

“The Old Soldier and the Rent Day”

Some years ago, there lived in a cold damp cellar an old soldier, who had lost one of his legs in fighting for his country. But his wife was ungodly, and this lay as a heavy burden on his heart. He had a small pension, which with the scanty product of a mangle, scarcely sufficed for their maintenance. They had fifteen-pence a week to pay for the cellar where rats ran over their bed at night.

The simple faith of this old man at once won my heart. I often visited him to be refreshed and edified by his remarks while reading the Word of God to him.

One morning the mailman brought me a letter from a friend to whom I had written about this aged couple, and, being much concerned about them, had enclosed five shillings. I set out at once to carry this to them. In vain, however, did I stand at the top of the dark stairs, and call aloud to Mrs. G. to open the door, that I might find my way down. It was no use. She was scolding aloud, and was deaf to every other sound. I groped my way, and, making for the door, gave a loud rap, which brought her voice to a hush, and she expressed regret that she had not heard me. I replied that I was surprised and troubled to find her scolding so loudly. "It is enough to provoke anyone," she said, "to see him go on as he does." "Oh, don't trouble the lady with them things," said her husband, "let's have some of the words of God for truly we need them this morning." Mrs. G. was not however to be silenced; she went on to vent her anger. "Now here's a man for you, ma'am, without a bit of care for his wife. The other day we had only one penny in the house, and I sent him to get us some bread. But instead of that he goes and gives it to a tramp he knows nothing of." The old soldier looked deeply grieved, and, addressing me, said, "There are two ways of telling every story," and then, with much emotion, he gave me his version. It was very true. The penny was all he had, and he was on his way to the bakers, when a travelling man, with his wife and three children sitting on a doorstep, took his attention. He found that, like himself, they were natives of Scotland, sick and hungry. He spoke to them a few words from the Bible, and found to his joy that they were also believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. On parting, he slipped his penny, with a thankful heart into the hand of his afflicted brother. It was not until he had done so that he remembered, with dark forebodings, "What will my wife say?"

Here Mrs. G. interrupted, "He must be a poor husband who would rob his wife to give to a stranger." "Let me finish," he said, "and you shall see ma'am, how the Lord returned the little offering tenfold." He then went on to relate that, not daring to go back empty handed, he walked up and down, asking the Lord to supply his need for his wife's sake. While walking back and forth a gentleman asked him the way to the Post Office. The soldier offered to show him the way, and while walking together the gentleman asked him if he were not old G. whom he

had known many years ago. G. replied that he was, upon which the gentleman put a shilling in his hand. "Now," added this old Christian, "is not our Master true to His word? And does He not bless a hundredfold out of grace?"

I was deeply touched by this account, and recalled to my mind the letter I had received that morning, so I inquired regarding their present trouble. Here Mrs. G. broke forth in her complaints again. The landlord had demanded their rent by twelve o'clock that day, as she had a payment to make up. They had but a few pence left in the house, and she was for hastening off her husband with some things from the mangle, which would bring them sixpence more. "But I could not get him to go," she exclaimed, "for he said he must first ask the Lord; so instead of doing as I bade him, there he has been sitting over the Bible; and, as if he had not lost time enough already, he must needs go down on his knees, and all my shaking and scolding would not get him up until just before you and now it is within half an hour of twelve."

"How much do you owe?" I inquired. "Just five shillings," she replied. "It's fifteen-pence a week as you know, ma'am; and it is just four weeks last Saturday." I said nothing, but opened the letter and read to her that part which related to her husband, and then gave him the five shillings' worth of stamps.

It was a moment not to be forgotten. The old man stood speechless with joy, and with humble eyes lifted up in sweet thanksgiving, whilst Mrs. G. sank down in a chair, and covering her face with her hands, wept tears of shame and sorrow. "May God forgive me," she said, "I am a wicked woman! I see it all now. I didn't believe, but it is just as he read it out of that very Bible: 'Before they call I will answer.' Oh, I didn't believe it! I didn't believe it! May God forgive me." God's mercy had melted her stubborn heart, and the overpowering sense of the fact "Thou God seest me" made her tremble with fear for her unbelief.

From this time a brighter day began to dawn upon old G.'s night of sorrow. His wife, so long a hinderer to his peace, and the subject of his many prayers, would now sit by his side as he read the Bible, accompany him to church sabbath and weekday, and when I left the parish, I had the comfort of believing that the Holy Spirit had begun a work of grace in her heart.