

# The Young People's Magazine

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## Holiness and Heaven

Heaven is a place of perfect happiness. The Bible tells us that “God shall wipe away all tears from” the eyes of those who go there; “and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4). All these things are the result of sin, and there can be no sin in heaven. In the presence of the holy God there will be nothing but perfect holiness, not only among the angels but also among those who in this world were sinful human beings. And none of the consequences of sin can follow God’s children to heaven. So no one will have to experience any of the sadness and trouble and hardship of this life in heaven; it is a place of absolute perfection.

Heaven is where most people with some Christian background think they are going. Yet, sadly, many of them have no right to think so, and it is a very dangerous matter to presume that we are on the narrow way that leads to everlasting life if in fact we are on the broad way that leads to everlasting destruction. So let us ask ourselves: Which way am *I* on?

How can we know? We may distinguish between those on the narrow way to heaven and those on the broad way to hell by their attitude to holiness. Those in the first group love holiness and the others do not. Holiness is not just a matter of trying to keep God’s commandments in an outward way; it has its root in the heart. Certainly, holy people may be far more conscious of the sin in their heart than of their holiness. Yet they do love holiness; they want to be truly holy. Besides, they love God and His people – those in whom they recognise at least the beginnings of true holiness. They love God’s laws and His gospel, which speaks of the wonderful mercy of Jesus Christ, who came into this world to die for sinners. W S Plumer, an American minister, once wrote: “Holiness is the greatest glory in heaven”. And he added, by way of contrast: “It is because men have no holiness that they hate God, His people, His laws, and His gospel also.”

In Wales in the 1730s Howell Harris was deeply concerned about the unholiness around him. He wrote, “A universal deluge of swearing, lying, drunkenness, fighting and gaming had overspread the country like a mighty

torrent. . . . Seeing thus, rich and poor going as it were hand in hand in the broad way to ruin, my soul was stirred up within me. . . . Ministers were . . . not in earnest and did not appear to have any sense of their own danger, nor any sense of the love of Christ. . . . This view of their darkness, deadness and indifference made me, out of the abundance of my heart, speak to some of those with whom I was acquainted. . . . I could not help making it my business to speak to all I came near of their danger. . . . Death and judgement were my principal subjects of conversation.”

Harris not only spoke to individuals about spiritual things but he became a noted preacher. One day in March 1739, Harris listened for the first time to George Whitefield, the famous English minister of the period, preaching in Cardiff. Afterwards they talked together about what God had done for them. Harris wrote in his diary: “I had my soul filled with heaven”. Here were two men whom God was preparing for heaven; they already had something of the holiness of heaven in their souls.

Heaven will be a place where everyone will worship God continuously, and they will never become tired of it. So we should expect that those who are being prepared for heaven will appreciate the worship of God in this world, and appreciate the Sabbath as the special day for worship. They have learned that the Sabbath is a gift from God; they are happy to set this day apart, as far as possible, for spiritual activities – going to church, for instance, reading the Bible and other good books, and prayer. Such activities are preparing them for what may be called an endless Sabbath in heaven. J C Ryle, a more recent English minister, wrote, “Your feelings about the Sabbath will always be a test of your fitness for heaven. Sabbaths are a foretaste and fragment of heaven. The man who finds them a burden and not a privilege may be sure that his heart stands in need of a mighty change.” Yes, the Sabbath is a privilege, and we should receive it as such. But if we find the Sabbath a burden, there is something far wrong with our souls. Before long we will find ourselves in eternity, but how can we expect to be in heaven unless we have a new heart, a heart that loves the Sabbath?

The best evidence that we are on the way to heaven is that we have a love for spiritual things, however poor that love may be. Plumer warned: “If one say that he has had a revelation from heaven assuring him of eternal life, it amounts to nothing”. We are not to depend on such revelations; indeed, if we would consider them properly, we would realise that they have *not* been sent by God; they have been produced by our imaginations. The revelation we are to depend on is the one God has given in the Bible. And in the light of that revelation we may examine how we live our lives – and, in particular, our thoughts and attitudes about spiritual things. So Plumer points out what

is safe, reliable evidence of someone being on his way to heaven: "If by the grace of God he is able to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness, that is evidence everyway conclusive".

