



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

'The Adventures of a Bible.'

On 12th May, Rev. Jonathan Creane, minister of Convoy Free Presbyterian Church and minister in charge of Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church, told a wonderful story to illustrate the power of God's precious Word during his message that Sabbath morning.

Amongst the belongings of an elderly Christian aunt of his wife, who had passed away, a tract was found in her old Bible which was entitled: "The Adventures of a Bible." It was the substance of that tract that Rev Creane repeated that day in Kilskeery.

It was a most moving story! The recording of his telling of the story was heard by a friend in the USA to whom I send articles and recordings. He was so blessed by it he played the recording in his church.

I related the story to another friend, a minister who called by on a recent Saturday. He immediately recognised the story and said that he had a copy of the tract.

He sent me a digital copy of it and I reproduce it here.

I have not been able to discover who Dr J H Townsend is, but I believe that because the lady, in whose Bible the copy of the tract used by Rev Creane was found, was a member of a Brethren Assembly, the meeting in Dublin which is at the heart of this story was a Brethren meeting and the company which published the tract was a well-known Brethren publisher, it is likely that Dr Townsend was a Brethren preacher.

I would value any information on the gentleman's identity that any of you may know.

Here is the story which touched my heart most deeply as I listened to the wonderful story of the power of God's Word and the merciful grace which was manifested to those featured in this story.

I am also including **a recording of Rev. Creane telling the story.**

Ivan Foster, July 2019.

'The Adventures of a Bible.'

A true story by Dr J. H. Townsend.

On a dull January afternoon many years ago a young widow was sitting in her lounge looking out of the window.

It was a fine house in a fashionable Dublin square; the room was nicely furnished and comfortable, even sumptuous, but the owner looked unhappy.

Mrs Blake was a devout Roman Catholic, very committed to the practices of her religion, but recently her mind had been troubled with the thought of her sins. Religious practices, penance and even prayers had brought her no relief; the burden of her sin just would not go away.

"Father John, you are kind and you have done your best, but the burden I have told you about troubles me greatly."

"Listen to me," he said, "I've made up my mind what you are to do. There's a man coming to the Rotunda tomorrow, who will make your sides ache with laughing, and you are going to hear him."

"Oh, Father John."



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

"Not a word! I won't take any excuses, you're going!"

The young priest explained that a well-known entertainer was to perform for a fashionable audience and what in his opinion this would be the best thing for her. Her protests were of no use – she could not disobey her spiritual advisor, who had even bought her a ticket for the performance. So, the next afternoon Mrs Blake arrived at the venue, where large posters advertised the performances which she had been ordered to attend.

The Rotunda had more than one public room – there was the great round room, the pillar room and one or two more, each with different entrances. Now, as it happened, Mrs Blake had made a mistake about the time of the performance, and instead of the large crowd which she would have seen if she had come at the right time, she noticed a little string of people making their way into the building. Following them, she found herself in one of the smaller halls where she sat down.

It seemed odd that no one had asked for her ticket, but she reckoned that she would be asked for it soon enough. There wasn't much time to think because almost immediately a man got up on to the platform and gave out a hymn. It quickly dawned on her that she had made a dreadful mistake – she must be in the wrong room and, worse still, this must be some evangelical meeting that she now found herself in. Mrs Blake was a bit shy, so to get up and walk out in front of everyone wasn't going to happen. What was she to do? She decided that she would slip out at the end of the hymn, when she was least likely to be noticed.

She tried to do this, but in her hurry to get out she kicked over her umbrella, creating such a din that many in the hall turned around to see what was the cause of it. Poor Mrs Blake, mortified at what she had done, sank back into her chair and wished that the floor would swallow her up.

There was deep silence, and then one voice, that of the man of the platform, was heard praying. She could not help listening, as she had never heard anyone praying like this before. The man was so reverent, but he seemed so happy as he prayed! This struck her as most extraordinary.

The prayer ended and the speaker announced that he would read a passage of Scripture in the New Testament on the 'Forgiveness of Sin', the one subject, above all others that she longed to hear about!

It didn't matter that Father John might say or do, she had to listen to this.

The man read the first eighteen verses from the tenth Chapter of Hebrews and explained the meaning of them in such a way that it became as clear as daylight. The one Sacrifice of Christ on the cross was offered once, and so, free and full forgiveness is granted to those who trust in Him alone. This message, illustrated by several other passages in the New Testament, formed the subject of the presentation.

As the dry ground absorbs the summer rain, so did this poor soul receive these wonderful truths. She had never heard them before, but now she was resting on Christ alone who had paid the penalty of her sin on the cross.

The speaker finished, and after another prayer the meeting broke up.

Mrs Blake felt that this was the opportunity of a lifetime, so, summoning her courage, she went to the edge of the platform and asked the gentleman whose words he had been reading.

Surprised at such a question, he came down and was at once bombarded with so many questions that he offered to write down references for her to study at home. When, however, he learned that the lady had never possessed a Bible, he was even more interested. "I will lend you mine," he said, "read the marked passages on the pages I have turned down, but let me have it back in a few days; it is the most precious thing that I have."



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Mrs Blake thanked him warmly, and hurried home with joy in her heart and a sparkle in her eye. What a change from the miserable woman who a couple of hours previously had made her way to the Rotunda!

For the next few days everything was forgotten but her new treasure; she read and re-read the marked passages and many others too. The light shone into her understanding; the burden long weighing upon her conscience rolled away into the Open Grave, and the Peace of God filled her heart and mind.

