

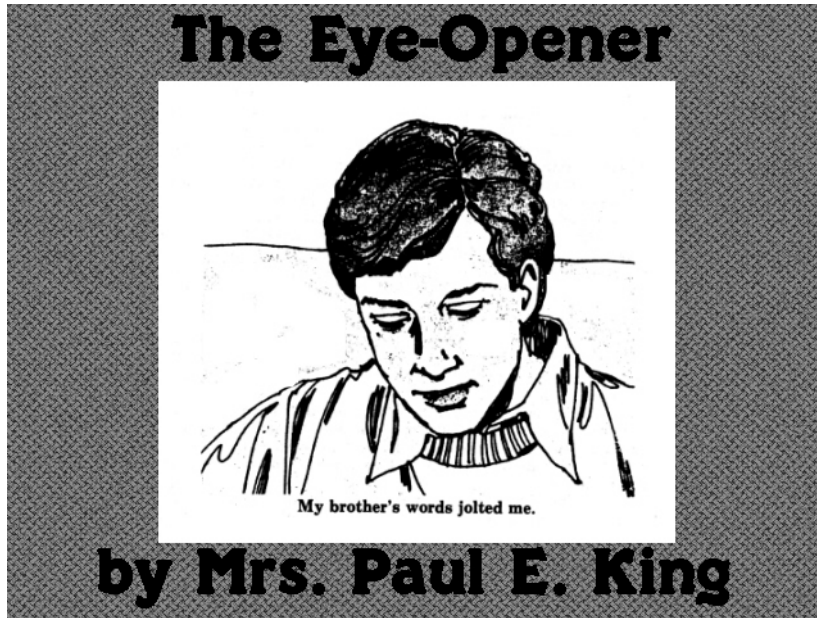
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THE EYE-OPENER
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Talk about excitement when Bill came home from the battle front unscathed, unharmed and completely whole and all in one piece! That was what we had in our family: excitement! Dad, Mom, Buttons and I all went down to the train station to meet him.

The train pulled in right on time, at the precise minute almost: 4:45 A.M. A bit early to get up perhaps, but our excitement and joy over seeing this much-missed member of the family assuaged all the unpleasantness of that ordinarily much-too-early 3:30 A.M. ring of the alarm clock. Then, too, living in a small town, well, it was quite natural that our town couldn't get a better hour, say, like 8 or 9 o'clock for the train to stop, since those were the hours for its scheduled stops at two much larger towns than ours. Business was by far much greater in each of those places. Besides, in the summertime, when the first rosy streaks of light were showing gloriously faint in the east, it was exhilaratingly wonderful to stand down on the platform at the station waiting for the giant engine to pull its long line of passenger cars in.

"When will he 'tom?" Buttons asked in her typical two-year-old fashion, perched atop Dad's shoulders with her legs wrapped around his neck and her tiny hands ensconced tightly in Dad's big, strong ones. "Me see. Me see."

"You'll see," Dad assured her softly and kindly. "Why, you're taller than anybody here, honey!" he added. "See? No one's sitting or standing as tall as you are on my shoulders. Now keep your eyes down along the tracks. You'll soon see the train come 'round that bend. . . ."

And come it did! With a loud blow of the whistle and a rush of its mighty engine, it rushed toward us. Buttons squealed with delight. Then, frightened, she began to cry. Very gently, Dad took her from his shoulders and cradled her to his manly chest and broad shoulders, leaving Mom's arms free to encircle Bill's form when he would emerge from that train.

I saw him when he stepped off the platform in the third car. "There he is!" I exclaimed, wanting to shout and laugh and cry and toss a hat up into the air for pure joy, only I didn't own a fancy hat to toss into the air. Fact of the matter was that I didn't own a hat. Period.

We pushed and squeezed past others of the town who had come to meet loved ones, an impolite thing to do and something we would never have done under ordinary circumstances and in less-emotional times. But this was no ordinary circumstance, nor was this a "less-emotional" time. Ah, no! It was emotion-packed to the bursting point of complete overflowing. A hero was returning from a battle field of horror, cruelty and blood-shed and he was unharmed. We were seeing a miracle emerge from car #3. He was hurrying toward us: a miracle of God's grace and God's protection!

I shed tears unashamedly and freely, especially when I saw Mom sobbing on my brother's broad shoulder and Bill crying like a baby. The same thing happened with Dad. And me. It was an emotion packed meeting, I tell you. Bill's joy over seeing Buttons for the first time ever was positively indescribable. "I've always wanted a sister for Butch and me," he remarked, coaxing Buttons into his arms. "At long last we have one. And what a beautiful sister she is!" he added.