On 29 September 1770 Whitefield rode into the town of Exeter in the north-western United States. He had not expected to preach that day but he found a large crowd waiting for him. An old man standing by the road told him: "You are more fit to go to bed than to preach". Whitefield agreed. But he was heard saying, as he looked upwards: "Lord Jesus, I am weary in Thy work, but not of Thy work. If I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields . . . and come home and die." Confident that he was going to "a rest prepared", he told the people: "I shall soon be in a world where time, age, pain and sorrow are unknown. My body fails; my spirit expands. How willingly would I live to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him." Although he was suffering from asthma, he preached, for 2 hours, on the verse: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith". Many hearers claimed it was the best sermon they had ever heard from him; they would never hear him again.

From Exeter, Whitefield travelled on to Newburyport. As he was tired, he was preparing to go to bed early. Yet, because the street outside the house had filled with people wanting to hear him preach, he agreed to address them. He stood halfway up the stairs proclaiming, for the very last time, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. In his hand was a candle, but at last the flame flickered and went out. Whitefield's work was finally over. For many years he had taken great delight in pointing sinners, in both Britain and America, to the Saviour. A few hours later he went to that world where "pain and sorrow are unknown".

We can say so with confidence because of how he lived. He wanted to be holy and he wanted to be useful in the kingdom of God. In one of his letters, he told a friend: "Jesus Christ alone can keep me and my dear friend from falling [into sin]. He has begun and He will carry on; He will finish the good work in our souls. We have nothing to do but to lay hold on Him by faith and to depend on Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption." Whitefield noted too that "we must be workers together with Him, for a true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it is an active, lively, restless principle. It fills the heart; so it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ."

No doubt you too expect to reach heaven at last. But have you good reason to believe that you are fit to go there? Have you good reason to say that you really wish to be holy? If not, seek the Lord now; seek earnestly the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. There is no other way of reaching heaven.

## Religion in Eastern Europe

### 5. Freedom and Confusion

*Rev David Campbell*

Last month's article dealt with the period when Communism was in control.

**I**n the 1980s, the Soviet Union began to edge towards greater openness, and there were signs of a loss of momentum in the persecution and tyranny which had gone on for much of the century. In 1989 Communist power in Russia was overthrown completely in a coup which largely avoided bloodshed. The country began to be run according to Western-style political thinking and economics. Within two or three years, the country had fragmented and the individual states set up their own governments free from central Communist control. This was a remarkable deliverance for many, especially for those who desired to worship God according to their consciences. Freedom of religion was granted in nearly every country of Eastern Europe, where strict control had once been applied.

While this happy change may appear to be all that was needed, it brought many serious problems with it, and these to a large extent remain till today. It cannot be denied that the freedoms obtained were a great blessing, but the confusion and heresies that these very freedoms brought with them into the countries of Eastern Europe present the true Church of Christ with a huge challenge. Against the background we tried to highlight in previous articles, this problem is all the more difficult to handle. Only the pouring out of the Spirit of God will remove the present religious darkness and disorder.

To give a sense of what has taken place since the fall of Communism, we will briefly draw attention to three parts of Eastern European. In doing so, we will notice the effects of the various religious groups that have become active in Eastern Europe since 1989.

In the northern part of Eastern Europe are the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The situation in Estonia is fairly typical of all three. Official independence came in 1991 and resulted in economic prosperity for some, but many others became much poorer with the change. The moral condition of society also worsened greatly and, among other things, crime and divorce figures increased dramatically. In 2004 Estonia along with a number of other countries joined the European Union. Unlike the Republic of Lithuania, where the Roman Catholic Church is dominant, Estonia and Latvia are nominally Protestant, with a Lutheran background. The persecution of native Estonians by Russians during the years of Communism has resulted in very strained relations with Russia. But the move towards a Western style

of government makes the Baltic States much more open to the truths of the gospel.

Further south, in Romania, the moral vacuum left by the Communists has been filled by every kind of social evil. Substance abuse and violent crime are on the increase. Romania has one of the highest abortion rates in the world. With freedom has come wealth for a few, but grinding poverty for the majority. Many have to spend most of their income on food. Although religious freedom is still threatened, a large number of new churches were planted between 1989 and 1999, with an average of five new church buildings opening every week. Only a lack of manpower and of materials has prevented this from continuing at such a rate. This is also fairly typical of the region. At the urging of some Orthodox leaders, the government has set tight restrictions for the registration of other religious groups and on their activities. Some groups in the Orthodox Church, reacting against the number of people who have turned Protestant, are violently opposing the spreading of the gospel.

