

The Undelivered Letter

"SORRY, MR. BLISS, not another cent! You haven't even been able to pay back our previous loans. The committee met just last week; we decided we have no alternative but to foreclose and to take up the collateral you have pledged in the past."

Old Farmer Bliss sat stunned in the chair across from his banker friend. He had felt some faint apprehension when he came into the office to ask for another loan, but now he was hearing words he never dreamed he would hear.

You see, it was this way. Year after year Farmer Bliss had toiled long and hard at the precarious business of farming, striving to make an honest living. His family had given him loyal cooperation. But every year it was the same sad story of defeat and loss. When the crop needed rains, the weather was always dry. At harvest time when dry weather was always dry, the rains came making harvest impossible. If, as occasionally happened, the climatic conditions were just right, then the bugs came in armies devouring any possible profit. On those rare occasions when climate and insects all cooperated, it was just his luck to have the bottom fall out of the market for his products.

So, year after year, the poor hardworking farmer would trudge to his banker friend and tell his sad story: *"Please, sir, if you can just increase our loan a bit more to tide us over, I am sure we can make it next year."* In this way the farmer went deeper into debt each year. More and more of his property was put up as security against his mounting loans.

Alternating between despair and hope, he had toiled on. Now he was trembling as he left the banker's office and stumbled out to the street. The words, *"Not another cent,"* were ringing in his ears. The awful realization swept over him, "I am bankrupt, a ruined man."

Slowly he made his way home. How would he tell his family? In terrible gloom he summoned them around him while he sat down at the old kitchen table. The children took chairs; Mrs. Bliss stood in the corner, looking on in bewildered apprehension. Sadly and with great pain he unfolded to them the family predicament. Gradually the realization dawned even on the little ones that soon they would be forced to leave the old home place they loved so well. They would have to go – they knew not where. The children cried. Mrs. Bliss dabbed her eyes with her apron. Hot tears of sorrow, disappointment, and frustration rolled down her cheeks. All was lost. The Bliss family was hopelessly ruined. What a somber mood the bitter moment brought.

However, I must tell you of something that happened soon afterward, just before the final blow of eviction fell. Out of the mailbox one morning Mr. Bliss pulled a long white envelope. He could not quell the feeling that here was something very important. His fingers trembled as he opened it and began to read.

Important? It was indeed! He could hardly believe his eyes. It was a letter from a fabulously wealthy prince of whom everyone had heard. He was said to *"own everything."* Here is what the prince had written:

"Dear Mr. Bliss: I have heard of your sad predicament and I am going to help you. Enclosed you will find a check which will pay off your obligations, repair your barns and equipment, restock your flocks and herds. In fact, I intend that this check will put you back in business. Furthermore, please remember that when this money is used up there is more where this came from."

For a moment the farmer stood thunderstruck with astonishment. Then he dashed into the house and in a far different mood than before summoned his family together. There, around the selfsame kitchen table where a few days before he had broken the news of ruin, he now read to them the amazing letter from the beneficent prince. Holding the precious check high in his hands he shouted, *"Look, it is no dream, it is not mere imagination, here is the check!"* Thereupon the Bliss children began to dance about the kitchen table, while Mrs. Bliss stood in her familiar corner of the kitchen wiping her eyes – but this time the tears were caused by relief, joy, and blessedness. All of them were thinking, or saying, or singing, *"In our darkest hour we have been delivered!"*

Now let us be charitable to the old farmer; we cannot blame him for failing to read every word of the letter. After all, any one of us receiving such a letter as this would be in a state of mind approaching delirium. It wasn't until the third reading that Farmer Bliss noticed a postscript which read:

"With this letter to you I am enclosing another letter, addressed to Mr. Poorman Knight. He lives in Darktown. In the envelope intended for him is a check similar to yours. It will meet all of his obligations and save him in a dark and difficult hour. Please deliver the letter to him in person."

Farmer Bliss shook the long envelope vigorously. Out tumbled the envelope mentioned in the postscript. He looked it over carefully. Yes, it was addressed to Mr. Poorman Knight, Darktown. As he held the letter in his hand he mused, *"Strange that the prince would expect me to deliver this letter. Why, I don't even know this Poorman Knight. I have heard about him, though. And what I heard wasn't very complimentary. They tell me he is dirty, ignorant, repulsive ... and besides, he lives a long way off. It seems to me the prince could have found someone who lives closer to deliver this letter. Well, I suppose I will have to take it to him – that is, when I can find the time. But I am much too busy now."*

And indeed he soon became busier than ever, for his new-found prosperity revolutionized his life. So many long-deferred opportunities beckoned him. So many projects he had dreamed of were now within his grasp.

