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Treasured Places

What are Scotland's most treasured places? A recent poll gave a rather unexpected selection. They included King's College in Aberdeen, a beautiful old university building, and the far-older Standing Stones of Stenness in the Orkney Islands. Also from Orkney is the ancient village of Skara Brae, part of which has been excavated. The most surprising choice was the town centre of Cumbernauld, which has often been criticised for its ugliness.

But at the top of the list was the Lady Victoria colliery, closed in 1981 but now home to the Scottish Mining Museum. This former coalmine near Edinburgh is evidence of the vast changes in Scottish industry over the past 50 years. Once tens of thousands of miners were employed digging coal deep beneath the surface. Now all the deep mines have been swept away – except this one, with its 20 buildings, 40-foot chimney and the huge wheel at the pithead which used to haul coal, and the miners who dug it, from the depths of the earth.

Around 40 000 visitors a year come to the museum. Among them are children who, says a receptionist, do not even know what coal is for. Their homes are heated by oil or gas or electricity. They have never seen a coal fire and their parents have never bothered to tell them about such things.

Coal is not the only thing that today's children do not know about. How much do most of them know about the Bible? Very little, one suspects. Yet it is God's book, in which He tells us the most important things we need to know about this life and beyond.

In it God tells us about Himself, that He is perfectly holy and that He is in control of everything. He created the universe and all that is in it. Most important of all, He made you. And that means you are duty bound to obey Him in everything He tells you.

But God has something to say in the Bible about *you*. No, He does not mention your name. But He tells you that you are a sinner, which is a tremendously serious matter. It means that you do not obey Him in everything; indeed you come short of God's demands in all that you do. It is not just that you sin *sometimes*; you sin all the time. And sin must be punished.

Yet there is something else in the Bible which we must not ignore. It is something altogether wonderful – that God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners. If you read the Bible, you will find that you will not suffer the punishment of your sins, in hell for ever, *if you believe in Jesus*. You will find it plainly declared in Scripture that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus came into the world to endure the punishment due to sinners. In other words, He came to die – because eternal death is the punishment we all deserve for our sins. So if you believe in Jesus, you will not perish in hell. Instead you will have eternal life and you will enjoy heaven for ever.

But how many parents bother to teach their children these important facts? How many parents today even tell their children simple Bible stories? Probably very few. If they have any contact with religion, it is probably at Christmas time – although it is an occasion which is, more and more, being drained of its religious content. But, in any case, the Bible gives us no authority to have a religious festival to celebrate the birth of Christ and Christmas is, in fact, a renamed heathen festival.

And how many parents take their children to church? How many children even know what happens there? How many parents bother to tell them about it? Again, probably very few. So it is unlikely that many children think of a church as a place where God is to be worshipped. This is a generation which has deliberately turned its back on God and on churches, where people are to gather to worship God. Yet if God is the true God, the living God, and He is – and if we are His creatures, and we are – then it very much is our duty to worship Him.

Certainly in many places today it is not possible to find a church where God is worshipped reverently and according to His own Word. In many places it is not possible to find a church where we would learn the way of salvation through Christ Jesus, who died on the cross for sinners. But, even if there is no suitable church to go to, we may still learn the truth from the Bible and we may worship God in our homes.

It is significant that the only church which appears in the list of most treasured places in Scotland is one which features prominently in a best-selling novel. But most of those who love God will have treasured memories of meeting Him in a church. It may have been during a sermon when the minister was speaking of Jesus Christ as the One “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). They looked to Christ by faith and saw Him as altogether lovely, the One who gloriously did all that was necessary for

the salvation of sinners. They saw His work as altogether suitable for them in their need. They trusted in Him and were saved.

How sad when children are not taught about God and the way of salvation! It may not matter too much if they do not know what coal is for. But it very much matters if they do not know about the Bible and about worshipping God.

Presumably you know something about the Bible and the worship of God. Yet do you take seriously what the Bible teaches? Or what happens in church? Be very thankful for those who have taught you from the Bible and who have taken you to church. And remember God’s call to *you* in the Bible: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). Take the call seriously, very seriously.