If we turn to the Ukraine, a country with a population of about 50 million, we see a similar picture to that in other formerly-Soviet states. The Orthodox Church maintains a firm hold on much of the people, but in the western regions, where Protestants were to be found in Reformation times, many have broken away. A very severe downturn in the economy followed independence, won in 1991, and it was aggravated by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. As elsewhere, the vacuum left by the downfall of Communism has been filled with violent crime, family breakdown and immorality. In addition, radiation pollution from Chernobyl still affects huge swathes of the country. This has weakened people's immune systems and, combined with the rapid spread of the AIDS virus, it could cause enormous damage to a population which is already shrinking.

In 2002, *Evangelical Times* quoted "a recent government report [which] recorded 5439 Protestant organizations in Ukraine". As in other countries, these are mostly Independent and Baptist. In early 2004 the Ukrainian Government published figures which showed that in the previous year 1300 new religious communities were registered in Ukraine and that the total number was 27 500. Many evangelistic campaigns have been held, with exaggerated claims of conversions. Seminaries and Bible colleges have come into existence, but in the wake of the political and economic changes there is still a theological vacuum. Some local church leaders have emigrated to the West.

What has been said concerning these three countries could also be said of most others in Eastern Europe. Each has its own differences and some, like

Serbia, have been considerably affected by recent conflicts. Yet the same problems are found wherever the fall of Communism has given rise to economic instability, political turmoil and increased lawlessness. Precious religious freedoms have been gained, but biblical Christianity has not yet prospered. Errors and deceits have large followings, while the small pockets of those who truly fear the Lord are compromised by disunity, inconsistent teaching and what is basically an Arminian gospel. How different the spiritual face of Eastern Europe would be if the Holy Spirit were to come with awakening power as in the days of the great Russian awakening of the 1870s. What a great change would take place if the Lord were to bless His own Word in the hearts of multitudes who presently live in gross darkness and confusion!

One aspect of religious life in Eastern Europe since the fall of Communism appears again and again in reports by Evangelical organisations. That is the disunity of the Church, which has fragmented into a multitude of independent bodies. While there are Presbyterian Churches like the Hungarian Reformed Church, these tend to be very liberal in their approach to the gospel and show little sign of genuine spiritual life. All other broadly-Evangelical groups have an Independent form of church government. The Evangelical Alliance, formed in 1991, brings together the main Independent bodies in many countries, with mixed success. Yet those who enter these countries with Bibles and other literature have not brought the biblical Presbyterianism which once served the Reformed Churches in Europe so well. This is sadly true even of those from some Presbyterian Churches in the West who have provided literature and material aid to Eastern Europe. The biblical doctrine of the Church, maintained in Scotland since Reformation days, seems to be much neglected, and the Baptist Churches have been vigorous in teaching their Independency.

One other aspect of religious life in Eastern Europe ought to be highlighted here. Since the fall of Communism, there has been a great rush of groups who are, in a loose sense, Evangelical; they have brought a questionable gospel and many of them are Charismatic. Also many cults have infiltrated an already-ignorant and superstitious people. These are mainly the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons and, from the east, Hindu mystical cults. While these groups gain followers in all parts of the world, they are especially successful in Eastern Europe, where their delusions are taught at rallies of many thousands. The zeal with which many of these groups "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" may put many to shame who have the true gospel, but it has contributed a great deal to the growing confusion among peoples in Eastern Europe at present.

## Carl and Lisa

### 1. “Death’s Dark Vale”

It was late at night. Carl was sitting at a table in the Dutch city of Gouda, and Lisa, his wife, was standing beside him. She was clearly upset. Carl tried to comfort her. “Do not fear; our Father cares for me”, he assured her.

“I am sure He does, Carl,” she answered. But she was concerned about what might happen to him: “You know He lets those He cares for suffer so often. He lets them be imprisoned, tortured. He does not now quench the violence of fire as he did in those old days of which you read to me in the Book” – referring to the Bible.

