



A BOOK TO READ

Mary Brown quickened her steps. It seemed to her that, since her mother's death a few months ago, she had done nothing but hurry—to the shop where she worked as an assistant in the morning, and home to get her father's tea at night. Then there was the washing, the cooking, and the cleaning. It seemed endless.



She walked along deep in thought, so it was not surprising that, as she turned into her own garden gate, she collided with a young man coming out.

“Oh, sorry! I didn't see you,” he said, grinning cheerfully. Then, feeling some explanation of his presence was needed, he handed her a leaflet, saying:

“I've just put one of these through your letterbox.”

She took the leaflet from him. On the front, in bold type, were the words

THE BIBLE
THE BOOK FOR TO-DAY

“But no-one believes the Bible to-day,” objected Mary.

“Oh, yes they do! Lots of clever people do, like Charles Marston, and the late Albert Schweitzer and lots of others. I do, too!” he added earnestly.

Mary looked thoughtful.

“I believe in God,” she said. “I don’t see how you can help that. Like it says in that Psalm we learnt at school, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.”

She paused, and the young man went on,

““Day unto day uttereth speech,

And night unto night showeth knowledge.’ That’s the 19th Psalm.”

“That’s it!” agreed Mary. “You can’t have a design without having a designer, can you? Why, even my watch shows that. It’s a perfect piece of workmanship, doing just what it was made to do. That couldn’t have happened by chance. And I can’t imagine the world can have happened by chance either.”

Michael looked at her with evident admiration.

“Phew! you’re a thinker!” he said. They both laughed; then he went on,

“Your watch is doing what it was made to do. That’s a good point. Well, if God made the world, He must have had some purpose in making it.”

“I never thought of His having a purpose,” Mary answered, “though I suppose He must have.”

“Look here, then!”

Michael took a small Bible out of his pocket, and found the 45th chapter of Isaiah. He started to read at the 18th verse.

““For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain; he formed it to be inhabited.’ See? He made it for people to live in.”

“I know THAT,” said Mary scornfully. “I don’t need the Bible to tell me that.” Michael was quite unperturbed.

“Ah, but listen to this,” he said, turning over to Habakkuk 2. He read the 14th verse:

““For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.’ You can’t say the earth is full of God’s glory now—not with atom bombs and jet fighters, and people dying of hunger in some places, and dying of over-eating in others.”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Now, the Bible tells how God is going to make it full of His glory. It tells you what He’s going to do; and how He’s going to do it.”

“It would be interesting to know what’s going to happen to the world. I suppose it can’t go on for ever as it is now. But it would be much more interesting to know what’s going to happen to me,” she added, thinking of her own difficult life.

“That depends on you.”

“How do you mean?” she asked.

“When you’re travelling in unknown country, you have to use a map, and a guide-book, and sign-posts; or better still, a guide. If you use these things—reliable ones, of course!—you’ll get to your destination. The future is like unknown country, and it belongs to God. He has given us the map, the guide-book, the sign-posts—even the guide—in fact, everything we need for the journey. It’s all, in the Bible.”

Mary did not answer, and he went on, “It’s God’s world, and we’re God’s creatures. He’s the only one who could possibly explain His purpose with the world to us; and the only one who could possibly tell us how we ought to live. It’s all in the Bible,” he repeated. “It’s God’s word.”

“How can you be sure?” asked Mary doubtfully.

“It claims to be. I don’t know how many times it says, ‘Thus saith the Lord’, but it must be, hundreds. And it says, ‘The word of the Lord came to—Isaiah, Jeremiah, or whoever it may be. The Apostle says, ‘Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.’”

“They could have been mistaken,” argued Mary.

“They could have been,” agreed Michael, “but it’s very unlikely.”

“I don’t see why.”

