" Rain Cloud choked down the cry of terror that rose in his throat. At that moment he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. Singing Bird pulled him back inside and shut the door against the wind.

He staggered like a dying man across the room and sank to his knees beside the little bunk. She knelt beside him, her arm around his heaving shoulders. Hiding his face against the quilts, he said, "Because of me we may all perish. Like Jonah I should be thrown into the sea."

"Our heavenly Father only wants you to return," she pleaded. "Promise Him that you will do His will."

Rain Cloud began to pray. Humbly he confessed his guilt and stubbornness and pleaded with God for mercy for them all. Then, thoroughly repentant, he rose and sought the captain with a strange confession and request. The captain agreed to take them back, and it seemed that the winds and waves began at once to subside. With difficulty they made their way once more to the security of the harbor.

The next day Rain Cloud and Singing Bird stood on the dock and watched as the little ship set sail for a third attempt, this time without them. Rain Cloud's heart was chastened, but peaceful, as he took the slender brown hand of his wife in his. "We will remain in this land. I will give my life to bring the light to these people. Surely if God can notice one so small and poor as I, as He has done in this astounding way, then He Himself will be with us and make our labors bear fruit.

Footprints of Providence



WHEN GOD USED HIS MASTER KEY

Moonlight fell in shafts between the iron bars of the window. It lighted up David Nitschmann's features as he lay sleeping on the paving stones. I couldn't help wondering at the peace on his face.

Only the day before, the soldiers had come for us. We had known it might happen, of course. But there seemed no way to flee. Enemies watched and waited for us to make a wrong move. And duty seemed to demand that we stay with the work God had given us.

But what now? Our wives and children were left alone, and we could no longer work for God. We might well rot in this disgusting place-if our enemies didn't torture us to death first. How could all this be God's will? There, alone in the blackness, my soul wrestled with despair. All the others seemed to be sleeping. Was I the only one whose faith was so weak?

How did Nitschmann rest so serenely? Disaster after disaster had fallen upon our peaceful people. It seemed, the fate of our ancient church hung in the balance. And how much we needed young David Nitschmann's forceful, courageous leadership! His loss would be a blow to the poor scattered flock.

Was it to be the end of the truth handed down from the brave and noble Huss? Was the darkness of compromise and error to triumph finally over the church he had planted and watered with his own blood? The iron heel of oppression seemed ready to extinguish its last vestige in Moravia.

The chains on my legs clattered against the stones as I sank on the floor and buried my face in my arms. I poured out the bitterness of my discouragement to a pitying Saviour. How long I lay there praying I do not know. I do know that it seemed as if He stood there beside me, as if He were gazing at me in tenderness and understanding. I must have made more sounds than I knew, for I felt a hand on my arm.

"Brother ___..." It was David Nitschmann's voice. "Brother, how is it with you this night?"

Footprints of Providence

Even in the dim light I could see the compassion on his face. I told him of the fear, the struggle, but of the Saviour's presence too.

"How well I understand," he sympathized.

"With faith like yours, how can you understand? You sleep so peacefully without a fear or doubt, while I wrestle the devil and his hosts."

"And where do you think the faith and courage in my heart came from?" he asked. "It came from nights like yours, nights of pouring out my fears and burdens to Him who is able to bear them all. It came from hearing Him say to me, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' There is faith for you as well as for me in Him."

"Pray with me," I pleaded. And so we spent most of that night in prayer while the others slept. And before the dawn broke over Moravia, the sunshine of courage and faith began to flood my soul. At last Nitschmann and I fell into peaceful slumber.

It was far into the day when I awoke. The others in our little cell had saved me some of the meager meal the jailer had brought. Their concern touched my heart. We were all quite hungry because of the small amount of food that we had received.

My heart still sang with the blessing of God. I shared with them my experience of the night before, and we spent the day as Paul and Silas had done so long ago-praising and blessing God. Nitschmann repeated to us again and again the promises of the Word.

More and more I could understand why the apostles praised the Lord that they had had the opportunity to suffer for His sake. Yet an urgent desire to preach the gospel disturbed me. How could I be content to remain here when so much needed to be done? David Nitschmann and I discussed this matter quietly.

"I feel just as you do, Brother Schneider," he said. "I could be content to remain here and suffer if God so wills it, but I feel that He needs our labors at this time. If this impression is really true, He will make a way of escape for us."