“No, Lisa,” Carl answered, “but there still walks with them in the furnace ‘One like unto the Son of man’.” Carl was thinking of the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

Carl was calm, but Lisa was not. It was a time when Holland was under Spanish rule, and Protestants were being persecuted. Lisa talked on in a state of agitation: “You are doomed, Carl, and you know it. Since you attended those field preachings last summer, our mayor knows you are a Protestant and has had his eye on you. God help us! In all this bloodstained country, the King of Spain has not a more willing servant to help him in wearing out the saints of the Most High than the mayor of our poor Gouda.”

“He cannot harm me until my hour has come”, Carl assured his wife, “for I serve a mightier King than Philip of Spain – even the King of glory, the Lord of life, who has the keys of hell and death. See here.” And he drew out a little book from under his leather doublet (perhaps the equivalent of a modern jacket). It was a copy of the French Psalms in metre – and in those days to be found with even a single page of such a book was enough to bring about the death sentence.

Just then their little Franz, in bed upstairs, began to cry. Lisa went to attend to him and found him rather feverish. She came back down to look in what she called her pantry for something to give him. The pantry had no obvious door; to get in, you had to push back a panel which covered the outside. When the panel was in place, no one would have known that it was any different from the rest of the wall. Lisa had often found the movable panel very inconvenient and wondered “why people built houses in such a senseless way”.

She had just begun to look for what she wanted when there was a loud knock at the front door. They both knew the reason. “Flee, Carl,” Lisa told him. “Flee while you can.”

"It is too late", Carl answered; "where could I flee?"

There was another loud knock, and they could hear voices outside. Then she quickly grabbed her husband by the arm and pulled him towards her pantry. "There", she said to him excitedly. "In there. Fear nothing. I will speak to them." With Carl and his Psalm book safely inside her pantry, she replaced the panel carefully and went to open the door. She silently prayed for strength and wisdom.

From his hideout, Carl could hear the voice of the mayor. And he could hear Lisa tell the men: "You may search the house from attic to cellar. I have said you will not find him." He could hear the men as they barged into the sitting-room and then as they tramped up the stairs. And at last, he heard the front door closing behind them. The men had gone.

"You have saved me, Lisa," Carl told her.

"God has saved you", Lisa corrected him.

"Then let us thank Him together", Carl suggested. And he knelt down to pour out his heart to God, who had shielded him in his time of great danger. He asked earnestly that God would continue to be with them – to protect them if He saw fit or, if not, to strengthen them to suffer for His sake.

Carl knew he now had to flee, and quickly; there was no alternative. He went first to where he had hidden some money. He took some for himself and gave the rest to Lisa to use for herself and the children. But he refused to tell her where he was going. So, if she was asked where her husband was, she could honestly say she did not know. But he encouraged her: "We shall still have the same heaven above us, and the same Father to pray to". Then Carl went upstairs to kiss his children goodbye. When he came down, Lisa gave him his Psalm book and asked about their Bible. "Keep it," he told her, "and teach the children to read and love it." But he warned her to be careful never to use it until it was dark and the doors had been bolted.

They committed each other to God's care. Then in a moment Carl was gone. Lisa sat down and cried. When the dawn of that dull December morning broke, Lisa was sitting in the same place, still in tears. Then she pulled herself together, conscious that life must go on and that every day she had her duties to carry out.

One day about three months later, Carl's friend Hans Tiskan came to visit Lisa. He was a weaver and had Protestant sympathies. She had heard nothing of her husband since he left home. She was just about to go out to buy food, but Hans would not allow her to go. Gently he took her basket from her, took off her cloak and sat her down. Lisa began to cry. Hans sat down beside her. He had news for her, difficult news.

One night, Hans told her, Carl had ventured back to Gouda in the hope of



making a brief visit to his family. But one of the mayor's agents had recognised him, and he had been arrested. Hans was sure that Carl would remain true to his faith but, as they spoke, Carl was standing before the mayor charged with heresy. Lisa fainted. Here was difficult news indeed. After she recovered, it was hard for Hans to persuade her that she could do nothing to help her husband. She wanted to go with her children to the mayor and plead for her husband's life. "Surely he will pity us", she said; "he too has children." But Hans refused to let her go. "His heart is harder than this", he told her, as he pressed his heel on the hearth. Hans wished the mayor's heart lay there and, if it had, he would no doubt have used his boot to destroy it.

