

# The Boy With a Bad Memory

A Story of John Newton

Long ago in England a little babe was born, and given the name of John. He had a lovely mother who gave all her time to his secular and spiritual education. She labored hard to store up in his mind passages of Scripture which she knew, if well learned, could never be wholly shaken from the mind. She prayed with him and for him every day. But John's mother died when he was but seven years of age. She regretted having to leave her little son to the mercy of a hard cruel world, but she had sown the seed faithfully, and she died trusting God for a rich harvest in the life of her dear child.

John soon forgot all her words of instruction and wisdom, for at the age of eleven he ran away to sea. God tried many times and in many times to call to his remembrance the things he had learned at his mother's knee: At one time he fell from a horse and looked death right in the face. He was deeply moved about this, but he soon forgot, and went on in his careless way of living.

At another time he had an appointment with some friends to go rowing. He was late in arriving and they went off without him. That day the boat capsized and all his friends in it were drowned. He went to their funeral and God spoke to him again. He was deeply moved, but he soon forgot.

At another time God wrestled with him in a dream. He was deeply moved, but again he soon forgot.

So it was because he forgot that he ran away to sea where he might do as he pleased, and sin to his heart's content.. He sailed to many places, and finally arrived in Africa where he became involved in the atrocities of the slave trade. He sank lower and lower until for a time he him-self became a slave.

He fell in love with a thirteen-year old girl named Mary Carlett and married her when she was twenty. She was a good woman and John loved her deeply, but not enough to change his ways. It seemed as if the influences of his mother and his wife had no effect upon his life. His soul was lost on "forgetful green."

One night out on the high seas, in a terrific storm, the ship on which he was sailing began to founder. The hold filled rapidly with water. As John took his place hurriedly at the pumps, he heard himself say to the captain, "If this will not do it, the Lord have mercy upon us.". His own words startled him. "Mercy!" he said. "What mercy can there be for me?" This was the first desire he had breathed for mercy for many years.

Later the hold of the ship was free from water, and then came a gleam of hope. He said, "I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor." At last he began to pray and God heard him. "That tenth day of March is a day I can never forget," he wrote afterward, "for on that day the Lord came from on high and deliver-ed me indeed out of deep waters. It seemed as if He came and looked into my very soul." There on the high seas John's memory was stirred to the extent that he thought not so much of physical, as of spiritual safety. He sought the Lord's mercy and received an abundant pardon.

After this experience John began to make history - Christian history. He made it well. He made it in many ways:

(1) By his ministry in the Church of England. That church at this time was within the grip of the political bishop, the fox-hunting parson, and an utterly worldly, materialistic laity. Into that atmosphere he went to serve. and John Newton, with a few kindred spirits, brought about the evangelical revival.

(2) By the personalities of his converts. For example, he led to Christ Claudius Buchanan and Thomas Scott. In due time Bu-CHANAN carried the Gospel to the East Indies, and wrote a book which led Adoniram Judson to undertake his historic mission to Burma. Scott became one of the most powerful writers of his time, and indeed, of all time. Cardinal Newman confessed that it was Scott's treat-ment of the doctrine of the Trinity that pre-served his faith, in one of the crises of his soul, from total shipwreck.

(3) By influencing for good preachers like Wesley, Whitefield, and great English states-men. Among the latter was William Wilberforce, that great and noble man who gave all his time and efforts in a terrific, but success-ful, struggle to have the slave trade abolished in Great Britain by act of Parliament.

(4) By becoming one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society, and in doing so he laid his hand upon all the continents and is-lands.

John is making history still; for wherever congregations rise to sing, "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound," "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds in a Believer's Ear!" "One There Is above All Others Well Deserves the Name of Friend" -there is John making Christian history still.

He was a tireless worker in the cause of Christ. When he was advanced in years, some-one suggested that he take things more easily. "What?" he asked, "shall this old blasphemer cease to serve while he has breath with which to speak?" He was

determined while he lived to preach the grace of God toward sinful man, as found in Jesus Christ, until he could speak no more.

Knowing human nature and its tendency to eulogize a man after he is dead, he prepared an epitaph for himself. This and no other was to be erected for him. So in a church in Lon-don, there is a plain mural tablet erected, on which are inscribed his own words:

John Newton, clerk  
once  
Infidel and Libertine  
was  
by the mercy and grace of the  
Lord Jesus Christ  
Pardoned  
Redeemed  
Restored  
and  
Appointed to preach the faith  
he had so long sought to  
destroy.

And what about that bad memory? On his study wall was a text he greatly loved, "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee" (Deut.15:15).

He never forgot again. Just before the end of his life he said, "My memory is failing me, but two things I shall never forget:

I was a great sinner, and Jesus Christ is a great Saviour."