“There are sixty-six books collected together in the Bible, written by—I should say, at least forty writers. There are many hundreds of years between the writing of the first book and the writing of the last. Yet it makes a perfect whole, with all the parts agreeing. It’s as if—” he thought for a moment, “as if Shakespeare and Bacon and Dickens and George Bernard Shaw and Neville Shute and Enid Blyton had all written bits which could be put together to make a whole. Just imagine it—Hamlet and Eliza Doolittle and Oliver Twist!”

They both laughed.

“But they could have made false claims,” persisted Mary.

“They could,” Michael agreed again. “But if they were false, the Old Testament is a great big hoax. And, since Jesus believed it, he must have been mistaken. If he who

claimed to be the Son of God could be so misled as to believe a book that wasn't true, we can't trust his words either. We have no guidance, and no help from God. The outlook is pretty bleak."

The girl did not answer, and he went on,

"If you had a message sent to you from the Queen of England, or even from the Prime Minister, what would you do? Why, you'd read it over and over again. You'd ponder over the precise meaning of every word. Yet here's a message from God in heaven, and what do people do? They put it right up on a high shelf, and forget it's there."

"But it's not a PERSONAL message," objected Mary.

"Oh, yes it is! You read it and see. I bet you've never read it right through."

"No, I haven't. Only bits of the Gospels, and the Psalms. It's hard to understand."

"Not really! Tell you what. You come to the meeting on Wednesday. It'll help you to understand. We've got a good speaker."

"I can't promise. I don't know whether I ought to leave my father. He's not been too good, lately. But I will if I can."

Michael told her where to find the meeting room.

"I'll look out for you," he said. "It begins at half past seven."

Mary glanced at her watch.

"Goodness! It's half past six, I shall never have Dad's tea ready in time. Cheerio!" she called, dashing up the path, and into the house.

CHAPTER 2 —A SURPRISE FOR MARY

Mary had quite made up her mind that she would go to the meeting on Wednesday. In the morning, however, her father seemed more depressed and unwell than ever. He simply would not see a doctor, and Mary put his poor health down to the shock of her mother's death. She watched him with a heavy heart as he set off for work.

Wednesday was early closing day, and the shop wasn't very busy. Mr. Jarvis, the manager, noticed that Mary seemed worried.

"Anything wrong?" he asked her.

"I'm a bit worried about Dad," she said. "I did want to go out to-night, but I don't like to leave him."

"What is it? A dance? A date with the latest boy-friend?"

Mary laughed.

"No," she said. "Actually—well, I wanted to go to a meeting?"

"What kind of meeting?"

Mary felt a bit embarrassed, but she had to answer.

"In the Co-operative Hall. A Christadelphian meeting—about the Bible."

"Well! well! well! Fancy that! How did you know about it?"

"I had a leaflet. I had a long talk last night with the boy who was taking them round."

"Well I never! Do you know who's speaking at that meeting?"

"No—I never asked. It doesn't say on the leaflet."

"I'll tell you then. It's me!"

"You!" gasped Mary. She knew Mr. Jarvis was "religious", and that he went to meetings on Sundays, and often during the week; but she had only been at the shop six months, and had never had a long talk with him.

"Tell you what," he said kindly. "Come home to dinner with me. I'll ring my wife, and tell her. Then I'll tell you this afternoon all I'm going to say this evening, and you'll be home in time to get your Father's tea."

"But your wife won't want a visitor sprung on her like that," objected Mary.

"Bless you! She won't mind," he said, "she's used to it", and off he went to make the 'phone call.

So it came about that afternoon that Mary found herself in a homely sitting room, with a Bible supplied by Mrs. Jarvis on her lap.

“Where shall we begin?” asked Mr. Jarvis.

Mary had been thinking a lot about her conversation with Michael.

“This boy Michael said the Bible is the Word of God, and we ought to read it. But I’ve been taught that it’s just fairy tales—like the Flood and all that.”

“The first thing you want to be sure about, then, is that the Bible records are true?”
Mary nodded.

“I’d feel more like reading it if I thought it were true. Of course, I believe the stories of Jesus, in the New Testament.”