Nor would Hans allow Lisa to go to pay one last visit to her husband; it would probably have been too dangerous. But Hans went instead. "What shall I tell him from you?" he asked.

"Tell him", she answered firmly, "to remember who has said, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'."

And Carl was faithful. The law was that, even if someone had given up his heresy and returned to the Roman Catholic religion, he must still die. Yet the authorities often ignored the law and offered a free pardon to those who would give up their faith. Carl was a respected man and he was offered his life if he would turn. "Do you not love your wife and children?" the mayor asked.

"God knows", Carl replied, "that if the whole world was made of gold and it was my own, I would give it all up only to have them with me, even if I had to live on bread and water, and in bondage."

It was evening when Hans returned to see Lisa again. He had to tell her that Carl had already been put to death. But he had brought with him her husband's Psalm book. A page was turned down at the words of Psalm 23:

"Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear none ill:  
For Thou art with me; and Thy rod and staff me comfort still."

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## The Seed-Time of Life

*J C Ryle*

An edited article from this noted English minister of the nineteenth century.

What young people will be depends, in all probability, on what they are now, and they seem to forget this. Youth is the seed-time of full age, the time in the little period of human life when we are moulded, the turning-point in the history of our minds. By the shoot we judge of the tree, by the blossoms we judge of the fruit, by the spring we judge of the harvest, by the morning we judge of the day, and by the character of

young people we may generally judge what they will be when they grow up.

Young people, do not be deceived. Do not think you can serve lusts and pleasures at the beginning of your life and then go and serve God with ease at the end. Do not think you can live with Esau and then die with Jacob. It is a mockery to deal with God and your souls in such a fashion. It is an awful mockery to suppose you can give the flower of your strength to the world and the devil and then put off the King of kings with the scraps and leavings of your hearts – the wreck of your powers. And you may find to your cost the thing cannot be done.

I dare say you are reckoning on a *late repentance*. You do not know what you are doing. You are reckoning without God. Repentance and faith are the gifts of God, and gifts that He often withholds when they have been long offered in vain. I accept that true repentance is never too late, but I warn you at the same time that late repentance is seldom true. I accept that one penitent thief was converted in his last hours, so that no one might despair. But, I warn you, only one was converted, so that no one might presume. I accept it is written that Jesus is able “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25). But, I warn you, it is also written by the same Spirit: “Because I have called, and ye refused . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Proverbs 1:24,26).

Believe me, you will find it no easy matter to turn to God just when you please. It is a true saying of Robert Leighton: “The way of sin is downhill; a man cannot stop when he would”. Holy desires and serious convictions are not like the servants of the Centurion, ready to come and go at your desire; rather are they like the unicorn in Job: they will not obey your voice, nor attend at your bidding. It was said of a famous general long ago warring against Rome that, when he could have captured it, he *would not*, and later, when he would, he *could not*. Beware lest this is how it happens to you in the matter of eternal life.

Why do I say all this? I say it because of *the force of habit*. I say it because experience tells me that people's hearts are seldom changed if they are not changed when young. Seldom indeed are people converted when they are old. Habits have long roots. If sin is once allowed to nestle in your bosom, it will not be turned out at your bidding. Custom becomes second nature, and its chains are threefold cords not easily broken. Well says the prophet: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23).

Habits are like stones rolling downhill – the further they roll, the faster and more ungovernable is their course. Habits, like trees, are strengthened by age. A boy may bend an oak when it is a sapling; a hundred men cannot

root it up when it is a full-grown tree. A child can wade over the Thames at its fountain head; large ships can float in it when it gets near the sea. So it is with habits: the older, the stronger; the longer they have been followed, the harder they will be to cast out. They grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength. Custom is the nurse of sin. Every fresh act of sin lessens fear and remorse, hardens our hearts, blunts the edge of our conscience and makes us more inclined to evil.