Buttons, whose real name is Shawna Delene, seemed to know that Bill was our brother. At least she made up with him immediately and gleefully accepted his shoulder ride back to the station much to our surprise and delight.

"God sure was good to me," Bill said, over and over, again and again, on the ride home. "I don't know what I'd have done without Him and His help. I grew spiritually over there."

For three or four months my brother went to church as regularly and as faithfully as ever. Then, after getting a steady job, he became dilatory and negligent, missing prayer meeting on Wednesday night and, finally, Sunday night's services, too.

It bothered me dreadfully, his apparent unconcern for spiritual things especially after being so marvelously delivered out of the hands of the enemy and escaping the devastating and fatal effects of the myriad land mines, et cetera. I felt I must now talk to him.

"Bill," I said, as I walked into his room and sat on a chair near the bed where he was reading a book and munching on an apple. "May I talk to you? Please?"

"Any time, Butch," he answered, grinning broadly. "Any time. That's what a big brother is for. That, and many other things. Now, what's bothering my favorite brother?"

He dropped the book onto the bed, lay back on the pillow and folded his hands beneath his head. "What's the subject, Butch?"

"God. And church."

"What about God? I believe in God. I'm sure you know this. And what about church?"

Without being tactful, I blurted out, "I'm worried about you. So are Dad and Mom. You... you don't love the Lord the way you used to. I don't ever hear you pray anymore. And you never come out to the prayer meetings nor the Sunday night services. And you look bored in Sunday school and never enter into the morning worship service. Why, Bill? Why? Especially after the way God spared your life and brought you home completely unscathed and unharmed. Don't you feel you owe God a debt of gratitude and love? And isn't it only reasonable that you should be His love slave forever, and serve Him with all of your being?"

Bill's eyes wandered over me piercingly. "Butch," he said, searching my face unwaveringly, "will you believe me if I tell you something? I'm not a good pretender, like some people I know."

"Of course, I will. What is it?" I swallowed.

His eyes never wavered nor left my face. "True, I don't attend the Sunday night nor mid-week prayer services anymore. But I've seen such a change at home here.., in our country, I mean.., that it's hard for me to believe that God means everything to people anymore, even though they testify this way. When I went abroad, people had less but were more dependent upon God. Something's changed. They profess as much, it's true, but where is the concern for the lost, Butch? Are you, and the youth group of which you are president, really concerned about the lost souls all around you?"

I gulped. I hadn't expected that!

"And what about the needy people, those who need food and clothing? Maybe rent monies, even? What is my church doing to sustain them? This last big picnic you had. . . ." His sentence trailed. Then he added with a sad note, "If all the money that was spent on that feed . . . that spread . . . could have gone to some of those poor, starving people whom I saw when I was abroad, it would have sustained them for a long time. Now don't get me wrong, Butch, I'm not against an occasional picnic or get-together; but I am against not doing something for the lost and dying and the needy poor. I saw

so much poverty over there; and I come home and find a great many of the professing Christians wrapped up tight in materialism. This is wrong, Butch. All wrong! I guess my frank answer is simply that I'm sick and tired of hearing words of supposed love and adoration for Christ and not seeing the action, or the fruits, of that professed love. Is there anything else you needed to talk to me about?"

"N . . . No," I stuttered. "I . . . I guess you've given me plenty to think about, Bill. Thanks. Thanks much."

I left my brother's room feeling like I was suddenly carrying a ton of bricks on my heart. Talk about heavy! I felt like the weight of it was going to smother me.

I went down the street to the church and hurried inside. With sobs, I raised my hands heavenward, knowing that I must somehow get the message across to the young people. I then asked God to show me what to do and how. I remained thus, on my face before the Lord, for a long time in intercessory prayer, confessing to Him the verity and the truth of what Bill had said. And not only confessing, but asking Him to humble and to change us. All of us; me, especially. I had no material assets of any great value as yet since I wasn't quite through high school and worked only two hours each afternoon for Mr. Highstreet in his tiny shop near the school which I attended. But I felt as though I hadn't been the best example of giving and doing that I should have been or could have been. In other words, if the blessed Lord had asked for a reckoning of my stewardship, I would have had to hang my head in shame.

I left the church, completely changed. God had helped me to set my priorities straight and right.