“You do? You believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead?”

“Yes, I do. I believe he was the Son of God and God brought him back to life again.”

“Right! Now read me the first verse of the New Testament from that Bible.”

Mary found Matthew chapter 1, and read,

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.”

“Who was David? Who was Abraham? You have to go to the Old Testament to find out. Now read Luke chapter 1, verse 32—this is about Jesus, too.”

Mary read,

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his Father David”

“Where was David’s throne, then?” asked Mr. Jarvis.

She thought for a minute.

“In Jerusalem.”

“How did you know? Because it says so in the Old Testament, of course. Turn over to Luke chapter 4, where it tells the story of the temptation. I expect you know it quite well. But see what words Jesus uses when he resists each temptation. Verse 4—Jesus says, ‘It is written ...’ Verse 10—again he says, ‘It is written ...’ Where was it written?”

“It must have been in the Old Testament,” said Mary.

“So it was. And all the time you’re reading the New Testament, you’ll find you have

to go back to the Old to understand properly. Jesus speaks of Noah, and Lot's wife; he speaks of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the later prophets; of David and Solomon. You can't accept Jesus without accepting the Old Testament."

Mrs. Jarvis, having cleared away the dinner things, had come in, and was sitting quietly darning some socks.

"You see," she said, turning to Mary, "People with the Bible these days are like a child with a jig-saw puzzle. They say, 'I don't like this bit. Throw it away. That bit's an awkward shape. Get rid of it.' Then when they've thrown overboard all the bits they don't like, they complain that the rest doesn't fit. Of COURSE it doesn't fit!"

She said this so scornfully that both Mr. Jarvis and Mary had to laugh.

"All right!" said Mary. "I can see that you've got to take the Bible as a whole. Michael said that. The boy who gave me the leaflet, you know.

"Oh, that would be Michael Edwards," Mr Jarvis said.

"That boy knows his Bible well enough," his wife commented.

"I'm still not sure," said Mary doubtfully, "if you can really believe all the Old Testament. After all, a lot of it makes very strange reading."

"It's a strange thing," Mr. Jarvis said thoughtfully, "that at the very time when certain men began to question the truth of the Bible—in the last hundred years, you know—other men began to dig up evidence of its truth."

"Dig up! How do you mean?" asked Mary.

"These archaeologist chaps, you know. They've dug and dug, in Bible lands; dug up bits of pot and ancient tablets that tell us a great deal about the people who lived in Bible times."

"Honestly? They never told us about that at school. You mean they've found real proof of the truth of the Bible?"

"Well, of course you can't prove everything. And if you could, some people wouldn't believe it. But it's amazing how modern discoveries support the Bible stories; and certainly help us to understand them better.

"You know at one time it was said that Moses couldn't possibly have written the first five books of the Bible, because writing wasn't known in his day. Well, we now have positive proof that books of all sorts—hymn books, history books, arithmetic books, and so on—were used in Ur at the time of Abraham, long before Moses was born."
"H'm. That makes you think!"



“It does, doesn’t it? I’ll give you an example of the way archaeology supports the Bible. Just look at verse one of Isaiah 20.”

He pointed it out to her.

“It says, ‘In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod (when Sargon the King of Assyria sent him) ...’

“Now in all the historical records they couldn’t find any mention of Sargon; so they said, ‘The Bible writers must have invented this Sargon. We just cannot find any trace of him in history.’

“But now, they’ve found positive proof that he did exist, that he fought many successful battles, and built a very fine palace which has actually been unearthed in Assyria.”

“But if all this was written history,” objected Mary, “I can’t quite see how it lasted so long. You say they dug it up. If books of ours got buried to-day—why, they wouldn’t be readable in ten years’ time, let alone thousands of years.”

“Bless you, girl! They didn’t write on paper! They wrote on clay tablets. They made wedge-shaped marks in the soft clay, and then baked it. Look, I’ll show you a picture of one of the tablets.”