You may think I am laying too much stress on this point. But you would not think so if, like me, you had seen old men on the brink of the grave dead, cold, without feeling, and hard as the nether millstone. Believe me, you cannot stand still in the affairs of your souls. Habits of good or evil are daily strengthening in your hearts. Every day you are either getting nearer to God or farther off. Every year that you continue impenitent, the wall of division between you and heaven becomes higher and thicker, and the gulf to be crossed deeper and broader. O dread the hardening effect of constant lingering in sin! Now is the accepted time. See that your flight be not in the winter of your days. If you do not seek the Lord when young, the strength of habit is such that you will probably never seek Him at all.

I fear this, and therefore I exhort you.

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*For Junior Readers*

## “Whiter than the Snow”

I am sure many of you enjoyed the wintry weather we had in Britain in February. Apart from the fun of playing in the snow, don't you think it looks beautiful? On a snowy morning, the whole landscape is changed, with a blanket of whiteness covering houses, trees and roads – making a very attractive scene.

Does it remind you of a verse of a Psalm which I am sure many of you have learned by heart? David prays in Psalm 51:

“Do Thou with hyssop sprinkle me,  
I shall be cleansed so;  
Yea, wash Thou me, and then I shall  
be whiter than the snow.”

David was obviously thinking very much of his sin. He knew that he had been born in sin and that his soul was filthy because of his sins. He couldn't cleanse them away himself, could he?

He knew that they could be washed away in only one way. He refers to the method God had given for cleansing from leprosy (see Leviticus 14). A

bunch of the hyssop plant was to be dipped in blood and also in running water. It was then to be sprinkled on the house or the garment or the person that was polluted by leprosy. But what did it represent? Surely it represented Christ and His blood; nothing else can cleanse away our sins.

But how can you possibly be made “whiter than snow”? The snow we see does not stay white for long, does it? It soon becomes grey and slushy, and eventually it melts away. But Christ Jesus can make you clean through and through, with a purity which will last into eternity.

If you look up Revelation chapter 7, you will read the question that was asked about those in heaven: “What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?” The answer given was, “These are they which . . . have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. Without the cleansing of Christ’s blood – without these white robes – you can never enter heaven at last.

Although it is impossible for you to cleanse yourself from sin, God has given you this prayer of David’s. It is a prayer you can use yourself: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”. As if to encourage you, God also gives you a beautiful promise to plead to Him when you pray: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be *as white as snow*: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Will you not be earnest, then, in confessing your sins? Will you not pray that your heart would be washed clean, even whiter than the snow? *J van Kralingen*

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*For Younger Readers*

## **Blind Robert**

**R**obert was blind. His father was lying sick in bed; he was not able to work; he could not earn any money. So Robert’s mother had to do something to earn some money. She did other people’s washing for them.

The children too had to do some work about the house. Because Robert could not see, his job was to go to other people’s houses to collect their washing for his mother. Even that would have been difficult for him.

One day a man met Robert making his way along the street. Robert was using his hands to feel his way along the front of the houses and the fences that he passed. The man asked him if he felt

unhappy because he was blind. "Sometimes I think it is hard", Robert answered. And Robert told the man that he sometimes wanted to look up and see the bright sun that was shining down on him. And sometimes, as he listened to the birds singing, he wanted to see them.

Then he said: "But God made me blind, and I know that is best for me. I am so glad that He did not make me deaf and dumb too." He was also glad that he had a good mother and that he was able to go to a Sabbath school.

Then the man said something foolish to Robert: "If you could see, you could help your mother more". That was true, but he was at once sorry that he said it, because it upset Robert.

Yet Robert agreed. "Yes," he said, "I often say so to my mother, but she says that I help her a great deal now. And Father says I'm the best nurse he ever had, though I am blind."

Perhaps to make up for his unwise words, the man then said, "I am sure you are a good boy, Robert".

But Robert did not agree. "No," he said, "I am not good, but have a very wicked heart, and I think very many wicked thoughts. And if it wasn't for the Saviour Jesus, I don't know what I would do."

"And how does the Saviour help you?" the man asked.

Robert explained: "O, I pray to Him and then it is as if He says, 'I forgive you, Robert. I love you. I will take away your evil heart and give you a new one.' Then I feel so happy, and it seems as if I could almost hear the angels singing up in heaven."

Then the man asked: "Do you ever expect to see the angels?"

"O, yes," Robert answered. "When I die, my spirit will not be blind. I can see with my mind now, and my mother tells me that is the way they see in heaven. And I heard Father read in the Bible the other day, where it tells us about heaven; it said, 'There is no night there'. But here it is night to blind people all the time. When I feel bad because I cannot see, I think about heaven, and it comforts me."