“As the Lord Commanded”

7. Singing Psalms

Rev D W B Somerset

In the previous article we considered the place of preaching in the public worship of God. In this article we consider the singing of Psalms.

Perhaps the most important part of the worship of God is the singing of His praise. We know that the praising of God is to continue in heaven. This was one of the things that Christ looked forward to when He was suffering on the cross: ‘I will declare Thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. . . . My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay My vows before them that fear Him’ (Psalm 22:22,25). He looked forward to the time when He would be leading the praises of His people as their Covenant Head. The prospect of this was part of the joy set before Him, on account of which He “endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). This praising of God is to continue throughout eternity: “I will extol Thy name, My God, O king; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever . . . my mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever” (Psalm 145:1,21).

It follows, then, that the praising of God is of central importance in His purpose. It is one of the chief parts of that Everlasting Covenant which is “ordered in all things, and sure” (2 Samuel 23:5). And the praise that men give to God on earth is of the same nature as the praise which men and angels give to Him in heaven. All praise is to mingle together in a beautiful harmony: “Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise Him in the heights. Praise ye Him all His angels: praise ye Him all His hosts. . . . Praise the Lord

from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps . . . kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth” (Psalm 148:1,2,7,11). From the orderliness that is found in every part of the Covenant, it must follow that God has chosen the way in which people on earth are to praise Him. He has not left it to human whim. We have spoken already about the spiritual nature of praise, and about the non-use of musical instruments, and we now consider the words that we are to use in praising God.

It is clear that when people are going to sing together, they must first decide what words to use. This is quite different from public prayer. Then one person prays aloud, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and the words of the prayer are not decided beforehand. The Holy Spirit has been promised to assist in prayer: “we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). The Spirit intercedes in the hearts of those that are truly praying, stirring up petitions which are appropriate for the occasion. But in singing, the words must be decided beforehand. And the question is, Who is to compose the words? Is anyone free to write a hymn and then try to persuade others to sing it, or has the Lord already given us the words that we are to sing? Our answer is that the Lord has given us the Book of Psalms for His praise, and no one has any authority to use anything else, whether hymns or paraphrases from other parts of Scripture. It is presumptuous to do so.

There have been many arguments on the issue of psalms and hymns and we will mention just a few of them. These are mainly taken from the helpful booklet, *God's Hymnbook for the Christian Church*, by Rev Malcolm Watts.

(a) There is a book in the Bible called the Book of Psalms. Historically this was the book used for the praise of God in the Old Testament synagogues and in the New Testament churches in early times. We know that to sing the Psalms is acceptable to God. “Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him: talk ye of all His wondrous works” (Psalm 105:2); “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16); “Is any merry? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).

(b) It is foolish, and indeed sinful, to approach God in any way that we are not sure of. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 15:23). If there is any doubt, we should avoid what is doubtful. We do not want to miss the blessing and incur God's displeasure. We should always be concerned that our “sacrifice of praise . . . that is, the fruit of our lips” (Hebrews 13:15) is acceptable in His sight. The mere fact that there is uncertainty over hymns and paraphrases shows that we should not use them.

(c) The praising of God is a very exalted activity, the highest in which a

human being can engage. It is said of David that he was “the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1). He was exalted and anointed so that he could write the Psalms. This shows that hymns of merely-human origin are quite inadequate to be the means of communion between our souls and God.

(d) There is an inexhaustible depth in the psalms. The most experienced believer is continually learning from them. Human hymns, by contrast, contain at most a few thoughts in each verse. Many psalms are directly about Christ, and some of them, such as Psalms 16, 22, 69, express His very thoughts. These take us beyond what is revealed about Him in the Gospels.

(e) The Psalms express and nurture the spiritual unity between Christ and His people. Christ sang all the psalms and they had a personal meaning for Him; it is always profitable to seek out this meaning. For instance, what did Christ think when He sang, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want . . .” (Psalm 23)? We would venture to suggest that, on the one hand, He sang it as a man; He expressed His confidence in God’s care, His assurance that God would give Him victory over His enemies (v 5), and His eager expectation of dwelling in the house of the Lord for ever (v 6). And, on the other hand, He sang it as the Divine Head of His people; from this point of view it expresses His duty towards them as their shepherd. What a burden lay upon Him in having to fulfil this obligation towards every single one of an innumerable multitude! And what a unity He must have felt with His people as He sang these words with them, and felt their dependence upon Him!

