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**WRONG INFLUENCE**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Harold opened the door to his small efficiency apartment and put his armful of books on the kitchen table before picking up the newspaper from the porch and sinking into the one and only comfortable chair in his sitting-room-bedroom combination room.

He leaned his head back against the chair's softness and closed his eyes, allowing, with pleasure, the weariness and fatigue to vanish and fade away with the moments of relaxation. He treasured these few moments and thanked God for them. They were like precious gems in his otherwise hectic and full day. But this was fast coming to a close, and with God's help he would soon be through with his heavy load of studies and he would be graduating.

With eyes still closed, he thanked the Lord for His help through the years of college, and of work. Yes, of work, for he had worked his way through college. His parents were unable to help him financially and he was thankful for this: it gave him a greater and deeper appreciation for what he had learned. The work had actually served as a goad to him, helping him -- teaching him, really -- how better to apply himself and how to utilize to its best and fullest each moment of time. He was no waster of either time or money; hard work and diligent study had been excellent schoolmasters, teaching him wisely how best to utilize each and to squander none.

He fell into a relaxing sleep; slept ten minutes then awakened feeling refreshed and revived. With his feet on a hassock, he opened the paper and scanned the headlines, pausing to read only what interested him and what he thought he should know of current events. A headline grabbed his attention instantly. It was the name that "grabbed" him. The name, and the picture of a totaled car.

Harold felt numb with shock as he stared at the picture of the wrecked car and the body nearby, covered with a sheet. Reading, he groaned audibly, crying aloud, "Oh Monty! Monty! No! No!"

Tears blurred his vision as he read; at times he could scarcely see for their heavy flow. It seemed unreal, the words in the paper. The news.

He finished the story; then, in shock, he closed his eyes and wept bitterly, exclaiming brokenly -- sadly -- "Monty! Oh Monty!"

Harold wept until the fountain of his tears were spent and he could weep no more. With his head pressed into the softness of the comfortable chair and his eyes closed, he thought of his friend. He and Monty had been friends from their first year in college together, when they met as roommates.

Monty was such a promising young man with a beautiful and bright future before him. He was amiable, morally clean and respectable and so very open for the truths of God's Word, which he became interested in when seeing the Bible on Harold's dresser.

"I've often wondered about that," he told Harold, pointing to the open Bible on the dresser. "And I even thought about buying one and starting to read it."

"Why didn't you, Monty? You couldn't have bought a better or more wonderful book. None to even begin to compare with it," Harold recalled having replied. "In fact, I'll loan you mine to read. You won't be sorry you did. I promise, you won't."

"OK, Harold. Thanks. That's really kind of you. Where do I begin?"

"Here, Monty, read the First Epistle of John for right now. There are only five chapters in it, but oh, it's wonderful. I'm sure you'll agree once you've read it."

"Five chapters! Say man, what do you expect of a fellow loaded down with studies up to his chin?" and Monty had laughed amicably.

"Hey, I'm sorry, Monty; I should have told you; these aren't lengthy chapters like one finds in an ordinary book: They're chapters with verses, and I believe the longest chapter has only 29 verses in it. I've asked you to read only the First Epistle; even though the other two are shorter."

"Whew! That sounds better. OK, Pal, give me the Book. . . ."

He had read the entire First Epistle through in short order. Then he read it through a second time, remarking soberly, "Quite a refutation to some people's philosophy, huh? It makes me see just how much I need God. I never realized this before. If you don't mind, I'll be borrowing this pretty often. I'm sure it's got what I've been searching for for a long time. . . ."

And borrow it he did, until Harold was financially able to buy him a beautiful new, genuine leather King James version as a surprise gift, which he accepted with tears.

Monty read his new Bible faithfully, morning and night, and shortly after receiving it, he was converted. It was a thrilling sight to see the spiritual progress he made. He had a brilliant mind and found scripture memorization an easy thing to do. Verse after verse was memorized and hidden away in his heart. Harold was overcome with joy over having helped to lead his roommate to the Lord Jesus Christ. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God would call Monty into His Kingdom work! he had thought, seeing the potential for such.

Things went along beautifully that first year of college, for Monty. He became an avid reader and student of the Word. He thought he could never be happier than he was, even though Harold had warned him about the carnal nature within him and urged him to seek the Lord for a pure heart; a cleansed heart and holy.

"I'm doing fine, Harold," came the quick reply. "I've never experienced such joy and peace as I have now. I don't see how I could need anything more."