While he was looking for a photograph among his books on archaeology, Mrs. Jarvis said,

“I like the story of Sennacherib and Hezekiah.”

Mr. Jarvis showed Mary several pictures of ancient clay tablets.

“The writing is called cuneiform,” he said.

“I’ve heard vaguely of Sennacherib,” Mary observed. “But I don’t know the story.”

“Well, Hezekiah was a king of Judah. And in his days there was this Sennacherib, King of Assyria. He rampaged all over the place, and conquered all the countries

around Judah, even Egypt. He took all the cities of Judah. Then his armies surrounded King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. You want to read it for yourself. It's in 2 Kings 19; It's a great story. And it finishes like this:

'The angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrian an hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses.'

Now Sennacherib recorded his own version of this. He was a boastful fellow; they've found lots of records of his victories. And there's a tablet which tells how he came against Hezekiah. He says, 'Hezekiah himself like a caged bird, I shut up within Jerusalem, his royal city.' But he says nothing about the end of this expedition. Why not? Because the Bible story is true, and the whole of his besieging army was wiped out by God. He would not want to record that."

"And, you know, there's a verse in Psalm, 124 which might have been written by Hezekiah, that says,

"Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.' I like that," said Mrs. Jarvis.

"Well, we can't be sure about that, love. You mustn't make things fit!"

Just then the clock struck four.

"Oh, goodness! I must go. I've heaps to do at home." Mary jumped up. "Thank you very much. I'm beginning to really WANT to read the Bible for myself," she added.

"Will you come again next Wednesday?" asked Mrs. Jarvis. "It's no trouble to get lunch for an extra one, and we can have another talk."

"I'd love to, if you're sure it's no trouble. And —tell Michael why I couldn't come tonight."

"I will," said Mr. Jarvis, and his eyes twinkled.

CHAPTER 3.

Mary was putting out the dinner on the following Sunday, when the door-bell rang. "I'll go," said her father.

He was a little nonplussed to see a young man at the door. The young man grinned cheerfully.

"Is Mary in?" he asked.

By this time Mary had come to the door. Her face was flushed, and she was wearing a pinafore. (People can look just as attractive that way, as when they are dressed to go out!)

"Sorry about Wednesday," Michael said to her. "Like to come to the meeting to-night? I could call for you about 6 o'clock."

Mary wanted to go.

"Dad," she called, "Do you mind if I go out for an hour to-night?"

"Of course not, girl," he answered, "It'll do you good."

"Who was that?" asked her father, when they were sitting down to dinner.

"Oh, a boy named Michael. I'm going to the Christadelphian meeting with him to-night."

"You wouldn't ever go to church with your mother."

"No. This is different. These people know their Bible; and they believe it. I have a feeling that if I could accept it as they do I could make some sense out of life."

No more was said. Mary enjoyed the meeting that night. When it was over, and she had spoken to Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, who were there, Michael offered to see her home.

"Let's go across the common," he said. "It's a bit further; but it's much nicer."

Mary was quiet for a bit, then she said,

"You know, it's all very well to believe the Bible's true—but that doesn't mean it's the Word of God."

"Why not?"

"Well—a reliable history book is true—but it's not a message from God."



“Far from it,” agreed Michael. “But it doesn’t claim to be. The Bible claims to be inspired by God. It says in Peter 1:21, ‘Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.’ And the Apostle Paul told Timothy ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God.’

“Yes, but can you prove it?” asked Mary.

“Here, come and sit on this bench,” answered Michael, taking his little Bible out of his pocket. “Now, you want me to prove that this book is not only true and reliable, but that it was written by men who were writing, not their own words, but God’s.”

“That’s it.”

“Right! We’ll start with the Jews. Look at this.”

He opened his Bible at Deuteronomy 28.