(f) In the Psalms, we have the Holy Spirit showing us what the life of the believer ought to be. There are striking differences between the emphases of the Psalms and those of the common human hymns. For example, there are at least 80 references in the Psalms to the psalmist’s “enemies”, whereas very few hymns touch on the subject. Human hymns are clearly unbalanced in this matter, and this imbalance can only be spiritually harmful. Likewise, there are the several imprecatory psalms (those where there is a prayer for punishment – for example, 55,58,109), but there are no imprecatory hymns. Again, such a deficiency must be harmful. Our great need is to be brought into conformity to the Word of God. If we find the imprecatory psalms hard to understand, then one time when we may expect to get spiritual light upon them is when we are singing them to the praise of God.

(g) We have no clear authority for singing paraphrases from other parts of Scripture in the praise of God. Nor do we have any guidance as to which parts might be suitable. Some parts are manifestly not suitable, and who is to judge the rest? The Book of Psalms is divinely blended for the purpose of public worship, like a mother’s milk, whereas any selection of paraphrases

is liable to give an unbalanced spiritual diet. It is no defence of a paraphrase to say that it is part of Scripture, because we know that men can wrest the Scriptures "unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Those who are seriously wrong in their doctrine invariably emphasise particular verses and ignore others which would have provided the counter-balance for their error. There is a danger in selections of Scripture, but there is no danger in the God-given Book of Psalms.

In this matter, we should stand "in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein", and we will "find rest for our souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms" (Psalm 95:1-2).

For Junior Readers – Lessons from the Life of John G Paton

15. Witchcraft

One day Paton was holding a service in a village where several tribes had gathered to discuss war plans. During the service he told the people that, if they would believe and follow the only true God, He would save them from their enemies and they would be happy.

Sitting amongst the people listening to Paton were three sacred men, or witchdoctors. All the people were terrified of them because they claimed to be able to cast spells which would make people become sick and even die. They also claimed to have power over the weather. These three men stood up and shouted that they did not believe in Jehovah God and they most certainly did not need His help. They could look after themselves because they had power to kill anyone by witchcraft. (The people on Tanna called witchcraft *nahak*.) All they needed in order to kill someone by *nahak*, they said, was the remains of a piece of food that the person had eaten.

Paton prayed to God, asking Him for help, and then he set the men a challenge. A lady was standing by holding a bunch of fruit, a bit like plums. Paton asked her for three of them and then took a bite out of each. He handed a half-eaten plum to each of the three witchdoctors.

He then declared in front of all the people: "You have seen me eat from this fruit; you have seen me give the rest of it to your sacred men. They have said they can kill me by *nahak*, but I challenge them to do it if they can, without arrow or spear, club or gun, for I deny that they have any power against me, or against anyone, by their sorcery."

The people were very frightened! They could not believe what Paton had just done and were certain that he would very soon be dead. They fled to their homes not wishing to see the nahak ceremony. But Paton stayed to watch. The witchdoctors rolled up the pieces of fruit in leaves from a sacred tree and then lit a fire at the root of the tree. They danced round the fire and waved their arms about, chanting and muttering. From time to time they would glance over to where Paton was standing as if they expected him to fall dead at any moment.

Paton shouted over to them: "Be quick! Stir up your gods to help you! I am not killed yet; I am perfectly well!" At last the witchdoctors stopped and said, "We must delay till we have called all our sacred men. We will kill Missi before his next Sabbath comes round. Let all watch, for he will soon die without fail."

Each day for the next week the witchdoctors gathered. They worked hard trying to cast a spell over Paton that would kill him. Every now and again a messenger would arrive from a different part of the island to ask Paton how he was feeling and to watch him closely for any signs of illness.

