



PAULINE AND HER BIBLE

One day, a young woman asked her mother for a Bible, because she was anxious to have her own just like the others in the Bible class. The story circulated around the village, the general reaction mixed: joy, sympathy, scepticism, cynicism and bewilderment. A Bible? Everyone knew she was unable to read; yet she was determined to have a Bible.

CONTROLLING INFLUENCES

Pauline was her name. My first sight of her was brief when, with head bowed, she brushed past me in a great hurry. She had made no attempt to speak to anyone, least of all to me, a stranger. Taken aback, I enquired who she was. “Oh, that’s Pauline!” was the reply.

She was about thirty at the time, short and overweight, with black hair and large brown eyes. However, one hardly ever saw the latter. She was withdrawn, staring at the ground for the most part, and never saying anything—at least, to most of us. She was also epileptic. Her education had been minimal, leaving her illiterate. Psychiatrists, electrical treatments and tablets controlled her life, the local psychiatric hospital being her second home.

A REMARKABLE CHANGE

Thus, although she regularly attended the Lord’s Day worship and the midweek Bible Class, I had every reason to wonder whether she was capable of grasping the basics of the gospel, particularly as she never appeared to be listening! Now suddenly, after nearly eighteen months since first meeting her, she wanted a Bible. She also began raising her head. Truly, the Lord had graciously laid his hand upon her (Rev. 1:17).

There was no doubting she understood the gospel in her simple way, reminding the rest of us in our rejoicing that redemption is by no means the preserve of sophisticated intellects. Jesus’ prayer to the Father sprang to mind: “. . . thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25). In any case, do we not have to be “as little children” before the kingdom of heaven can be entered (Matt.18:3)?

ANOTHER SURPRISE!

Pauline and her precious Bible were inseparable, a treasured ornament of which she was immensely proud. When I announced the Scripture reading, I would see her open her prized possession at random and pretend to be following. This imaginative play continued for some time, until one day she astonished everyone still further. She informed us—yes, she had emerged from her shell by this time—that with help she was teaching herself to read her Bible. She did too, in a limited way, with the one sitting next to her at the Bible class assisting her.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS!

Every Christian can testify to how much is owed the grace of God, but some even more than others. Pauline was one of them. True, the psychiatrists, the hospital and the medication were ever present, but central to the limited framework of her life stood Jesus about whom she loved to speak; “What a friend we have in Jesus” was her theme song.

I never failed to be touched when she assured me of her prayers, and I was also deeply moved when sometimes she pitifully said to me, “I’ll never marry a man who doesn’t love Jesus”, although we both knew, at least I did, she would never attend her own wedding. I thought though of the many Christian girls willing to barter their soul’s welfare and loyalty to the Lord, for the “pottage” of marrying an unbeliever—and feeling no shame in doing so.

WHAT HOPE FROM THE WORLD?

When visiting her at the psychiatric hospital the nurse would unlock the ward door, and there would be Pauline surrounded by the most distressing of tragic cases, yet spiritually in her “right mind” (Lk. 8:35). Accompanied in the background by raucous screaming and groaning we prayed together, her Bible open on her lap, and when we had finished she always reminded me that Jesus was with her.

The world had given Pauline up, pointed her to the bleakness of her future, and no doubt wished her “good luck”, but God had graciously intervened, choosing “the weak things of the world to confound” the rest of us (1 Cor. 1:27). He had brought her out of her shell, raised her head, provided her with hope and contentment in salvation, enabled her to read simple verses of his Word (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4), and eventually even to pray audibly in the prayer



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meeting (several times!). If ever there was one who knew that “none but Christ can satisfy”, it was this lamb in the flock.

REMEMBERING PAULINE

Upon leaving Pauline locked up again, unnecessarily as it was later admitted, I would sit in my car feeling heavy-hearted, and yet praising God for what he had done for his child. She had so little, but in knowing him she had everything; she had so little, but in knowing her I had received so much.

In 1984, her Friend Jesus freed his infant in the faith from her sufferings so that she could spend eternity with him, as promised (Jn. 14:2, 3).

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