So, promising himself, *"I will deliver that letter when I can find the time,"* he placed it carefully between the leaves of the big family Bible. This is the manner of some – using their Bibles for filing cabinets, stashing away sundry objects. Reaching up to a shelf, he placed the Bible on it in such a way that the undelivered letter stuck out slightly. Every time he came into the house he would see the Bible on the shelf and the protruding little line of white would stab his conscience. The only way he could get any peace would be to promise himself anew, *"When I can find the time I must deliver that letter. But I am much too busy now."*

Yes, he was a busy man. His farm was the very picture of prosperity. The fences were up, the barns and house were repainted, a lovely new weathervane atop his barn swung this way and that with the changing winds. Big fat cattle were in the feed lot. Up and down the country road his neighbors were agog. They could not figure it out. *"Why, old Farmer Bliss was on the verge of ruin a while back – and now look at his farm! What has happened?"* The people of the community shook their heads in amazement. They were unable to explain the phenomenon. But deep in the heart of every member of the Bliss family there was a beautiful secret: they had been saved by the fabulous prince!

Time hastened on. The days slipped into weeks, the weeks into months, the months into years. One day a neighbor stopped by for a chat as he made his way into town. The two old farmers hung over the fence and talked about all sorts of matters: crops, markets, prices, and so on. In the course of the conversation the neighbor said, *"You know, Mr. Bliss, a terrible thing happened last night over in Darktown. A man starved to death."*

"What's that?" cried Farmer Bliss incredulously. *"The very idea that anyone should starve to death in times like these. Why, look at my barns and buildings. Look at my fat cattle. I've never seen such fine and comfortable times."* On he went, bragging of his prosperity. And it was all true – he was a very prosperous man. At last he got around to asking the question, *"What was the man's name?"*

His neighbor thought for a moment, uncertain; then in a flash of memory replied, *"His name was something like Poorman Knight. Yes, that's it."*

When he heard the name, Farmer Bliss' face suddenly fell. Without so much as a decent good-bye he dashed into the house and rushed to the shelf where the family Bible lay. Hastily he grabbed the book, blew off the dust, opened it, and took out the undelivered letter now yellowing with age. Yes, there was the name and address, plain as could be: *"Mr. Poorman Knight, Darktown."*

The awful realization was like a crushing blow. *"Here in my hands is a letter from the fabulous prince, written to the man who died last night of starvation. In this letter is a check from the prince which would have solved all his problems and saved him from destruction. And I was the one charged with delivering it!"*

Farmer Bliss turned pale. For a long time he sat with his head in his hands. When they called him for supper, he said he was not hungry. Clutching the yellowed envelope in his hands, he fell on his knees. Hot tears streamed down his cheeks as he cried, *"Oh, Lord, forgive me!"* But striking like a hammer in his mind and heart, growing till it filled all his consciousness, was a somber expression of the Word of God: *"His blood will I require at thy hand."*

By now you have realized that the story is a parable. Who is Farmer Bliss? He is you, I, every one of us to whom the gospel of Christ has come. In our darkest hour, when all was lost, He sent us a message of hope. When we were mentally, physically, morally, spiritually bankrupt for all eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ rescued us. Just one touch of His grace restored my soul and yours, put us back in business, cancelled our debt of sin which we never could have paid. I owe everything to that fabulous Prince. So do you, if He has saved you. You could well join me in the chorus, *"Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."*

And who is the Poorman Knight living in the Darktown of our little parable? Don't miss it, my friend. He is that man, woman, boy, or girl who sits this very hour in some dark heathen land while you bask in the light of the Redeemer's favor. He is that one to whom the gospel of Christ has never yet come, not even once! And he is not one. He is a thousand times a million.

Yes, Poorman Knight awaits the letter of deliverance which lies in your Bible and mine. As long as there is one man, woman, boy, or girl left in the world who has never received his invitation to Christ, we are yet blood-guilty. Let us with all haste deliver the letter of good news from our fabulous Prince lest on the great day of accounting we should hear the stern words, "*His blood will I require at thy hand.*"

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