

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE VALLEY

Harry Foster

“THERE is a new tenant at Ivy Cottage at the other end of the valley,” said the agent, and then added, “He is an educated man who must be down on his luck, so I kept the rent low. Is that all right, Sir?”

“Yes,” replied Sir Somebody Rich, the lord of the manor, “Yes, I suppose so. I’ll look in and see him when I ride round that way.”

Sir Somebody owned the entire valley and was very rich. He never seemed to have time for God, though he was a kindly man. He enjoyed riding around the countryside so a few days later he stopped at the cottage and saw the new tenant, Mr. Pilgrim, sitting outside in the sun. He made himself known and, as they chatted, he found that Mr. Pilgrim had spent his active life as a missionary, and had now retired and come to spend his last days in the tiny two-roomed cottage. “But you should have a better home than this,” objected the squire, but then he realized that his tenant had very little money and said no more about this. As he rode away, though, he felt it a pity that such a man should have wasted his life and could only think of him as “poor Pilgrim”.

After that he began to call on him from time to time, but when the conversation turned to spiritual matters he grew uncomfortable. The retired missionary explained that, far from wasting his life, he had spent it in the best possible way, adding that his greatest joy would be to introduce the Saviour to his visitor. “What me?” asked Sir Somebody, “Oh, no. I am much too busy to waste my time on religion. I am going to enjoy this life in my own way, and leave the next until I am ready to die.” Mr. Pilgrim tried to explain that a man is not ready to live until he is ready to die, but the lord of the manor didn’t like this, and from then on contented himself with a nod and a greeting whenever he passed that way.

One morning it was different, though, for Mr. Pilgrim hurried out of his cottage and stopped the horseman with a solemn warning. He said that on the previous evening as he dozed by the fire he thought he heard a voice saying: “Tomorrow the richest

man in the valley will die.” It seemed so positive and so clear, and he had thought of nothing all night but those words: “the richest man in the valley”. Now everybody knew who was the richest man in that district, and none better than Sir Somebody Rich himself. What was he to think? At first he was taken aback, especially as Mr. Pilgrim seemed so earnest as he begged him to take the warning, but then he laughed it off and rode on. But he could not forget the words, “the richest man in the valley,” and, feeling a bit nervous, he decided to go straight home and spend the rest of the day quietly. In the afternoon he did not feel very well, so he went to bed - but not to rest. The words kept ringing in his ears, and as the day wore on he began to feel quite ill, so ill that he sent for the doctor.

In spite of several calls the doctor delayed. It was evening, and the squire was feeling very ill now when, at last, the doctor hurried in, excusing himself by saying that he had been suddenly called to the other end of the valley. A man called Pilgrim had been taken ill, and after a short time had passed away. So there had been a death in the valley that day! “Poor Pilgrim,” said Sir Somebody, not without a certain relief that it was not he after all, but the doctor replied: “You would not call him that if you had been at his deathbed. Rich Pilgrim, I call him. In fact I think that he was the richest man in the valley.”

Suddenly it all became clear to the rich landlord. The richest man in the valley had died, but it was not he. He was not the richest. This man whom he had always thought of as “poor Pilgrim” was richer than them all. He had left almost nothing behind, but had taken his value with him into eternity. Sir Somebody would have to leave it all behind when he went. What had he to take with him? Nothing. Perhaps, after all, he was the poorest man in the valley.

And what about you? Jesus said that it would be no profit at all for someone to gain the whole world and lose his own soul (Matthew 16:26). Only eternal life from Christ can make us truly rich.

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