

In Memoriam

A Tribute to the late Polish Leader, Brother R. H. Oleszynski

Since last we met at this spot to hold a Memorial Service to the memory of Brother Russell, another Faithful Servant also died in the harness, our dear Brother R. H. Oleszynski whom we have personally known for over twenty-five years.

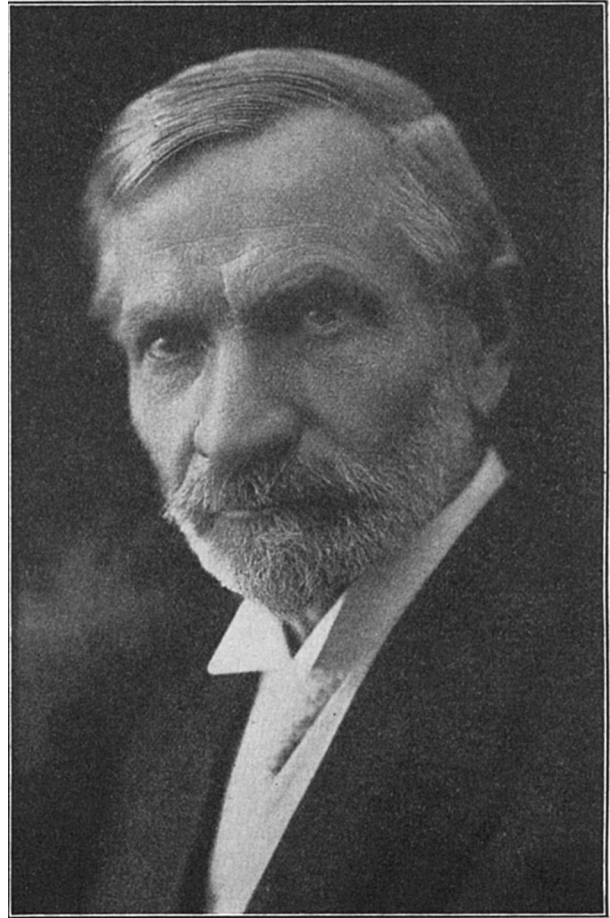
For many years Brother Oleszynski has been an outstanding leader amongst the Polish people throughout the world, and practically all who have come into the light of Present Truth are indebted, either directly or indirectly, to this dear Brother. He was Brother Russell's right-hand man, so to speak, in their united efforts to serve the Polish Brethren. Practically all of the translations of the Towers, Scripture Studies and Booklets from English to Polish were the results of his labors. He also, in harmony with Brother Russell's wishes, edited for years the Polish Watch Tower.

In view of the fact that thousands upon thousands of Polish Brethren have come out of dense darkness and ignorance into the light of Present Truth, we feel that it is meet and proper, out of respect to his memory as well as an expression of appreciation and gratitude on behalf of the Polish Brethren, that we insert in this Souvenir Report a picture and biography of our dear Brother, which we do as follows:

A FAITHFUL AND LOYAL SOLDIER OF THE CROSS

We append herewith a brief sketch of the life of our dear Brother Oleszynski whose earthly pilgrimage ended with his passing on April 29th of this year. Although unknown to many except the older English friends, (his activity in the "Vineyard" being confined exclusively to the Polish brethren) his biography is being inserted in this Convention Report, both as a tribute to our brother's memory and also in the hope that its perusal may prove encouraging to others of the Lord's People.

Brother Hipolit Oleszynski was born in Warsaw, Poland, in the year 1857. His parents were orthodox Catholics of the middle class. As with Brother Russell, a mother's gentle care and refining influence were lost to him in childhood, and thereafter his life was one of hardship. He was taught strict obedience to the religious faith of his parent, but his other education was elementary only—too meagre for one possessing an innate thirst for knowledge. Of his early religious emotions we know little, but a friendship which developed with the parish priest, together with the subsequent permission to do various services around the church, begat in him the desire to enter religious work, and at the age of fifteen he determined to prepare for the Catholic priesthood. However, his application for entry into a school of instruction was rejected, the qualifications being one of three: education, beauty of form and feature, or wealth. Not qualifying under these conditions, he was crestfallen to receive this setback to his ambition, but



undaunted he determined to leave home and travel about the Continent, hoping that somewhere, somehow, he would be accepted into the service of the Catholic church. Traveling through Germany, Austria and Italy, earning his way by work here and there, he arrived in the "Eternal City." Surely here his application for entry to the priesthood would be looked upon with favor; but alas! once more he was rebuffed. Although later he was to be glad for these rejections, at the time they seemed cruel indeed to a young soul bent on consecrating his life to service in the religious system whose claims to divine origin and catholicism were undisputed in his own mind.