“This chapter gives a whole list of curses that would come on the Jews if they disobeyed the laws which God gave them. Just for example, here are verses 28 and 29:

‘The Lord shall smite thee with madness and blindness, and astonishment of heart; and thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in the darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways; and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.’ Doesn’t it remind you of the concentration camps, and the sufferings of the Jews? How could the writer describe these things thousands of years before they actually happened? Look at verses 64-66:

The Lord thy God shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling of heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.’

“The Jews have been scattered—for thousands of years. They’ve become a ‘proverb and a byword’. Any ordinary nation, driven from its land, would have intermarried with other peoples and disappeared as a separate race, wouldn’t it? But not the Jews. God said they would always remain as a people, and they have”

“But they’ve gone back to the land of Israel now, haven’t they?” asked Mary.

“Yes; just as God said they would, in the Bible. In Jeremiah 30:11, God says this to the Jews: ‘... though I make an end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee.’ And in Jeremiah 31:10, it says, ‘He that scattered Israel will gather him.’ Jesus spoke about it, too. After he has spoken of the final scattering of the Jews, which happened in A.D. 70—and that’s history!— he says, ‘Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ ‘Until’, you see. Now the Jews are back in Israel again; it shows we’re at the end of the times of the Gentiles.”

“Times of the Gentiles? That’s a funny expression.”

“It means the time when other nations—not the Jews—were in the land of Israel. Now the Jews are back, and we’ve reached the time Jesus spoke of in Luke 21. Here read these verses.”

Michael pointed to Luke 21:25-27, and Mary read,

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring: men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

“Sounds like the world to-day, doesn’t it? But to come back to the Jews. A hundred years ago there was hardly a Jew in Israel. It must have looked then as if the Bible prophecies were all wrong. But they weren’t. Only God could have foretold the re-gathering of Israel.”

“I can see that,” said Mary. “It means that the prophecies must have been given by God.”

“Don’t you see what else it means?” asked Michael. “It means that the hand of God is at work among the nations. And His work will in the end bring peace and joy on earth.”

“That reminds me of something you said when we had that first talk. Something about the earth being filled with God’s glory.”

‘The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.’ That’s right. It makes sense of the song the angels sang at the birth of Jesus: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men’.”

After a little, Mary said,

“I suppose the best way to find out if the Bible is the word of God is to read it.”

Michael agreed heartily.

“It certainly is. Lots of people cast the Bible aside without even reading it. If you read

it, you see how all the parts fit in together. There are such detailed prophecies in the Old Testament of the birth of Jesus Christ, and his death and resurrection—they couldn't possibly have been lucky guesses.”

“Tell me some,” demanded Mary.

“In Micah it tells how Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. In Daniel it tells when his birth would be. Right back in the second chapter of Genesis it talks of the ‘seed of the woman’—I think that’s a hint of the fact that Jesus wouldn’t have an earthly father. The prophet Isaiah speaks of his virgin birth. Shall I write down the chapters for you?”

“Yes, please,” said Mary.

Michael fished a rather grubby envelope out of his pocket, and wrote:

MICAH 5 DANIEL 9 GENESIS 3 ISAIAH 7

“Those are the chapters. You can find the verses for yourself, it’ll be good practice,” he said, absent-mindedly returning the envelope to his pocket.

“I must be getting home now,” Mary said.

“Just look at this, then we’ll go,” said Michael, turning in his Bible to Psalm 22.

“just look at this, Mary. Look at the first verse. Those are the words that Jesus spoke from the cross. Remember? Now you read verses 7 & 8.”

Mary read,

“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip they shake the head, saying,

‘He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him’.”

“And that’s just what they DID say. They said, ‘He trusted in God. Let him deliver him now.’ Look at verse 16: ‘They pierced my hands and my feet; and at verse 18: ‘They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.’ In fact, right down to v. 20 is a vivid picture of the experiences of the Lord Jesus during the crucifixion.”

Again Mary was silent, looking at the words in wonder.