We prayed together, then Nitschmann rose and looked at the other men. "I have thoughts of leaving you this night," he told them. "I feel that God wants me to go and that He will open the way."

"And I too," I announced, springing to my feet.

"I mean to go with you." My own reaction amazed me. How could we go anywhere, chained in irons as we were? Yet somehow I had no doubt that it would be so.

We waited until eleven o'clock in the evening. Then Nitschmann drew out a little knife. "I've managed to hide this," he said. "Perhaps it will help us get the irons off our feet."

As he picked up the padlock, hoping to unlock it, it fell open in his hand. He looked at me with tears in his eyes. "Now I see for certain it's the will of God that we go!"

The padlock on my chains fell open at a touch as well. Removing the irons from our feet, we bade a fond farewell to those we must leave behind. Scarcely daring to make a sound, we encouraged them to trust in God.

Footprints of Providence

Our cell door was not locked. Slipping out in absolute silence, we searched the courtyard for a ladder so that we might go over the wall, but found none.

After puzzling for a few moments about what we should do, Nitschmann decided to try the door into the main passage. He discovered it unlocked. There was no one in sight in the courtyard or the corridor. Breathlessly we tiptoed through the darkness of the passageway. Sure enough, the door at the other end stood unlocked as well.

We were outside the castle.

Nitschmann lived just across the garden from the castle. Keeping in the shadows, we reached his front door. The door was barred, but he tapped with gentle persistence until his wife opened it. She took one look at us, her face went white, and she fell fainting into his arms. He caught her, and we entered the temporary refuge of the little cabin.

After he laid her on the bed, she stirred as he bent over her, and he put his finger on his lips.

"David!" she whispered, reaching out a hand to touch him. "David, how did you get away?"

"God set us free, Sarah. We must escape quickly Herrnhut. Count von Zinzendorf will protect us. But as soon as we can we'll send for you and the children and Brother Schneider's wife. We won't have time to see her, but you tell her to be ready to leave as soon as the messenger arrives. Someone will guide you both to Herrnhut."

They bade each other a touching farewell, and we escaped into the darkness of the night. Since it was many miles to safety, we needed to make good speed. We fled by night and slept by day, huddled under bushes and as nearly buried in leaves as we could manage.

A few days of such travel brought us to our destination. A great welcome awaited us at Herrnhut. Our beloved brethren who had made their escape before us greeted us with open arms. And Count Zinzendorf was extremely kind. We found a thriving little community of the brethren flourishing under his protection.

But for a time we couldn't find anyone to guide our wives to safety. About two weeks after our arrival a man came walking into the little settlement one day, dusty and weary from a long journey. With a leap of the heart I recognized our dear friend and brother, David Hinkel. I called at once to David Nitschmann, "Brother Hinkel is here!"

We were delighted to see him, but it was plain that he was at the point of collapse. It was necessary to swallow our impatience and give him food and rest before we could ask him what had happened after we left. When he had sufficiently recovered, we waited anxiously for him to tell us his story.

"The authorities were furious when you escaped," he reported. "They could not understand how you got away. Calling your wives in, they threatened to arrest them if they didn't send someone after you to bring you back.

"Your wives asked me to overtake you and tell you of their problem. I followed but couldn't find any trace of you. I could have made my escape, but I feared the authorities would take out their anger on your wives; so I returned and reported my failure.

Footprints of Providence

"The judge had me arrested and put into prison. He said that I should be hanged for helping you escape. I told him that would be as God willed it. If He did not purpose it, it would not be.

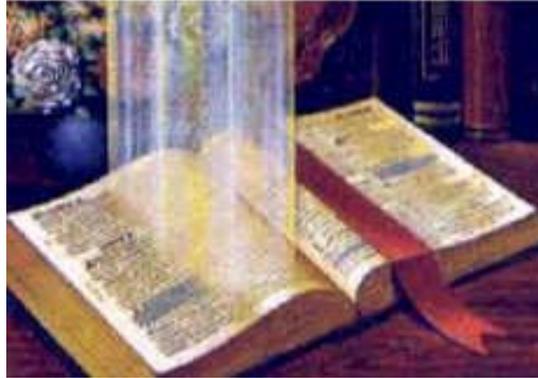
"They put me into a dark hole without food or water for three days. I thought I would die of cold and thirst. Then the judge called me before him and demanded what I knew of you. I told him again and again that I knew nothing. At last he ordered me put into a warmer cell. They gave me a little bread and some dirty water. The judge gave strict orders to the jailer to watch me carefully. This brought to my mind the charge given to the Philippian jailer before Paul's deliverance. I thought, 'Perhaps God is telling me that He wants me to escape.'

