Cripple Tom



Or, Knowin' is Lovin', and Lovin' is Doin'

Verified authorship of "Cripple Tom" by Mrs. Walter Searle, alias author name of Mary Louisa Baker.
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In one of the deplorably miserable East London homes, in a dark, wretched room at the top of a house, lay a cripple boy, greatly neglected and comparatively unknown. When quite young his parents had died, leaving him to the mercy of an aged relative, whom he called "Granny".

Born a cripple, he had always been a sufferer, but as long as he was able, he had swept a crossing on his crutches, or gone on short errands to earn a few pence. But soon after his parents' death the boy had to take to his bed. Very ungraciously the old woman allowed him to occupy the top room in her house, which room he never left again.

His mother taught him to read and write, and sometimes, on a snowy night, the lad had crept into the mission hall merely for the sake of getting warm. Numb with cold, and weary in body, he took little heed to what he had heard on those nights; but lying alone day after day there came into his mind the memory of it, and by degrees he was possessed with a great longing to know more about the things of God, and to have a Bible of his own. He knew that it was from the Bible that the speakers had gathered their knowledge, and that was all. So, summing up courage, he one day consulted Granny about it. His only encouragement in that direction was an ironical laugh. Bibles weren't in her line!

What did a lad like him want with a Bible?

So the matter dropped for a time, but the lad's desire to possess one did not grow less.

One day, however, up the creaking stairs came noisy, boisterous Jack Lee, the only friend the cripple had in the world. *"Hurrah! hurrah! Got a new box. Off north tomorrow! Come to say Good-bye Tom,"* he cried, all excitement, seating himself on the bed, and wiping the perspiration from his brow. *"But I've got a real beauty present for you, my lad"* taking from his pocket something that was wrapped in a greasy bit of brown paper.

Tom raised himself on his elbows, not at all gladdened by the news he had heard. *"A bright new shilling for you Tom. And you're not to spend it till yer wants suffin' real particular." "Oh, Jack, you are good, but I want something now very, very particular." "Yer do? What's he?" "I want a Bible!" "A Bible! well I never! Who ever heard of a poor lad spending all that on a Bible, when I had to scrape months and months to save it in coppers." "Don't be angry, dear Jack,"* cried the crippled boy, *"you're going away, and I shall be lonelier than ever, and oh, I do so want a Bible. Please get it, Jack – now – this very evening at Fisher's, before the shop closes. Granny never would; she'd spend it n gin, if I let her get it in her hands."*

What ca yer want with a Bible. Tom? Only scholars understands them there things," he answered rather crossly. *"Maybe so, Jack, but I'm hankering after one, for I must find out whether t hem there folks in the Mission Hall you and I sometimes used to go, told true about some one they called Jesus Christ. Let it be your parting gift, Jack, and you will make me so glad." "Very well, lad, then I'll go, but I knows naught of Bible buyin'." "Fisher has 'em at a shilling, for I saw 'em marked in the window when I used to go by. Quick, Jack, or the shop will be closed!"*



Jack complied very ungraciously, and descended the stairs less rapidly than he had mounted them. But he got over his disappointment before he returned with a beautiful shilling Bible. *"Fisher says I couldn't leave you a better friend, Tom, and he declares the shilling couldn't be 'vested better; and he says: 'It may be worth more than thousand pounds to the lad! So 'pears there's suffin' we ought to know about."*

Tom's joy and gratitude were unbounded, *"I know it, I know it!"* hugging the Book to his breast. *"I'm happy now, Oh, how kind you were to save that shilling!"*

After a month of hard reading, Cripple Tom knew more about his Bible than many who have professed to study it for twenty years. He learned the way of salvation, his only teacher being the Holy Spirit; he learned also that obedience to God's will meant helping to save others.

"It won't do to keep this blessed news to myself," he said; so he thought and thought, until at last a simple, but very beautiful work was decided on for the Master. His bed stood close by the window sill, which was low, and somehow he got a pencil and paper, and wrote out different texts, and dropping them into the noisy street below, directed:

"To The Passerby. Please Read."

He hoped that by this means some one might hear of Jesus Christ and His Salvation. This service of love – faithfully rendered – went on or some weeks, when one evening he heard a strange footstep and immediately afterwards a tall, well-dressed gentleman entered the room and took his seat by the lad's bedside.

"So you are the lad who drops texts from the window, are you?" he asked kindly. *"Yes,"* said Tom, brightening up. *"Have yer heard as some one got hold of one?" "Plenty, lad plenty! Would you believe it if I told you that I picked up one last evening, and God blessed it to my soul?" "I can believe in God's Word doing anything, sir,"* said the lad humbly, *"And I am come,"* said the gentleman, *"to thank you personally," "Not me sir! I only does the writin'; He does the blessin'."*

"And you are happy in this work for the Lord Jesus Christ?" said the visitor. *"I couldn't be happier, sir. I don't think nothin' of the pain in my back, for shan't I be glad when I sees Him, to tell Him that as soon as I know'd about Him I did all I could to serve Him? I suppose you gets lots O' chances, don't yer, sir?"*

"Ah, lad, I have neglected them; but God helping me, I mean to begin afresh. At home in the country I have a sick boy dying. I had to come to town on pressing business. When I kissed him good-bye, he said: 'Father, I wish I had done some work for the Lord Jesus. I cannot bear to meet Him empty-handed,' and the words stuck to me all day, and the next day too, until the evening when I was passing down the street, your little paper fell on my hat. I opened it an read: 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night comes when no man can work' (John 9:4). It seemed like a command."

"I have professed to be a Christian for twenty-two years, my lad, and when I made inquiries and found out who dropped these texts into the street, and why it was done, it so shamed me and humbled me that I determined to go home and work for the same Master that you are serving so faithfully."