It cannot be said that at that time Brother Oleszynski had even a rudimentary knowledge of the Truth, as the Bible was not accessible to the masses, the catechism being deemed all-sufficient for orthodox souls. Seeking to draw near to God under the folds of the (to him) Mother Church, the repulses he received came as shocks difficult for him to comprehend at the time. However, it was in Rome, which had turned him away, that he had a peculiar experience that opened his eyes to some of the true state of affairs obtaining in the "Vine of the Earth." He was violently swung into the

opposite extreme of infidelity—to the extent of, while still believing in the existence of an Omnipotent power, denial of the veracity of revealed religion.

In this state of mind he drifted to Paris where, now twenty-three years of age, he embraced Socialism, which was not satisfying to his hunger for religious things, but “he would fain with the husks be filled,” for want of more soul sustaining food. He was here thrown in with a class whose radical teachings did not stop at blasphemy and were cruel mental torture to one brought up to reverence religion and whose mind was still searching after God, if mayhap he might find Him. However, it is probable that even these experiences were working out for good to him in that they brought about a “try the spirits” state of mind which was to prove helpful in later years in discerning truth and error. Thus was the twig bent that the branch might form.

After several years' sojourn in France he returned to Poland. He there became acquainted with a Baptist who presented him with a New Testament, the first he ever had. This friendship and the consequent study and discussion continued throughout the three years he spent in the army—service which was compulsory under the National Military Law. Brother Oleszynski often looked back to those years when the various disciplinary experiences were helping to develop his character.

It was at this time while billeted at the home of his brother that he came in contact with Spiritism. A small group met there and experimented with the workings of the ouiga board. Brother Oleszynski, his mind being open to conviction from anything savoring of truth, was certainly on precarious ground here, as he himself afterward realized. At one of these meetings after a phenomenal demonstration his mind formed a question as to the source of this power, and the words “An evil spirit” were spelled out; then “I can make you wealthy, famous or whatever you desire if you will subject yourself to me,” to which Brother Oleszynski replied “I am not a fool.” His next thought was, “Can you harm me?” and the answer came, “You will see.” He was shaken by this experience but took comfort by reasoning that if there were evil spirits (for he instinctively felt them to be such) then there must also be good spirits. In later years he had cause to remember the evil spirit's threat of harm.

It was during his army service that he contracted typhus and pneumonia. He recovered after a protracted illness, but the weakening effects remained the rest of his life. Unknown to most of the friends, Brother Oleszynski had his thorn in the flesh, only his immediate family and a few intimate friends being aware of his physical condition.

The close of his army term found him strong with the urge to visit the New World, to which his Baptist friend had already journeyed, and after gradually working his way to Hamburg he sailed for America. This was 1891 and he was thirty-four years old.

He left for Chicago shortly after his arrival, and here it was three months later that he first came in contact with the Harvest message being published so energetically by Brother

Russell. While talking with a friend one day a distinguished gentleman passed carrying a valise of books. He learned that it was a Mr. C. Antoszewski, and as his friend knew him well, Brother Oleszynski was introduced.

Mr. Antoszewski was a Pole of education and refinement who colporteur'd Bibles and religious books among the foreign classes of people. A friendship sprang up between the young immigrant and himself and he invited Brother Oleszynski to his home where among other things he was shown an English first volume of the Millennial Dawn Studies as they were then called. There was no literature in Polish bearing on the Truth at that time, but Mr. Antoszewski being fully conversant with the English language, patiently explained to the eager young truth-seeker as many of the jewels of truth as he had himself grasped. As the beautiful symmetry of the true Gospel message began to impress itself upon his mind, the joy and peace that came to Brother Oleszynski can only be fully appreciated by those who have themselves found the promised rest for their souls. Here was the Creator as he had instinctively known him to be, now revealed in a marvelous Plan of the Ages, which set forth His glorious attributes: Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power. “Praise ye the Lord.”

From that time on Brother Oleszynski spent every possible moment in the company of his benefactor plying him with questions, hungry to learn more of the blessed Truth. Thus the first Polish Berean Bible class in America consisted of these two brethren who diligently sought by mutual study to perfect one another in the knowledge of the Lord. Witness Brother Antoszewski's letter in the Tower for December, 1891. Handicapped as they were by the lack of literature in Polish, they sought, nevertheless, to witness verbally to whomsoever had ears to hear among their friends, and slowly but surely Brother Oleszynski grew in grace and knowledge, and in 1893 when the first General Bible Students' Convention was held in Chicago, he symbolized the consecration of his all.