Sabbath arrived peacefully. Paton woke up feeling fine and went up to the village feeling healthier than ever! Huge crowds of people had gathered and, when Paton arrived, they looked at each other in astonishment. How could he still be alive and well?

The witchdoctors admitted that they had failed to kill Paton by nahak. And they admitted that Paton's God was stronger than their gods.

Paton then spoke to the people and told them that his Jehovah God was indeed stronger and that He had protected and helped him. He told the people that his God heard and answered prayer. And he said that God would answer their prayers if they would love and serve Him only.

The people gathered round to hear Paton talk about the love and mercy of God and to learn about how to worship and serve Him. Two of the witchdoctors sat and listened. But one, the most senior of them, went off. He returned with a spear. He came into the gathering with the spear raised and pointed towards Paton.

Paton sat calmly in the middle of the crowd while the witchdoctor danced around in a rage, scolding the other witchdoctors for listening to the sermon, but he did not throw his spear. Eventually Paton went home, but for weeks afterwards the angry witchdoctor would appear suddenly with his spear raised as if to kill Paton. But God kept him from throwing it.

The people of Tanna began to question the supposed power of the witchdoctors. But even when some of them did believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they remained superstitious and never quite got over their fear of nahak.

Paton made a stand against witchcraft and idolatry. Witchcraft is making a comeback in our society. The Harry Potter books and films have made people think that it is all quite innocent, and even that it is fun – that it is just a form of make-believe. Some TV programmes also use this theme to entertain children and young people. This results in people gradually becoming used to the idea that there is no harm in witchcraft. As they get older, there is more of a temptation to start dabbling in what they think are fairly harmless activities, especially if their friends are doing it to amuse themselves.

But we have to be on our guard against becoming involved in things connected with witchcraft and the occult. It is best not to get involved in any Hallowe'en activities and to avoid Harry Potter and other books that delve into the world of witchcraft. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

S M Campbell

Solomon – the Wise and Wealthy King

3. Spiritual Decline and Punishment

Rev W A Weale

Last month's article looked at Solomon's kingdom and his writings. This is the final part of this series, originally given as a paper at this year's Youth Conference.

As we noticed earlier, it was a great advantage for Solomon to become king of Israel after his father David had subdued all the surrounding nations. It was also in his favour that none of the superpowers of the time, such as Egypt or Assyria were particularly strong. All this ensured that his country would continue strong and prosperous during his whole reign, and that the people, despite heavy taxation, would enjoy as good a life as any generation did in all of Israel's history.

Religiously however, Solomon did not continue as he began. Sadly he did not live up to the fine convictions he had expressed in his prayer at the dedication of the temple. The *Imperial Bible Dictionary* points out that "the splendour of Solomon's empire was passing into eclipse before his death. A sad degeneracy came over him, although this is not mentioned in Chronicles. The heart that could conceive the dedication prayer must have undergone a sad change." At one time he would not allow Pharaoh's daughter to live near the ark but this attitude changed completely. His many wives were his ruin. It was only an extremely sinful desire, associated with irresponsible power, that could gather about him so many women. Even had they all been Hebrews,

he was setting a very bad example to the nation. His troops of horses, like his multitude of wives, were forbidden by God's law. A king "shall not multiply horses to himself . . . neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deuteronomy 16:16,17).

Henry Morris suggests that the first step in Solomon's decline was in fact his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. This marriage, he maintains, took place early on in his reign and it may have been his first marriage. At any rate it was one of many marriages to strange (or foreign) women which were no doubt motivated by relations with other countries and which resulted in his heart being turned after other gods (1 Kings 11). Probably he was fascinated by those gods which his wives worshipped and at last he was drawn into the sin of worshipping them himself. The extent of Solomon's departure from God's law is seen in the fact that he built a high place for "Chemosh, the abomination of Moab . . . and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon", and apparently also for the false gods of all his strange wives (1 Kings 11:7,8).