Robert clearly wanted to move on. The man could see this; so he asked, "Don't you like to talk with me?"

Robert explained that he did not want to keep his mother waiting for the clothes. The man then took some money from his pocket and gave it to Robert to buy something for his father.

Robert thanked him and said, "I was just wishing I could buy something for my poor sick father. He has no appetite, and we have nothing in the house but potatoes. He tries to eat them and never complains. But if only I could get a chicken for him, it would make him better. I know it would. But I don't want you to give me the money. Can't I work for you and earn it?"

Robert went on his way. He collected the clothes for his mother; he bought a chicken and a loaf of bread and brought them all home.

Yes, Robert was a good boy. But do boys usually behave like he did? And why not?

I think there was something special about Robert. God give him a new heart. That was why he was so patient, although he could not see what he wanted to. That was why he realised he had bad thoughts. That was why he did not want to keep his mother waiting for the clothes. He wanted to obey her, just like God has said, "Honour thy father and thy mother".

I am sure Robert is now in heaven. And, just like he said, his spirit is not blind there. You should ask God to give you a new heart so that you too may go to heaven when you die.

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## The Old Book

A young French nobleman came to Britain to consult a doctor. Dr Whinston examined him and saw that something was disturbing him. "Have you lost any property?" asked the doctor. "What is troubling you? You have something weighing on your mind."

"O there is nothing in particular", replied the young Frenchman.

But the doctor persisted: "I know better. Have you lost any relations?"

"No, none within the last three years."

"Have you lost your reputation in your country?"

"No."

The doctor thought for a few minutes and then insisted: "I must know what is on your mind; I must know what is troubling you."

Then the young nobleman said: "My father was an infidel; my grandfather was an infidel" – he meant that they had completely rejected the truths of Christianity. Then, not surprisingly in view of his family background, he added: "I was brought up an infidel". But he went on: "For the last three years these words have haunted me: 'Eternity, and where shall it find me?'"

The doctor now understood what the problem was. "Ah," he said, "you have come to the wrong physician." Yet, in God's kindness, the nobleman had come to a doctor who was able to point him to the Physician who can heal distressed souls.

"Is there no hope for me?" the young man cried. "I walk about in the daytime; I lie down at night; and it comes upon me continually: 'Eternity, and where shall I spend it?' Tell me, is there any hope for me?"

The doctor answered: "Now, just sit down and be quiet. A few years ago I was an infidel. I did not believe in God, and was in the condition in which you now are. I have with me an old book which contains a remedy for your disease."

As he spoke, the doctor took down his Bible and turned to Isaiah 53. He began to read: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."

"Who do these verses speak of?" asked the Count.

"Of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent into the world, so that by His death He might make atonement for sin." Then the doctor read on: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not".

"That is indeed true," the Count agreed. "We have not esteemed Him."

The doctor continued to read: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

"What does that mean, doctor?"

"That the Son of God took the sinner's place and bore the punishment due to the sinner."

"Is it possible, doctor? What divine beauty and simplicity! The guiltless dies for the guilty!"

The doctor read on to the end of the chapter. When he finished, the young man asked: "Do you believe this, that He voluntarily . . . came down to this earth and suffered and died that sinners might be saved?"

"Yes, I believe it. That brought me out of infidelity, out of darkness into light." And he spoke to the Count about Christ and His salvation. The result was that the Count was able by faith to do what the doctor and multitudes

more had done before him – to replace “our” by “my” and say, “He was wounded for *my* transgressions. He was bruised for *my* iniquities: the chastisement of *my* peace was upon Him; and by His stripes *I* am healed.”

Later the young nobleman wrote to Dr Whinston in London, telling him that the question of eternity and where he should spend it was settled and troubling him no more. He had found “joy and peace in believing”.

But have *you* thought seriously about eternity? Do you know where you will spend it? Have you found joy and peace in believing in Jesus Christ, or is He still to you “as a root out of a dry ground” – of no real interest whatever? And if God is speaking to you, do not reject what He is telling you.