"So when they had left me alone for a little while, I opened the door softly and looked out. Two guards stood outside, but they didn't see me. Then I realized that I could pass them without being observed. I walked out through the back gate and the garden in broad daylight. Once free, I urged some of the brethren to help your wives escape immediately, then set off in haste to join you here."

Nitschmann and I listened to his amazing account with joy and thanksgiving. David Nitschmann took Hinkel's hand in his own. "I can see," he told him, "that God has set His hand to deliver many of our people and bring them out safely. We may suffer much for His sake, but the light of truth will not go out. By His grace and our earnest labors it will shine to the ends of the earth!"

NOTE: David Nitschmann became the first bishop of these so-called Brethren who escaped. He and the other Brethren not only kept the light burning, forming the Moravian Church, but they became missionaries to the ends of the earth. Their influence set John Wesley on fire for God, thus kindling Methodism as well.

Footprints of Providence



"ALL IS FOR THE BEST"

Herbert stuck a cautious head around the corner. It would never do to disturb Pastor Gilpin at his prayers, but time grew short. He should be dressing for church. Yes, the good man stood looking out of the great sunny windows on the east end of the room. The book he had been reading lay closed on the dressing table, a sure sign that he had finished his morning prayers.

When Herbert cleared his throat, Pastor Gilpin turned, his face glowing like the morning sunshine. "Good morning, Herbert. What a beautiful day the Lord has given us!"

Smiling a little at the pastor's enthusiasm, Herbert replied, "Yes, sir. It is truly a beautiful day. And the hours are slipping away. You'll be due soon at the church."

"Ah, yes. Bring me my vestments, Herbert. I was reading the Book of John in the Greek. It was so absorbing. What tremendous depth it has! What a wealth of sermon material!"

The lad laid out each garment carefully. "I shall be looking forward to those sermons, sir. But I do wish you would be more careful what you say in public. These are fearful days. A little bird may carry your words to the queen."

Bernard Gilpin turned and put a hand on his servant's shoulder, reading the devotion and deep concern in his pale blue eyes. "Herbert, Herbert, you must not worry so. God's hand is over me. I must speak the truth He gives me. The people are so hungry to hear the Word."

"Sir, I pray God He'll protect you. You know Queen Mary's wrath falls on all she suspects of heresy, the high and low alike. She has burned bishops Ridley and Latimer. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury has fallen before her. If you continue to speak these things, only a miracle can save you."

Herbert's eyes searched Pastor Gilpin's face, but he could read no trace of fear. Only joy and peace rested there. When he answered, it was with a smile. "Ah, well, God's will be done. All is for the best."

With a last glance in the mirror on the wall, the pastor ran a hand over his dark hair and started for the stairs. With sadness in his eyes, Herbert watched him go. "He's a saint," he murmured. "God grant he doesn't become a martyr."

Footprints of Providence

Halfway down the great curving staircase two golden-haired lads sat on the banister. Gilpin greeted them with his usual good cheer. "Good morning, Douglas. Good morning, Harvey. How are your studies coming?"

"Very well, Pastor Gilpin," said Douglas, the older boy.

The priest looked intently at Harvey. "Are you still suffering with homesickness, my lad?"

"I'm all right, sir. I can't tell you how much I appreciate being able to live here and go to school. I'll never be able to repay you."

Gilpin laughed. "Oh, yes you will, my lad. Just study well and use all you learn to glorify God and bless your fellowmen. I'll be more than repaid. I consider you an excellent investment."

He continued on his way down the stairs, leaving the boys to their conversation. Harvey's eyes followed him with a puzzled expression. "Say, Douglas, how many boys has Pastor Gilpin given a home and an education?"

Douglas chuckled. "I couldn't begin to count."

True to his word, Bernard Gilpin continued to preach what the people needed with small regard for what the authorities would think. His immediate superior, the Bishop of Durham, loved and protected him. But with "Bloody Mary" on the throne, such protection could not ensure his safety for long.

So early one morning in May a detachment of soldiers rode up the long driveway under the elms to the door of the manor house. A maid caught sight of them through a window and screamed. Servants left their work and the boys their studies. A great pounding echoed through the old house.