It is not absolutely clear at what point in Solomon's reign he began to go after false gods. If it was on his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, as Morris maintains, then it must have been fairly early on, but this does not quite square with the biblical narrative, which would suggest that it took place later. But when the temple was dedicated, God had solemnly warned him about the danger of him or his children turning aside from following the Lord: "Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them, and the house which I have hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight and it shall be a proverb and a byword among all people" (1 Kings 9:6). While these threats of God involved the whole nation of Israel, and were indeed fulfilled against them, yet our concern in this study is with Solomon himself. And it is to his punishment that we now turn.

In 1 Kings 11 we are told about the adversaries whom God raised up against Solomon. First there was Jeroboam (verses 26-44). Clearly a very capable man, Jeroboam was placed in charge of one of Solomon's building projects. One day Ahijah the prophet met him and told him that 10 tribes were to be taken from Solomon and given to him. When Solomon heard this, he wanted to kill Jeroboam, who had to flee to Egypt, where he was given protection until after Solomon's death.

The second adversary was Hadad of Edom (verses 14-22), whose activity undermined Solomon's kingdom to the south. Hadad was the sole survivor of the royal family of Edom at the time of Joab's great slaughter there during David's reign. He had to flee to Egypt, as Jeroboam did at another time. But when he heard that David and Joab were dead, Hadad returned to Edom. He

made trouble for Solomon until the end of his days, for Edom was under Solomon's rule.

The third adversary was Rezon of Damascus, who caused trouble for Solomon at the northern end of his kingdom (verses 23 to 25). Again Rezon had been involved in war with David along with Hadadezer king of Zobah. Although he was defeated, he survived the battle and went on to raise an army and take control of Damascus. Like Hadad and Jeroboam, Rezon appears to have been a very capable ruler. While it does not seem as if Solomon actually lost that territory before his death, yet Rezon, like the others, gave him trouble until the end of his days.

One question must be addressed about Solomon's sad declension. Did he acknowledge his sin and repent? The answer to this question is that there is no direct evidence that he did; the narrative simply closes with his attempt to kill Jeroboam, and then we are told that "Jeroboam was in Egypt until the death of Solomon".

But it seems logical to conclude that, in his latter days, Solomon did repent and acknowledge his sin. After all, we are clearly told in 2 Samuel 12:24,25: "The Lord loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah [which means, *beloved of the Lord*] because of the Lord." And we must not forget that Solomon was used to write three books of the Bible. It is generally believed that Ecclesiastes was written, as already stated, when he was advanced in years. This Book reflects an acknowledgement of his folly and of the vanity of "all things under the sun", if God is not at the centre. It is also significant that while Solomon's reign is not again mentioned in the Bible after his death, his greatness lived on in the imagination of the people. So when Christ wished to mention an instance of unrivalled personal splendour, He referred to "Solomon in all his glory"; and yet it was a glory outshone by the lilies of the field.

In conclusion, what lessons can we learn from the life of King Solomon? We may briefly notice four:

(1.) In God's providence some people enjoy greater privileges than others. Few enjoyed such privileges as Solomon. He was born in a palace, brought up by godly parents, at a time of peace in his own nation and in the nations round about. He was also given riches, wisdom and honour, such as none before or after had; so that his very name is still proverbial.

(2.) None of these things – neither his riches or his wisdom – prevented him falling into sin, even the great sin of idolatry. Indeed his riches and power may have contributed to his sin. Perhaps Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:8,9 is most appropriate when we consider Solomon's final years. "Remove from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with

food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

(3.) God can and does bring good out of evil. Think of Solomon’s many warnings in Proverbs to young men to avoid immorality and strong drink and covetousness and foolishness. Think too of his reflections on the vanity of life without God, which he sketches in Ecclesiastes. No doubt, in all this, Solomon was speaking, not just out of the wisdom God gave him, but also out of his own experiences. He is saying in effect, Do not go down the road I went down, but learn from all those mistakes I made.

(4.) No country can bear the lavish lifestyle that Solomon and his court enjoyed. We noticed the high taxes needed to maintain this lifestyle. Clearly this was resented, as Rehoboam was to discover when he took over the throne of his father.

May we then learn from Solomon, from his strengths and weaknesses, and especially from his writings! These are part of Holy Scripture, which is “given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works”.