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## Looking Around Us

### “This Night Thy Soul Shall Be Required of Thee”

Suddenly, early one recent Sabbath morning, in a quiet back street, a terrifying fire started in the house opposite. A window exploded, smoke and flames came billowing out, and the blaze spread rapidly. Two fire engines came and the firemen eventually managed to put out the flames. But they brought down the stairs a lad, just 18 years old, and they laid him out on a plastic sheet in the street. He was only wearing shorts and must have been in bed when the fire started – a slight, small lad in such a poorly condition. The flames hadn't burnt him, but he was so very black from the soot and the smoke.

How startled we all were! What a struggle to control my emotions, and I wept because I thought that young man was probably without Christ. It was such an awfully solemn time for the neighbours in the street but I felt a particularly solitary anguish because there was nobody there who knew the reality of the danger for his soul.

His parents had gone to visit a relative. Within 30 minutes on that day, the house was a shell and a lad lay dying. It was reported that the cause of the fire was an electrical fault. A week later – the following Sabbath – the young man died amid much sorrow, without ever regaining consciousness. The home is now boarded up and seems set apart in its desolation – an overwhelmingly sad reminder of what happened.

J C Ryle spoke to this effect: “Your repentance may be feeble, but let it be real; your faith may be weak, but let it be real; your desires after holiness may be mingled with much infirmity, but let them be real. Who knows but he may be called this very year to meet his God? The time is fast coming when nothing but reality will stand the fire. Seek real repentance towards God, real faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, real holiness of heart and life.” *FC*



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### Dangers from Cannabis

Smoking cannabis almost doubles the risk of developing mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, say researchers from the University of Otago in New Zealand. For 25 years they studied over 1000 people born in 1977, asking them about their use of cannabis at the ages of 18, 21 and 25, and about various aspects of their mental health.

The study showed that mental health problems were more common among cannabis users. The scientists suggested this was probably due to chemical changes in the brain which resulted from smoking the drug. The leader of the research team was Professor David Fergusson. Writing in the magazine *Addiction*, he emphasised that, even when various other factors were taken into account, there was a clear increase in the number who developed symptoms of mental illness after starting to smoke cannabis regularly.

Clearly young people, in particular, need to be aware of the dangers of dabbling in drugs. Aside from the dangers, there is the fact that many crimes are committed under the influence of drugs – as are many other sins, which are not crimes.

Paul Corry, of the UK mental health charity Rethink reacted to the study by saying: “This is the latest in long line of international research over the last 12 months that shows we are facing a drug-induced mental health crisis. He went on: “We need action from the Department of Health, and we need it now, if we are to avoid the risk of tens of thousands of young people developing a severe mental illness in the future.”

It is not clear what action Rethink is looking for, apart from wanting “the Health Select Committee to investigate the latest research”. But we ought to be clear that such a crisis could only occur in a society which is rejecting God and the revelation He has given in the Bible. Let none of us be guilty of the basic failure of rejecting the claims of God and of going after whatever we may mistakenly see as bringing happiness. We ought to recognise that, if we take that direction, there will be “bitterness in the latter end”.

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## I Need no More

Precious Bible! What a treasure  
Does the Word of God afford!  
All I want for life or pleasure:  
*Food and medicine, shield and sword.*  
Let the world account me poor;  
Having this I need no more.

*Food* to which the world's a stranger,  
Here my hungry soul enjoys.  
Of excess there is no danger;  
Though it fills, it never cloy.  
On a dying Christ I feed;  
He is meat and drink indeed.

When my faith is faint and sickly,  
Or when Satan wounds my mind,  
Cordials to revive me quickly,  
Healing *medicines* here I find.  
To the promises I flee;  
Each affords a remedy.

In the hour of dark temptation  
Satan cannot make me yield,  
For the word of consolation  
Is to me a mighty *shield*.  
While the Scripture truths are sure,  
From his malice I'm secure.

Vain his threats to overcome me,  
When I take the Spirit's sword.  
Then with ease I drive him from me;  
Satan trembles at the Word:  
'Tis a *sword* for conquest made,  
Keen the edge, and strong the blade.

Shall I envy then the miser,  
Doting on his golden store?  
Sure I am, or should be wiser,  
I am rich, 'tis he is poor.  
Jesus gives me in His Word  
*Food* and *medicine*, *shield* and *sword*.

*John Newton*