Upstairs Herbert stood wringing his hands. "What shall we do, sir? They've come for you. What shall we do?"

"Open the door." Gilpin's voice was calm. "But, sir..."

"Open the door."

The soldiers pressed into the entry hall. Their captain held up a paper. "I have a summons from the Bishop of London for Bernard Gilpin."

Pastor Gilpin stepped forward. "I am Bernard Gilpin. Come in, sir, and have breakfast. I'll be ready to go with you in a few minutes."

The captain's mouth fell open, and he looked about suspiciously but followed the maid to the table. He and his soldiers took to their seats while panic-stricken servants served them a lovely meal.

In a few moments Gilpin appeared, dressed for riding, with a small bag of clothing in his hand. The boys had gathered, awed and silent, and the servants wept. He bade them good-bye with his usual cheery smile. "Do not weep; do not fear. God's will be done. All is for the best."

Footprints of Providence

The balding captain made a sound suspiciously like a snort and herded his prisoner out of the door. The household watched them ride away in stricken silence. There seemed little chance Gilpin would ever return.

Peasants working in the fields saw the little group pass. Through the countryside, people in breathless haste spread the news. Crowds, mourning as they went, accompanied them on the road.

The captain shooed them away, threatening them with his sword. They fell back, but as soon as the march resumed, they followed again, still wailing.

The captain grew more and more irritated, but it was useless. As they progressed, some of the peasants returned to their homes, but others joined the procession from the villages they passed. Finally in desperation the captain called a beggar to him. "Why," he demanded, "are the people following? Tell them to go to their homes."

The beggar fell on one knee. "Oh, sir, they love the good pastor. He travels through the countryside preaching the gospel to them. He feeds the hungry and buys clothing for the naked. There's scarcely one of these people that he's not befriended. Shouldn't they weep when he's in trouble?"

Pastor Gilpin turned his horse back and addressed the crowd. "I thank you for your devotion, my dear people. But you're annoying the captain. Please go to your homes in peace. Don't be afraid for me. The will of God be done. All is for the best."

His calm voice and cheerful smile reassured them. They turned and made their way back to their homes. The captain led on at a faster pace toward London.

On the second day of their journey the sun sank in the west as they entered the cobblestone street of a small village. Since evening was falling, the captain determined to spend the night at the inn.

Bernard Gilpin, in dismounting, slipped and fell. His foot caught in the stirrup and twisted violently. The horse shied and bolted, dragging him for several feet before the soldiers could catch it.

When they released his foot from the stirrup, he lay white and still on the pavement. The soldiers carried him into the inn and put him in a bed. A doctor pronounced his leg broken and said that he must not travel for a time.

Although bruised and bleeding, his face contorted with pain, Gilpin did not let his patience and cheerfulness desert him. The captain stared down at him, a cynical smirk flickering across his face. "I suppose this is all for the best, too," he commented.

Gilpin smiled. "I have no doubt but that it is," he answered.

Several weeks passed before the man could travel. Although he still couldn't walk without assistance, the captain decided that they had delayed long enough. He told the innkeeper they would leave in the morning.

Footprints of Providence

But that evening a breathless messenger arrived at the inn. The news he carried was startling indeed. Queen Mary was dead. Elizabeth reigned.

Pastor Gilpin addressed the captain with customary good humor. "Now, since the new queen is a Protestant, do you think I'll be convicted of heresy?"

The captain looked disgruntled. "It's scarcely any use taking you in."

"And if I hadn't fallen and broken a leg I would have been in London some time ago, maybe even burned at the stake by now."

The captain nodded.

"So, you see, my dear captain. As I said before, God's will be done. All is for the best."

NOTE: Bernard Gilpin lived and served for many more years. His people called him the Apostle of the North, and his piety, cheerfulness, and generosity have earned him a place in history.



THE WALL

A cry rang through the quiet village, startling its inhabitants from their evening meals. "The army is coming, the Swedes and Russians. Flee! Flee for your lives!"

Wailing people erupted from the cottage doors to see the refugees pouring into the village. "They're burning, killing, as they go. If you don't flee, you'll surely be destroyed."

"How soon will they come?"

"We don't know. They aren't far behind, and they're coming swiftly. Those who don't flee they murder. "

A bitterly cold night in January began to settle on the little province of Schleswig. Frightened people gathered a few belongings and streamed out of the village and down the road toward the capital city. In one small cottage Bertha Schmidt looked at her grandson. "Shall we flee, Karl, or stay?"