Missionary to India

19. A Heart Filled with Joy

By 1850 Alexander Duff had completed two spells of missionary activity, based in Calcutta. He was now back in Britain and was doing his utmost to encourage the church there to support mission work in India.

December 1852 found Duff at Banchory, near Aberdeen, expressing a desire for a deeper sense of thankfulness to God for all His goodness to him. But life was not without its difficulties; all sorts of people and societies were clamouring to have Duff speak for them. But his time and energy were limited; so he had to refuse most of these requests.

One of these requests came from a Mr Spence; he wanted Duff to preach a Sabbath-evening sermon on behalf of a school where the children of poor fishermen were educated. Spence and the others responsible for the school knew that the famous missionary would attract a large congregation. Then there would be a large collection, which would go a long way to covering the running expenses of the school. Duff was sympathetic; so he did not quite refuse; he just said that he could not promise to come. If, when the time came round, he felt able to take this extra service, the people could be told about it at the normal morning and afternoon services of that Sabbath. But after

meetings on Thursday and Friday and Saturday, when he addressed gatherings of over 1000 people – and expecting to take two services in Banchory on the Sabbath – Duff wrote to cancel the extra service. He felt exhausted, especially with the effort of making himself heard by these large crowds – in an age long before amplification systems had been invented.

One can imagine Duff's surprise when, about 9 o'clock that Saturday evening, someone brought him a note to tell him that advertisements had appeared in two Aberdeen newspapers announcing the service. Duff wrote back to make it plain that he could not be responsible for people feeling disappointed when he did not turn up; he had not given anyone authority to advertise the service. He would not be able to come unless he felt very much better than he then was.

But Duff slept particularly well that Saturday night, and in the morning he again thought the matter over. He knew that large numbers of people were sure to gather, and they would be disappointed to discover that there was to be no service. This would lead to a lot of talk and gossip; he might have to make a public explanation of what had happened, to show that it was not his fault; the enemies of the Church might make the most of this opportunity to criticise; and the cause of Christ might be damaged. Duff decided that he should throw himself "on the grace and protection of a loving Father who 'knoweth our frame' and 'remembereth that we are dust'" (Psalm 103:14). So he sent a messenger to Spence to say that, although he was under no obligation to take the service, yet he would try to do so to prevent any damage to Christ's cause.

When he reached the church that evening, Duff found it already full and crowds standing around outside who could not get in. He tried to reach the back of the church but the lane leading there was also filled with people. He managed to get half way to the door but he could get no further; the people were too tightly packed. The church officer had to open the door and let some of the people into the vestry before Duff could enter. It was with difficulty he got into the pulpit as even the stairs to it were packed.

As he was about to begin, Duff felt such "a sense of weakness in every sense" that he threw himself "absolutely upon the Lord for help and strength". And did God hear his prayers? Indeed He did. Duff wrote: "Never was I more conscious of a real direct answer to prayer". And from the earnest way in which the congregation seemed to listen, he felt that the truth was telling on their hearts. His spirit in preaching that evening was the same as he had a year later in Ayr: "To me personally it is very exhausting. But I grudge nothing when I see good fruit."

Yet, even in Ayr, all was not plain sailing. When he met the presbytery

there, they decided not to arrange for a collection for foreign missions every three months – which is what Duff was trying to arrange throughout Scotland. He was so disappointed that he hardly spoke to anyone around the dinner table that afternoon. But in the evening the church was full and he spoke earnestly. One of the deacons said to his minister: “Did you ever hear anything like that? It is like Paul pleading for the heathen world.” When Duff had finished, the local minister stood up and asked the members of the congregation to stay behind so that they could form a Foreign Mission Association. Many waited and with great enthusiasm agreed to the minister’s suggestion. “As we walked home,” the minister recalled, “Dr Duff was like another man; his heart was filled with joy.”

But more joy came through a letter from one of his colleagues in India, William Mackay. It told about the Dutt family. The father, Russomoy Dutt, had been a judge and the very first Indian that Duff had got to know after reaching Calcutta; they often had long earnest talks together. But Russomoy became ill and died. Then his eldest son Kishen took a fever and died after a few days. All the sons in the Dutt family used to come to Duff’s house to discuss Christianity and to borrow books. And after Kishen died, it became known that had expressed his belief in the truth of Christianity. What is more, he had expressed a wish to be baptised, but no one would go to tell the missionaries. Indeed it seems that the father himself had been reading the Bible carefully. And now, Mackay was reporting in his letter, all the surviving family wished to be baptized.