The following Sunday night, standing before that wonderful group of young people, I unburdened my heart and bared my soul. "I'm going to do something entirely different tonight," I told them, with tears. "I haven't been as concerned about the lost and the dying as I should have been, nor about the poor and the needy, either." And then I related my visit to Bill's room, telling them everything that my brother had said and ending with, "It took Bill's candid statements to shake me and to open my eyes. I asked God to forgive me and to help me to get out there where the lost are. I must do something more than talk about their lostness. With His help, I'm going to win some of

those lost ones to Christ. Each of us will have his and her reckoning day with Christ, as to what we did and didn't do for Him and the up-building of His kingdom."

Silence was "knee-deep." I felt the Holy Ghost was speaking to hearts just as He had spoken to mine. "We must do more than pity the poor and needy, also," I continued. "Pity alone does not feed and clothe their bodies. We've been blest with pity; but that's been the extent of our outreach, if indeed one would dare call it 'outreach.' Outreach has a far greater meaning to it than any of us has ever put into practice. From tonight on, God helping me, I'm going into action. My prayers for God to sustain the needy poor are going to have feet put on them. With my meager earnings, a weekly portion is going to be set aside for food and clothing for the poor. . . ."

The young people felt the burden on my heart; the challenge was "catching." Elaine Levian stood to her feet, weeping. "Philip," she said addressing me as she always did by my real name instead of my nickname, Butch. "I, too, have felt guilty over our unconcern for lost souls and for the needy. In fact, I've prayed earnestly about this. I'd like to see us have a weekly prayer hour or more where we pray for lost souls in a concerted effort of earnestness to God that He would give us souls to lay as sheaves at His feet. And why couldn't we, as young people, give of our after-school earnings into a fund for food and clothing for the poor, both here and on that mission field which we heard about recently? I'd like to start by giving \$25.00. I was saving for something else, but I feel God will be pleased by this sacrifice. . . ."

Elaine's speech was almost electrifying. It started things moving. In full force. I was moved to tears of humble gratefulness and thankfulness as one after another stood and confessed their coldness of heart and made their way to the little bench that served as an altar in our young people's room.

Needless to say, we went into the main sanctuary that night all fired up and victorious. It set things on fire in that night's service. The glory of God filled the church. People ran the aisles and shouted and cried with holy joy. It was glorious and wonderful and wondrously glorious. We had a real spiritual awakening.

Bill heard about it the following week. He came to me with, "So you told what I said to you."

It was neither a question nor an exclamation, only a mere statement... "So you told what I said to you." It left me wondering if I had done the right or the wrong thing and for a brief moment, I was greatly concerned what further damage this would have upon my beloved but backslidden brother's heart. Then, feeling and knowing that I had minded and obeyed God, I turned the matter over to the Lord completely and entirely and rested the case in His hands.

Nothing more was said that entire week. Not one little squeak from Bill, even. About the meeting on Sunday night, I mean. I knew, however, that at our newly-formed prayer hour time, Bill's name was lifted up "ferverently, tearfully and earnestly to God for his salvation. What's more, I was confident that, even though I could see no visible outward sign of change, God was dealing with my brother's heart. I got on the "praise wagon" and began to thank the Lord for the work He was soon going to do in Bill's heart and life.

I wasn't surprised when I saw Bill come into our young people's meeting that following Sunday night. But I was surprised when he got to his feet and said, with tears in his eyes, "I want you all to forgive me for taking such a rotten attitude toward you. You're a great bunch of young people. I'm glad that Philip told you what I said. Everything I said was truth. But God saw my attitude, and He judges us by our attitudes and our feelings. Those inward, unseen-to-the-public attitudes and feelings. Mine were bad. Bad! And all wrong. Tonight I'm going forward. I want you to come and pray for me. I don't want to be lost and go to hell. . . ."

I wish you could have been in that young peoples' meeting! It was a real foretaste of glory divine and of what Heaven's going to be like. Bill prayed clear through and through clear. He became our very first visible and known "lost soul" won to God. But not our last. New faces were now common in the church, and souls were born into the kingdom of God. Bill became our most earnest and zealous-for-God soul-winner.

It took Bill's eye-opening statements to shake us. And am I ever thankful! Instead of living for self and its interests, we are reaching the lost, clothing some of the needy poor and feeding their bodies with nourishing, much-needed foods. And having the greatest spiritual feasts ever in our soul.

I praise God for the shaking eye-opener Bill gave me.