

THE PROPHET OF ETERNITY

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Every big city has its famous "characters", and Sydney is no exception. One of the best-known of such people in Sydney a few years ago was a man who kept his actual identity a secret; but his work was on display everywhere. He was known as "Mr. Eternity", because he spent his time writing that single word, "Eternity", on the footpaths. "Mr. Eternity" wrote in chalk, and in beautiful copperplate handwriting. Many the time I have seen it myself, and I expect many listeners have also.

Who was this man, and what was the meaning of his single-word message to the citizens of Sydney? We now know that his name was Arthur Stace. He came from a family of methylated-spirit drinkers and he was gripped by the same habit. He once said "The craving for drink never left me. I asked one doctor why it was and he asked me about my parents, and I had to confess with shame that my poor old mother had died from the effects of methylated spirits, that my father died from insanity because of drink, my grandfather had died in an insane asylum, my brothers and sisters had all been through the police courts, because of the curse of drink."

One day, in despair, Stace asked to be locked up by the police. They declined and he wandered along to a Christian meeting where he knew he could get cake and tea. He got rather more than that, for, to quote him again "I heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ I broke away from the crowd I was with and went into the park" (I think it must have been Victoria Park near Sydney University) "and knelt down among the bushes where I could not be seen and prayed that prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. A new life, a new joy, a new peace and satisfaction came to me that I had not known for forty-six years." Stace

was a new man; a profound personal revolution had occurred in his life, brought about by a power outside himself and more potent than his addiction. From then on he devoted himself to the service of his fellow citizens, by his anonymous one word message "Eternity". What was Arthur Stace trying to say to us? Are you humble enough to listen to an old "down and out"?

Eternity. That's what's ahead of us. Our life on earth is just the beginning of our existence. Growing old here is the process by which God makes us ready for the future. Life on earth is our time of preparation for eternity. We make choices now that will stay with us for ever. Eternity. At the door to eternity stands God himself. As we pass into eternity we pass beneath his gaze and his judgement. To fail this test is to plunge into a dark, lonely eternity, without God and without hope. Stace's message was a warning. But, as the story of his life demonstrated, it was also one of hope, since the person who calls for help to Jesus Christ now, in this life, is never disappointed. The person who commits his life to Christ today, asking for mercy and willing to follow his master in obedience, is the person who is prepared for eternity, an eternity of joy and fulfilment in the presence of God for evermore.

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