Tears of joy were rolling down the lad's face. *"It's too much, sir,"* he said, "altogether too much." *"Tell me how you managed to get the paper to start it, my lad?"*

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"That warn't hard, sir. I just had a talk with Granny, and offered to give up my ha' porth o' milk she gives me most days if she would buy paper instead. You know, sir, I can't last long. The parish doctor says a few months of cold weather may finish me off, and a drop of milk ain't much to give up for my blessed Jesus. Are people happy as has lots to give Him sir?"



The visitor sighed a deep sigh. *"Ah lad, you are a great deal happier in this wretched room, making sacrifices for Jesus, than thousands who profess to belong to Him, and who have time, talents and money, and do little or nothing for Him."*

"They don't know Him, sir. Knowin' is lovin' and lovin' is doin', it ain't love without."

"You are right, Tom. But now about myself. I must begin by making your life brighter. How would you like to end your days in one of these homes for cripple lads, where you would be nursed and cared for, and where you would see the trees and flowers, and hear the birds sing? I could get you into one, not far from my home, if you liked, Tom."

The weary lad looked wistfully into the man's kindly face, and after a few moments' silence answered: *"Thank'ee sir, I've heard tell of 'em before, but I ain't anxious to die easy when He died hard. I might get taken up with things a bit too much, and I'd rather be a-lookin' at Him, and carryin' on this 'ere work till He comes to fetch me. Plenty of joy for a boy like me to have a mansion with Him up there through all eternity."* The visitor felt more reproved than ever.

"Very well, my lad; I will see that you have proper food and all the paper you need while you live. I will settle it all with one of the Bible women. Now, before I go, I want to pray aloud for me," and as he made the request the strong man knelt down by the crippled boy's bedside, scarcely suppressing a sob, he knew he ought to comply with the request.

There was a seraphic light on the poor pale, upturned face, as he said in a tone of the deepest reverence: *"Lord Jesus, I know You're a-listenin', and I'm much obliged to You for sending this friend here to cheer me in my work. Now, Lord Jesus, he's a bit troubled about not havin' worked for Thee enough in the past days. Will you help him to see to it that there's nothin' left undone in the comin' days, and please, Lord, make him go straight away and tell them other rich men that they don't know Thee if they aren't a-workin' for Thee. And I'm grateful to You, Jesus, for all the paper and the food that's a-comin' to me while I live. Maybe I'll hold out a bit longer to write these texts for Thee. Now, Lord Jesus, please bless this kind friend, all roads and always. I ask this for Thy name's sake." "Amen,"* said the deep-toned voice.

Then the gentlemen rose and said farewell. Before leaving London, he made every arrangement for the lad to be cared for, and then with a gladder heart he went back to his beautiful country home and lived for Christ.

As soon as he could he built a mission hall on his own grounds, and preached salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ to the villagers. When he confessed his sins of negligence toward them, and told them of his rededication through the crippled boy and his text, many of them were led to the Lord Jesus Christ, who *"came and seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10).

News of the dying lad reached them from time to time through the Bible woman, but it was not till winter set in, and the snow had fallen and covered the earth with its crystal whiteness, that they heard that the dear lad "had gone to be with Jesus."

The same post brought a parcel which contained Tom's much prized and much-used Bible. What a precious relic was that marked Bible in that beautiful home! And when Tom's friend lent it to his youngest son to read — that careful marking, the short, simple prayers written by the cripple lad on the margin and his dying wish on the flyleaf, written about a week before his death, that *"this Holy Book may be as great a friend to someone else as it has been to me,"* made such a deep impression on the youth that he gave himself to the Lord, and later on to mission work in foreign fields, and out in Central Africa he has shown that worn Bible to many a native Christian, when telling them about Cripple Tom and his texts.

This beautiful incident of consecration in lowly life teaches us that the most adverse circumstances coupled with intense suffering, need not interfere with a life of intense devotion to Jesus Christ.

Thousands of sad, weary hearts are wanting the ministry of love that we might render.

Shall we then take our ease, enjoy our pleasure, or indulge in our luxuries? Millions of dark, benighted souls are crying out for the light; they continue to grope in darkness, while many of us who profess to love Christ, live self-centered and self-indulgent lives. Today — without the help of the world — the Christian Church could easily send enough missionaries out to evangelize the world; but the dark blot of "it won't," stains its fair name.

Oh, that the Spirit of God would, by His mighty power, cleanse away all the slothfulness, unreality, and self-complacency from our lives, for following Christ means self-sacrifice, and there is no such thing as holiness without it. If a dying lad in suffering and destitution could joyfully deny himself the little sip of milk, which cooled his parched lips and partly fed his weary body, surely it is possible for us to do more! *"Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"* (1 Chronicles 29:5)

Researched and verified historic characters:

Original Title: "Cripple Tom"
Original Author: Mary Louisa BAKER
(* 1846 Birmingham, England, + 1925 Cape Town, South Africa)
Alias Author Name: 'Mrs Walter SEARLE'
Gentleman: Walter Samuel SEARLE
(* about 1852 London, England, + ?, oo 1875 Mary Louisa BAKER)
Died son: Sydney Campbell SEARLE
(*1878 Plymouth, England, + ?)
Missionary son: Walter Scott SEARLE
(* 1876 Plymouth, England, + 1964 Cape Town, South Africa)

Tom: (* ?, + ? East-London)
Jack Lee: no additional data
'Granny': no additional data
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Location gentleman's home: Plymouth (?)
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Mary Louisa Baker (1846,- 1925)
Alias Author "Mrs. Walker Searle'
Photo about 1916