Soon the time came for the Bible to be returned. Once more she was deep in her new study and so engrossed in her thoughts that she did not notice a ring at the hall door. The priest entered her sitting room and stood in front of her. He noticed two things; that she seemed somewhat embarrassed, but at the same time there was a peace in her eyes. "What has happened to you?" he asked. "I haven't heard how you liked the show, and as I didn't see you last Sunday I thought you might be ill."

Taken aback by the suddenness of the whole thing, Mrs Blake lost her confidence. She had intended to keep the matter a secret for a little while at least, but now she was off her guard, and with the simplicity of a child she told the whole story – the mistake of the room, the attempt to go, the words spoken, the book lent, and, last of all, the joy and peace that filled her heart. She spoke with downcast eyes, but when she glanced up, she froze with terror at the look of the man before her.

He was red with rage! Never before had she seen such fury on anyone's face.

"Give me that book!" he said hoarsely.

"It isn't mine" she cried, vainly attempting to stop him.

"Give it to me," was his reply, "or your soul will be damned eternally; that heretic had nearly got you into Hell, and neither he nor you shall ever read the book again."

Grabbing it as he spoke, he thrust it into his pocket and giving her a terrible look stormed out of the room. The lady sat as if paralysed – she heard the hall door shut, and something in her heart seemed to shut also and to leave her alone in fear. That awful look continued to trouble her. Then she thought of the gentleman who had lent her his Bible; his address was in it, but she could not remember it and had no idea where to write. This bothered her greatly, but the thing that distressed her more was that look on the priest's face – it was branded on her memory. Days passed by slowly, but the priest, whose visits she used to look forward to but now dreaded, did not return. Her courage began to grow again, and at last, after a fortnight or more had gone by, Mrs Blake decided to pay him a visit. She had to make one more effort, if it was not already too late, to get the book and return it to its rightful owner.

Father John lived some distance away from Mrs Blake's home, and his house was joined unto the Convent, to which he was a spiritual advisor. The door was opened by a nun, who was clearly startled at the sight of Mrs Blake and, when she was asked if the priest was at home, her eyes seemed to blaze for a moment. Immediately her face became rigid and her manner cold as she said, "Yes, Father John is at home – he is in his room; would you like to come in and see him?" as she spoke she half led, half pushed the lady into the room which led off the hall. As Mrs Blake entered, she let out a piercing shriek, for – horror of horrors – there was an open coffin, and in it the lifeless form of her dear priest!

Before she could recover from the shock, the nun sidled up to her and hissed into her ear, "He died cursing you. You gave him a Bible and he told me to tell you that he cursed you – cursed you with his last breath. Now Go!" Almost before she knew what had happened, Mrs Blake was in the street with the door shut behind her.

Several weeks elapsed. The promise of spring had come, waking leaves and flowers to life and beauty. One evening Mrs Blake was sitting alone pondering over the events of the last three or four months. The joy of pardon was in her heart; she had bought a Bible for herself, and had read it daily. The old errors which she had been taught as she grew up had been one by one renounced, but there was a sorrow which could not



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

be removed. How sad, how extremely sad, the brief illness and sudden death of that young priest! His last look! His last words! The terrible message!

Why should she have been so blessed, brought into the haven of peace, filled with heavenly joy, and he – why did the same words not bring him the same message? It was too awful, and was one of the mysteries which could never be explained. “Why,” she said to herself, “should a God of love do this?”

At that moment, the servant ushered into the room a lady whose face was almost hidden with a veil and who stood for a moment as if unsure of herself.

Before Mrs Blake could speak, the other woman said, “You do not know me in this dress, but you will soon recognise me.” With these words she lifted her veil and revealed the face of the nun who had delivered the message of cursing as they had stood beside the open coffin.

Mrs Blake started back, not knowing what might happen next, but her visitor calmed her fears, adding, “May I sit down and tell you something?” Having been invited to do so she went on, “I have two things to tell you, and I must be very brief for I’m in a desperate hurry. First, please, please forgive me for that awful lie of mine; I have asked God’s forgiveness, but I beg also for yours. Father John died blessing you with all his heart. The day before his death he charged me to tell you he too had found forgiveness from God for his sin by that book, understanding clearly that his sins were forgiven not by any effort or works of his own; throughout Eternity he would bless you for having brought him to the knowledge of Christ as his Saviour. Now, will you forgive me?”

“Of course I will, from the bottom of my heart,” gasped the astonished lady, “but why did you say what you did?”

“Because I hated you. I loved him, and hated you for having sent him to hell as I believed. But listen, I felt the strongest desire to read what he had read, and after his funeral I could not resist looking into the book for myself; I was fascinated and read more and more, and I too have found pardon and peace in my Saviour. I have been studying the Bible for weeks, and now here it is,” she said producing it as she spoke. “I have left the convent this evening and will cross to England tonight, but I felt that I must come here and return this Bible, and to tell you that all my life I too shall bless you because through it I have learned how to get forgiveness for my sins. Good-bye! God bless you! We shall meet in Heaven.”

A brief farewell and she had passed out of the house and was gone.

Could it be that it was all a dream? A little worn Bible lay on the table before her. It was no dream, but a glorious reality. The little book – without a living voice to explain its teaching in two of these cases – had brought three precious souls out of darkness into light.

Imagine the feelings of the owner when it was restored to him with this wonderful account! And yet, what says the One who sent it on its mission?

“So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11