

Simple Jess; or, One Talent Well Improved

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JESSE SMITH, or Simple Jess as he was universally called, belonged to a respectable family consisting of father, mother, two daughters and one son, the subject of our story.

The family, while not actually poor, had seen better days in the old land across the sea. This perhaps accounts for the fact that the parents and daughters always felt that they should move in a higher social circle than they were able to do. The young ladies especially were a trifle high-minded, so much so that they became dissatisfied with that common and old fashioned name, Smith, and somehow they had persuaded themselves that the name had been largely to blame for the lack of appreciation which they believed rightfully belonged to them. So, after much talk and reasoning on the subject, it was decided that in future the name should be written and pronounced Smythe. It was claimed that an ancient member of their family had spelt the name in that way and through somebody's blunder the name had been reduced to the common name Smith.

After much perseverance and frequent correcting all and sundry, the young ladies succeeded fairly well in convincing the community that they were really and truly the Misses Smythe; simple Jess, however, never would submit to be other than Jess Smith, so while his sisters were the Misses Smythe he continued to be Jess Smith. In this one particular some people thought that Simple Jess possessed more intelligence than the rest of the family. In all other respects, however, Jess was really simple. Old Aunt Doolittle, a near neighbor, seemed to voice the sentiment of the neighborhood when she constantly declared in her old Yorkshire way that "Jess baint all there, poor lad." Neither was he, in fact he was not half there, perhaps not more than one quarter there. If the real amount of self exceeded one quarter then the real Jess as he should have been would have been small indeed.

Simple Jess never went to school, for two reasons. His parents found out, or thought they did, early in life that there was no use trying to teach him. In this they made a great mistake, as will be seen later on in our story. He was, however, with commendable perseverance, taught at home to read simple and easy sentences. Probably another reason why he was not sent to school was that he was always the butt of ridicule. Whenever he went the boys would play tricks upon him. The appearance of Jess was always the signal for some boy to shout, "Hurrah, boys, here comes simple Jess," and all seemed to know at once that there was fun on hand for the crowd.

Jess had one habit greatly to be admired. He would always go to church. His sisters, who were ashamed of him, would plead with the mother and scold the boy in order to induce him to remain at home, but the mother would say, "Surely he can go to church if he wants to if nowhere else." So Jess was always on hand at the hour of service and usually stood near the door outside to watch all the people go into church.

Revival meetings were announced and Jess was in great excitement about them. He had never been allowed to go from the house on an evening up to this time and he greatly feared he would not be able to find out what a revival meeting really was. After much pleading the mother gave her consent for Jess to go and he was happy beyond measure. The sisters indignantly declared that if Jess went they would not for a time they kept their word. At the close of the first meeting, when the minister said in the prayer meeting which followed the preaching, "If anybody wants to be good, forsake sin, and go to heaven, let him show it by coming to the front and kneeling at the altar," Jess was the first to respond. So peculiar were his movements that a broad smile

could be seen on the face of each, and with difficulty the pastor was able to command himself completely when Jess knelt for prayers. Few seemed to think him bright enough to have an intelligent faith and become a Christian. Nobody thought that even if he were a Christian that he could ever be of any use to the church, but in this they were mistaken. Almost all were of the opinion that poor Jess did not know what it meant, but that he came simply because the minister had given the invitation and had urged the people to be good. Nobody took the trouble to speak to him or to pray with, save the pastor who in the simplest possible way pointed him to the Saviour and told him of the love of Jesus, saying, "Yes, my boy, Jesus loves you more than your mother does, and He wants you to love Him; just trust Him and He will save you and make you good and take you to heaven when you die."



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Jess was not long seeking till in his childlike way he trusted and was saved. There was not much in him to be forgiven, for his sins were more those of ignorance than otherwise and it did not seem hard for him to grasp the fact that Jesus loved him. As he knelt at the altar he said, "If Jesus loves me more than mother do, He will forgive poor Jess; Jess don't want to be bad, Jess do love Jesus and Jesus loves poor Jess; yes He do, I know He do," and tears of joy ran down his cheeks as again and again he repeated, "Jesus love Jesus and Jesus love poor Jess more than mother do, Jess never be bad any more, Jesus love poor Jess."

As soon as he was converted he began to work for the Master with his one small talent, seeming to feel that if he had but one small talent he must work all the harder and keep at it all the time if he were to accomplish anything for God. So he was always ready to speak for Christ (even when others would smile and ridicule him) and say, "Jesus do love poor Jess more than mother and Jesus love Jesus too."

Many of the Scribes and Pharisees in the church said the minister should know better than to allow a half-witted fellow like Jess to speak; it was sure to kill the meeting, etc., etc., and if the minister did not stop him some one else should. Some one else did try again and again, but to no avail; Jess would only say, "Jesus do love me and I will tell everybody, Jesus love poor Jess more than mother do."

Not only did he tell his simple story but he set to work to get others to love Jesus, the first one being his mother, and as in his childlike way he told her that Jesus loved him more than she did, her heart was touched and she was strangely moved by his simple words. In a few days she