“Why! No-one could have known what was going to happen to Jesus, or how he would feel about it, all those years before it happened,” she said at last.

“No—that’s why it must be the word of God. There’s more in Isaiah 53.”

“I really must be going,” protested Mary, though she didn’t really want to.

“Last one, then. Isaiah 53. This’ll amaze you. This chapter speaks of the death of Jesus, too. Look at v. 9: ‘He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.’ He was crucified with thieves; but he was buried in the tomb of a rich man—you remember, Joseph of Arimathea.”

Michael looked at Mary to see what effect this amazing prophecy had on her. He was not disappointed.

“Phew!” she said. “Only God could have foreseen that. And look! Is it speaking of his resurrection, here in v. 10, where it says ‘he shall prolong his days’?”

“That’s it. Better add Isaiah 53 to the chapters on your bit of paper.”

“No. I’ll remember it. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. I must go now.”

They got up slowly. As they went, Mary said,

“I’m beginning to really want to read my Bible.”

“Jolly good! The apostle Paul says the Scriptures are able to ‘make you wise unto salvation’.”

“Salvation’s an old-fashioned word,” objected Mary.

“Maybe. But death’s not an old-fashioned thing. It’s happening every day. And if the Bible can teach us how to have life instead of death—it doesn’t much matter whether we call it salvation, or God’s way of life.”

“What about Wednesday?” he asked, as they reached Mary’s door.

“No, because of Dad. But I’ll come next Sunday, shall I?”

“O.K. I’ll call for you.”

Mary said Goodbye, and went into the house, little guessing what a shock awaited her.

CHAPTER 4.

Mary opened the living-room door—and stood rooted to the spot! Her father was in his usual easy chair, but he had fallen forward, quite still, and seemingly lifeless.



For the moment, she was panic-stricken! While she was struggling to overcome her fear, and to do something, there was a ring at the door. Michael had found the envelope with the list of references in his pocket, and come back with them.

“Michael! Come quick! It’s Dad. He’s collapsed!” she gasped. Michael quickly took control.

“Go and ‘phone the Doctor at once. Make sure you’ve got the right money,” he ordered her. His brisk common-sense helped to calm her, and she hurried out to the ‘phone. Michael, meanwhile, lifted the unconscious man, and gently laid him on the rug.

* * * * *

Mary didn’t go to bed that night. Michael waited with her at the hospital until the Doctor assured them that they had best go home and get some sleep. They could ring, he said, first thing in the morning.

When they reached Mary’s front door, Michael seemed worried. “Are you sure you’ll be all right? Mrs. Jarvis would put you up, you know,” he suggested.

“Can’t bother them at this time of night—I’m not nervous of being alone,” Mary assured him.

“Well, I’ll ring up early to-morrow morning.” He looked at his watch. Goodness, it’s tomorrow now—half past one! Anyway I’ll let them know what’s happened. Then he’ll understand if you’re late for work.”

“Would you? Thanks. And—thanks for all you’ve done.”

Mary went in, and made herself a hot drink. She felt sleep was impossible, so she fetched her Bible and sat down by the table. On the table she caught sight of the grubby envelope with the chapters Michael had given her. She thought she would turn them up, but when she opened the book at random, her eyes fell upon some words from Hebrews 6.

“... We might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us,” she read. Over and over again Mary repeated this verse to herself, and in repeating it, she found comfort—Morning came at last, and she was at work at 8.30 a.m. as usual, knowing that she could ‘phone the hospital when she got there.

“Sorry to hear about your Dad,” Mr. Jarvis said. “Have you ‘phoned yet?” “No. May I do it now?”

“Of course you can, my dear. Go ahead,” the manager said sympathetically.

The news was cheering. Mr. Brown had had a good night, after being given a blood transfusion. He was being kept in for observation, and Mary could go and see him on Wednesday.

The next two evenings she spent with the Jarvis’s, though she insisted on going home to sleep.