"But you do, Monty. Believe me, you do. We were born with the carnal nature. It's an enemy to God. The Apostle Paul calls it the old man. . . ."

"I know. I know, Harold. But for now I'm so happy and full of joy until I don't see how I could possibly contain another thing. Thanks much for your concern. You're a great friend."

"Please, Monty, allow the Holy Spirit to purge out the carnal nature in your heart and to sanctify you wholly. That old nature has pulled more than one soul back into sin."

"Just keep praying for me," Monty replied. "But like I said, I don't see how I could contain anything more. . . ."

The school year terminated and they went their separate ways, Monty to his home some sixty miles distant and he, Harold, to his folks in another state.

The following year he noticed a change in Monty as they returned for a second year of schooling. Instead of wanting to room with him, Monty roomed with a young man whose father was wealthy. Brendan was anything but spiritual. This bothered Harold, and each time he mentioned it to his

friend, Monty said, "Oh, I'm not doing what Brendan does. I'm trying to let my light shine. . . ."

'Have you been sanctified wholly, Monty? Generally, unless one is wholly sanctified and truly following the Lord, the worldling pulls him his way and, in a subtle way, he squeezes him into his mold. Read that First Epistle of John through again, please. Read it prayerfully. I Corinthians 15:33 says, 'Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.' Brendan's having an ill effect upon you and your spiritual life, Monty. He's influencing you whether you realize it or not and, truthfully, I'm greatly concerned for you. You've begun so well in this spiritual warfare -- this Christian life -- don't allow anything to hinder you, my friend, nor to sidetrack you."

Monty had made no reply, and the next time Harold saw him he was in Brendan's Mercedes with a bunch of loud, boisterous and noisy young men and women.

They seldom saw each other after that; Monty seemed to "make himself scarce" whenever Harold tried to see him. But the news he heard on campus filled his heart with grief and sorrow over his one-time Christian friend.

Monty became a part of the wildest group on campus, drinking, dancing, partying, doing drugs and swinging from one girl to another, even becoming a part of an occult group. With his handsome face and his tall stature, his great broad shoulders and his pleasing ways and pleasant mannerism, he made it into the elite "in" crowd on campus, a thing to his detriment and, ultimately, to his death.

Harold looked at the picture again and groaned aloud. He recalled over hearing a conversation in the school cafeteria more than two years previously regarding Monty's first encounter with an alcoholic beverage.

"You should have seen him!" a girl from a nearby table screeched. "It was hilarious; he was silly as all get out. He went around slapping everybody on the back, laughing like a wild goon. It was kind of scary, the way he laughed. But at least he wasn't throwing things, like some do when they're drinking."

The others at the table laughed uproariously. Then one of the fellows said, "He got hooked on that first drink."

"I can't believe that," came a terse reply from an overbleached blonde. "I've been at this thing for years and I'm not hooked."

"Don't kid yourself, Sal. Try to quit; you'll soon see how unhooked you are. And as for Monty, well, he spoke the truth. Most of us are too ashamed to admit that we're an alcoholic; we try to pretend that we can leave the stuff alone if we want to. But we know it isn't true. And so do a lot of other people know it, too. Monty now, well, he admits it. And yes, Sal, whether you believe it or not, Monty got hooked on that very first drink. Monty's an alcoholic. A sad, bad, alcoholic, and it all started with drink number one. And that's a fact."

Sick at heart, Harold remembered having gotten up from his chair at the table and walking away. Now, looking at the picture of the white sheet covering Monty's mangled, cold-in-death body, Harold thought of the power of influence. Had his friend not gotten in with the wrong crowd and been influenced by their wicked ways, he would, no doubt, still be alive, and would have graduated with him in the spring of the year. But not now. No, not now. Not ever!

Bible verse after Bible verse came to him now as he sat in the chair, thinking of the tremendous power of wrong influence: Habakkuk 2:15 stated, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also. . . ."

Isaiah 3:11 said, "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him. . . ."

Oh, if Monty had only remained true to the Lord in his wonderful conversion experience and gone on and been sanctified wholly! If only he had heeded Prov. 1:10, 11, 15 and 16, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

"If they say, Come with us. . . ."

"My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:

"For their feet run to evil. . . ."

"Oh Monty! Monty!" Harold exclaimed sadly. "You walked in the way of the transgressors and now you are dead. Your soul! Oh, your poor soul! You died under the influence of liquor! Oh, your soul! What a way to meet God! How very fearful! Oh Monty! Monty."

Harold slid off the chair to his knees in prayer, for a fresh and a new outpouring upon his own soul.