Were the Dutt’s truly converted? While we might hope that God had indeed brought Kishen and his father to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, the evidence on which the last paragraph is based is not enough for us to respond to the question with confidence, but all will be made clear on the day of judgement. Yet it was an encouragement to Duff to know that there was some evidence of movement towards Christianity in Calcutta. And he knew, whatever might be true of those who had already died, that God was well able to bring the other members of the family into His kingdom – even if, at that stage, they were only believing Christianity to be true without actually trusting in Christ and His saving work.

After all, it was to make known the way of salvation that Duff had gone to India and he was wearing himself out in Britain seeking to awaken greater interest in missions to India – in the hope that through stronger missions, many more Indians would be brought, not only to accept that Christianity is the true religion, but to find salvation for themselves in Christ. He was an instrument whom God had provided to spread the gospel in his generation. And we should pray that He, as the Giver of every good gift, would send out

many such instruments – men with real godliness and ability – to preach the gospel in this and every future generation.

For Younger Readers

The Long Walk

There was a man who looked after a Bible shop in a place called Novisad, in the country of Croatia. One day he was coming back to the shop after lunch. As he came near the shop, he saw a very small man looking into the window. He had never seen so small a man in all his life.

In the window there were lots of Bibles. The Bibles were all open, at various places, so that people passing by could read some verses of God's Word.

At last the very small man came into the shop. He said, "Please give me a Bible in the Croatian language".

The shopkeeper asked him where his home was. He said, "Bjelovar". This place is a very long distance from Novisad, but the small man had walked all the way. Do you know how many days he took to get from Bjelovar to Novisad? He took 10 days to walk that long distance. He must have wanted a Bible very much indeed.

The Bible cost 30 dinars. (That was the kind of money they used in Croatia then.) The small man put his hand in his pocket and brought out a large number of tiny coins. He used 120 little coins to pay for his Bible. The shopkeeper thought that perhaps he had to beg for this money, and a lot of people each gave a small coin.

"Now", the little man said, "I start on my way back." He would have to walk all the way home, another 10 days of walking.

The little man was afraid a policeman would stop him on the way home and accuse him of stealing the Bible. So the shopkeeper had to give the man a piece of paper to say that he did pay for the Bible.

As the little man was going out of the shop, the shopkeeper put his hand on his shoulder and said, "In this Book you will find the way to come to the Saviour".

And the little man answered, "It is He I want to find". Yes, the little man was looking for Jesus in the right place. You too should be looking for Jesus in the Bible. Even if you are not yet able to read, ask Jesus to show Himself to you as you listen to your parents reading from it.

The Young People's Magazine

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*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil
days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no
pleasure in them (Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