On Tuesday, as they sat by the fire after tea, Mr. Jarvis said, “How’s the Bible reading going Mary?”

“Very well, but ...”

“You’ve still got some ‘buts,’ then?”

“Well, yes. I can think of all the Old Testament people as real people, right back to Abraham. Further back than that—right back to the Flood, and Noah. I believe all that. But when you go back to the very first chapters of Genesis, you know—the serpent talking, and the tree of life, and all that—it seems like fairy stories.”

Mr. Jarvis nodded.

“Have you noticed,” he asked her, “How many times in the first chapters of Genesis it says, ‘God saw,’ ‘God made,’ ‘God said’ and so on? Just you count the number of times in the first chapter.”

Mary counted silently.

“Twenty-seven times,” she said in surprise.

“And there was no man there!” Mr. Jarvis said, “so how did Moses know what God thought and said, and did?”

Mary thought for a bit.

“He couldn’t have known, unless God had told him.”

“Right!” said Mr. Jarvis, “Now if these first chapters aren’t true, who is deceiving us? Is it Moses, in pretending he knew what God said and did? Surely God Himself wouldn’t deceive men?”

“H’m. That’s a point. But it still sounds like fairy stories,” persisted Mary.

“Look,” Mr. Jarvis said, “What did Jesus die for?”

Mary looked surprised.

“Why to save men from their sins,” she said, “but I don’t see that has anything to do with the garden of Eden.”

“It has everything to do with it. Sin began in the garden of Eden. All men do wrong. Some are quick-tempered, some are mean, some are proud —there isn’t such a thing as a perfect man. You’d agree with that, wouldn’t you? No man can live up to the best he knows. Men can’t live without sinning, and growing old, and dying. Why?”

“I suppose it’s their nature,” Mary said.

“Exactly. And where did they get that imperfect, dying nature? The Bible says they got it from Adam and Eve. Listen to Romans 5:12. ‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’ Because Adam and Eve did wrong, all who came after them have found it impossible to live perfectly. It’s as though we start life with a handicap. We have inherited a sinful, dying body. Is there any other explanation of the sin and sorrow and suffering and death?”

He paused for a minute, then went on,

“If the story in the garden of Eden isn’t true, then the work of Jesus is just a lot of nonsense; and so is the whole Bible, because from start to finish it sets out to tell us how God, through Jesus Christ, is working out a plan to save men and women, and put the world right. If things never went wrong in the way the Bible says they did, then there is no need for Jesus to put them right.”

“You mean I can’t really be a Christian unless I do believe the story of Adam and Eve? That’s a bit hard.”

“A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. He believed the whole of the Old Testament. On one occasion, when he was discussing the question of divorce, he said ‘... from the beginning God made them male and female.’ If it was true for Jesus, it should be true for us.”

Mary thought for a long time.

“There’s no half-way, is there?” she said. Suddenly a passage from the New Testament flashed through her mind.

“‘Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’ It’s a bit like that. You either have to accept it all, like a little child (Jesus said that, didn’t he?) and give up your whole life to getting to know God from the Bible, and trying to obey Him—or you just throw it all overboard. There are no half-measures; I can see that.”

Mary sounded rather sad.

“It’s true it isn’t easy,” agreed Mr. Jarvis. “Jesus never said it would be. He spoke about the narrow road that leads to life eternal. He said to his followers, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation.’ But it has great rewards. Even in this life, obeying God brings peace and joy that nothing else can give. And think of living for ever, with Jesus in his Kingdom, when the earth is full of the glory of God.”

“I do think about it,” Mary said. Just at the moment, Mrs. Jarvis came in with some tea, and the talk turned to less important things.

“What about dinner to-morrow?” she asked Mary.

“I think I’ll go home, if you don’t mind. I’m going to see Dad at 2 o’clock, and it’ll be nearer from our side of the town. I am looking forward to seeing him. It seems ages since last Sunday,” she added earnestly.