Footprints of Providence

Karl stood by the door of their home, watching weeping women and children and grim, silent men hurrying past. His bride of a few months, white and shaking, clung to him. When he turned to Frau Schmidt, his face was rigid. "There's no use in running. Most of these people will freeze tonight before they can reach shelter. We might as well remain here in our home and await our fate."

Bertha Schmidt put out a wrinkled hand to grip his arm. "We won't perish, Karl. God will be our protection."

He didn't answer. He pulled the two women inside and bolted the door. Piling all the furniture in the little one-room cottage in front of it, he stood back and surveyed the barricade. "We might as well do what we can to protect ourselves," he sighed, "but it's flimsy protection against an army. Besides, they have only to set the cottage afire."

Mona sobbed silently, her whole body convulsed with fear and grief. Karl put his arms around her, and she hid her face against his shoulder. "What shall we do, Karl? Oh, what shall we do?" she cried. His strong arms held her to him, but he had no comforting words to offer.

"Why do the Swedes and Russians attack us?" she questioned.

"They're angry with our government for siding with Napoleon," Karl explained.

Frau Schmidt had taken her Bible from its resting place on the shelf. "Come, my children," she said. "Come and worship. Our God is strong enough to deliver us. Don't be afraid."

She gathered them around the fireplace. Since the chairs formed part of the barricade, they sat together on the floor before the fire. She opened her worn Bible and began to read: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. ... The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.... Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

Turning from passage to passage in the Psalms, she read to them the strong, comforting promises. Her voice rose in holy confidence: "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me."

Raising her eyes to her children, face aglow with assurance, she declared, "God will build a wall of protection around us and preserve us from our enemies!"

"Now, now, Grandmother," Karl protested. "Do you really expect God to erect a wall around our poor hut strong enough to keep out an army?"

"Haven't you read," she replied, "that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice? Did not God turn back the mighty Assyrian? And didn't Elisha see horses and chariots of fire surrounding him to protect him from his enemies?"

Karl shook his head. "But, Grandmother, that was centuries ago. Have you heard of God working in such a way today?"

"And why would He work a miracle for us?" Mona put in.

But Frau Schmidt would let nothing discourage her. "God never changes," she insisted. "And if He so cares for the sparrow and the grass of the field, should He not much rather care for us?"

Footprints of Providence

Silence fell on the little group by the fire. Each seem absorbed in his own thoughts. Hours crept by. Outside, a storm whistled and roared its rage. At midnight the wind stilled somewhat and the chimes of the great clock on the steeple drifted through the night. Just as it struck twelve o'clock the faint strains of martial- music reached them.

The fatal hour had come.

In the distance they could hear tramping and shouting. Nearer and nearer came the frightening sounds. They huddled together on the floor. The fire had gone out, unnoticed. Almost inaudibly Frau Schmidt whispered, "Build, O Lord, a wall around us."

Horrible, muffled shrieks pierced the night, and there was the sound of crackling flames. Violence and destruction surrounded them. Yet no intruder disturbed the peace of the little cottage. The uproar ebbed and flowed, then drifted away. Still no one stirred.

Silence reigned. After a time Mona raised herself. "I can't understand it," she puzzled. "Why didn't they come in?"

Karl pulled her back down. "Be quiet. Be quiet," he whispered. "Who knows if there are still soldiers near."

So they rested, huddled together, until the morning. At last Karl got to his feet. "This is truly a mystery!" he exclaimed. "They must be gone by now. We haven't heard a sound for hours. How did they miss us?"

Frau Schmidt looked up, her face radiant. "The wall. The Lord built the wall."

"But how? How? That's what I'd like to know. I wonder what's left of our village? Are we the only ones who survived?"

"Shall we open the door and look out?"

"I think we'd better crack the shutters first." Karl loosed the latch and put one eye to the slit, and then he threw it wide open.

"Praise God, Grandmother! Here indeed is your wall!" he exclaimed. He waved his hand at the open window.

Outside stretched only the solid whiteness of snow. During the night it had drifted entirely over the little cottage, hiding it from the eyes of the invading army.

Frau Schmidt looked at the glistening wall, her eyes full of tears. "Faithful is He who hath promised: He also hath done it," she declared.