“As the Lord Commanded”	108,133, 152,171,187,206,225	Avoiding War on Tanna	176
Book of Ruth, The	12,68	Peace Does not Last	189
Britain’s Heritage	123	Surrounded by Danger	214
Complete Change, A	56	Witchcraft	228
Contentment	49	Looking Around Us	20,34,79,95,120, 140 158,178,194,219,239
Crossing the Desert	3	Make the Bible Your Guide	217
Danger of Being Afraid of Others, The	54	Missionary to India:	8,26,46,74,85, 116,126,155,166,185,211,233
Danger of Despising Religion, The	28	More than a Dream	143
David – Son of Jesse	87,106,130,148	Nothing as Important as Your Soul	175
Do not Despair	96		
Evil of Sin, The	113		
For Younger Readers:		Poetry:	
Do Zebras Fight?	18	Bible, The	240
God Made Him Safe	174	Daniel and His Three Friends	139
God Spoke to Samuel	193	Running the Race	15
Long Walk, The	236	Sabbath Day, The	25,50,71,89
Not too Young to Ask for Help	151	Seashore Thoughts	180
Old Shoes, The	115	Sinner, The	80
To Tell the Truth Is Best	31	Temptation	220
Washing away Sin	77	Scotland Deserves Better?	103
“Who Would See You?”	52		
White as Wool	94	Scripture and Catechism Exercises:	
Whiter than the Snow	216	Exercises	36,97,196
Young King, The	138	General Information	195
“God Manifest in the Flesh”	203	Names	19,59,119
In for the Kill	23	Prizes and Awards	179,200
In New Surroundings	163	Seek to Know Jesus Christ	129
It Is Possible to Serve God	191	Separations	90
Learning from History	43,63,83	Setting out on a Long Journey	6
Lessons from the Life of John G Paton:		Solomon – the Wise and Wealthy King	168,208,230
Teaching in Glasgow	10	Spiritual Vision?	183
Kidnapped	29	Treasured Places	223
More Difficult Decisions	53	Wise Words	78
Arrival at Last	66	“You Have Never Asked”	35
First Months on Tanna	92		
Threats of War and Death	111	Youth Conference 2007:	
Stealing and Warships	136	Announcements	40,60
The Great Visit	146	Report	159

Looking Around Us

Nature's Wisdom?

Have you ever heard of biomimicry? Probably not. It has been described as taking “design inspiration from nature’s wisdom”. It designs new gadgets and processes by following the way nature works.

For instance, ultrasonic walking sticks were devised for blind people by imitating bats. Little pieces of plastic film were produced so that carpet tiles can be stored in a big roll and also be removed easily; these pieces of film were designed by copying the toe pads of a gecko, a lizard which can climb smooth walls and even walk along ceilings. Synthetic sheets were developed to collect water from mist and fog like desert beetles do, and paint that cleans itself like a lotus leaf does. Future developments include: solar cells like leaves; incredibly hard pottery made to resemble the inner shells of abalone, a shellfish known as pawa in New Zealand; and an adhesive to be used under water which mimics the glue found in mussels.

There is no doubt that there are many other wonderful designs in nature which could usefully be copied in similar ways. But the wisdom which has produced these designs is not nature’s; it is the wisdom of the Creator. And that Creator is God.

Some scientists, who are very determined to promote the idea of Evolution, try to persuade everyone that there is no design in nature. It just looks that way, they say; there is just the *appearance* of design. Of course, their main motive is their hope that God does not exist.

Yet the fact is that there *is* real design in nature; that is what biomimicry shows. So there must have been a Designer. But these scientists find it very inconvenient to believe that there is a Designer who brought everything into existence, including mankind. You see, the Designer must have been God, and they do not want to feel that they are responsible to God. One reason for Evolution being so popular is that the only alternative is to believe that there is a God, and this would leave people’s consciences uncomfortable, for all have sinned. And no one likes to have a guilty conscience.

But how much better for people to believe the whole testimony of the Bible, which is God’s testimony to the human beings whom He created, but who wilfully went away from Him into sin. Yet God does not only bear testimony to us about our sins; He also tells us about the remedy for sin. And if His wisdom is revealed in the wonders of nature – and it certainly is – it is even more wonderfully revealed in the plan of salvation. God sent His own Son, Christ Jesus, into the world to die. No other person could do what was necessary; in no other way could sinners be saved. God’s wisdom is perfect.

The Bible

Would you be wise and know the Lord?
Would you believe aright?
Make the blessed volume of His Word
your rule, your guide, your light.

Here is the spring where waters flow,
to quench our heat of sin;
Here is the tree where truth does grow,
to lead our lives therein;

Here is the Judge that stops the strife
when men's devices fail;
Here is the bread which feeds the life
which death cannot assail.

The tidings of salvation great
come to our ears from hence;
The fortress of our faith is here,
our shield and our defence.

Read not this book in any case
but with a single eye.
Read not till first you ask God's grace
to understand thereby.

Pray still in faith with this respect,
to cleanse your soul therein;
That knowledge may bring this effect,
to mortify your sin.

Then happy you in all your life,
whatever you befalls;
Yes, doubly happy shall you be,
when you by death God calls.

Anon