“Oh, goodness me! I nearly forgot! How dreadful of me,” said Mrs. Jarvis. “Michael left a message to say he has an hour off to-morrow afternoon, and he’s going to meet you outside the hospital at 4 o’clock and take you out to tea.”

“Fancy forgetting that!” said her husband, reproachfully.

CHAPTER 5.

True to his word, Michael was waiting outside the hospital when Mary came out at 4 o'clock on Wednesday. He noticed at once how happy she looked.



“How’s your Dad?” he asked. “Getting on nicely. He’s coming home on Saturday, and so long as he’s careful, he’s good for many years yet. The weakness was caused by inward bleeding—internal haemorrhage, sister called it. He’s got to be very careful, but he’ll be OK; and Michael—I’ve been talking to him.”

“I should think you have. You’ve been with him two hours.”

“No silly! I mean talking about the Bible. He wanted to talk about it. He said when he first came round (they gave him a blood transfusion, you know) he felt sure he was going to die. He said he longed for some sort of anchor.”

Michael nodded. It was plain that all Mary wanted at the moment was a good listener. She went on,

“I told him how I was reading my Bible the night he was taken ill. Fancy, it’s only four days ago, and it seems years. I kept reading those words from Hebrews, ‘... we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge lay hold on the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.’ He wanted to know what the hope is that is set before us ...”

“What did you tell him?” asked Michael-

“I told him it was the hope that when Jesus comes back to set up His Kingdom, he will raise us from the dead and give us eternal life. He was quiet for a bit. I thought maybe he didn’t want to hear any more. Then he said, ‘But, Mary, I feel outside these things. I’ve never let God into my life, and I don’t know how to begin.’ I told him the way to begin was by reading the Bible. He said he’d made up his mind to do that; but he still felt like the young man who said, ‘What lack I yet?’ I said to him, ‘You’re like me. You want to make a new start. And the way to do it is to be baptised, like Jesus was, right under the water.’ I told him what it says in Romans 6:4: ‘Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead

by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
Michael was taken aback.

“But, Mary—it’s not more than a week since you told me you didn’t believe the Bible.”

“I know! But I’ve been doing my homework!”

Mary laughed at his look of disbelief, but she hastened to assure him.

“I have, really. I’ve read the booklets Mr. Jarvis gave me. I’ve read and read the Bible, and I’ve thought and thought.” Michael still looked doubtful, so she went on, “I know I’m not ready to be baptised yet. Not nearly. I’ve got an awful lot to learn. Dad and I are going to learn together; and you can come round and teach us,” she added, in case he should feel left out.

You see, I was proud before. I thought I knew it all. But now I’m ready to learn.”

“There’s more to it than being baptised,” said Michael seriously. “That’s only the beginning. It’s not an easy way, you know, when you try to put God first, and to please Him instead of pleasing yourself.”

“I know it’s hard. I know Jesus said, ‘Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way.’ But I reckon it’s worth it.”

By this time, they had reached the main road. By this time, too, Michael realised that, although she had a lot still to learn, Mary was very much in earnest.

“Come on,” he said. “I know a good place for tea, and then we’ll go to the Bible Class.”

* * * * *

Michael waited patiently until Mary was ready for baptism- His own childhood had been rather an unhappy one, because his mother and father had different religious beliefs, which caused conflicts in the home. He felt he must wait until Mary had finally made up her mind, and been baptised into Christ, before he could ask her to share his life. He thought often about the words of the apostle,

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

But Mary was a quick scholar in the things of God, and very earnest, so he didn’t have to wait very long.

Mary and Michael are married now. They read their Bible together every night. They don’t read in a haphazard way, but use a Reading Table, which takes them through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice every year.

Mr. Brown, who was baptised soon after his daughter, often calls in to do the Readings with them.



They have made up their minds, too, like Abraham of old, that they will teach their children after them to keep the way of the Lord.

And what about you? Don't you think it's time you started to read your Bible?

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