Not long after he was permitted to witness the message to a Polish man and woman—brother and sister—who embraced the Truth. This was the first Polish sister—who later became his wife. At that time the English friends in Chicago were but few in number and scattered throughout the city without regular class meetings. Several of the brethren, amongst them Brother Oleszynski, began to urge the desirability of meeting regularly at the homes for mutual upbuilding and encouragement, with the result that such weekly gatherings were instituted. At these Brother Oleszynski attended, together with the afore mentioned brother and sister, patiently striving to learn both more of the truth and more of the English language at the same time. Very few of that original Chicago Class are still alive, though some remain even unto the present time. We digress here a moment to explain that Brother Antoszewski, who had “run well” so far, had become offended during the unfortunate Adamson-Zech controversy and had left for Europe. Thus to Brother Oleszynski devolved the distinction of being the oldest Polish Bible Student in these last Harvest days.

In 1895 he returned to Poland to see if he could impart to his relatives the Truth which had so rejoiced him, but they would have none of him, considering him both a fool and a fanatic. Though much grieved at heart he was none deterred, however, remembering the Lord's promise. (Matt. 19:29.) Again he left for America, traveling, however, by way of Egypt as he greatly desired to see the Great Pyramid, the symbolic characteristics of which were at that time being deeply studied by reverent Bible Students. Before reaching Chicago he visited Brother Russell at Pittsburgh and became more acquainted with the man for whom he never lost respect and love as long as he lived. Perhaps it is not too much to say that Brother Russell even then realized the earnest zealousness of this young man who spoke only broken English but whose enthusiasm for the precious truth he had received was so manifest, for, years after, practically all the Polish work was intrusted into Brother Oleszynski's hands by Brother Russell, a confidence and trust which was never misplaced.

In 1896 the Polish Class in Chicago consisted of five persons which by diligent labor increased to 22 the following year. However, the number decreased by reason of a "Harvest sifting" to 11. Brother Oleszynski was now living in a Chicago suburb, riding on a bicycle 22 miles to meetings. His "tent making" consisted of a little shoe repair shop where he prepared his own meals and where he also made his lodging. Every possible moment was spent in "redeeming the time" in witnessing and study of the Lord's Word.

In 1900 he was united in marriage to Sister Wierzylo, to whom he had brought the message of truth some years before. And thus the oldest Polish brother and the oldest Polish sister were drawn together by both spiritual and temporal bonds. To his wife he owed much of his encouragement and even health during the following troublous years when both "friend" and foe attacked from all sides, as did also his physical ailment from within. About this time also, having become more familiar with the English language, he translated several booklets into the Polish language. These were printed and distributed at his own and wife's expense, she being the proprietress of an artificial flower making establishment. It was this little business entirely under her supervision that furnished their subsistence for some years, during which Brother Oleszynski devoted his entire time to traveling, preaching and translating. The message in Polish was now gradually spreading and finding adherents in many of the larger cities. In 1907 Brother Oleszynski finished translating the First Volume of Scripture Studies, the distribution of which reached even to Poland itself. There, small classes had begun to form mainly through the efforts of Brother Kin, who had himself received the truth while in America through Brother Oleszynski. In 1911 Brother Kin requested Brother Russell to send Brother Oleszynski to Poland on a pilgrimage tour for the encouragement of the brethren, which visit was made, lasting for six months. A brief report of this trip is inserted in the December 1, 1911, Tower, being a letter from Brother Oleszynski to Brother Russell.

In 1912 Brother Oleszynski was sent again and remained some eight months during which time he journeyed from town to town addressing the gradually increasing number of private gatherings and also all public meetings that could be arranged. Of these latter there were few, however, as the government being more or less influenced by the clergy, permits for meetings were difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, under the Lord's jurisdiction the message prospered and at the time of Brother Russell's death the friends were numbered in hundreds.

A third trip was made in 1913 from which Brother Oleszynski did not return until a year and a half later; the World War breaking out making it extremely difficult for any one to leave the belligerent countries. It may not be amiss here to mention that during his prolonged absences from home, Sister Oleszynski was faithfully managing the home and nurturing their five children. The Oleszynski home had become a Polish Bethel to which many of the friends would bring their troubles and misunderstandings. It was Sister Oleszynski's lot to comfort them while entertaining with whatever bounty her limited store could provide. Indeed, there were times when not even a crust could be found to feed six souls, but somehow things always turned out right and always will while there is an ever-abiding faith in Him who bade us seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness and all things needful would be added unto us. The one great aim was to keep Brother Oleszynski always in the Lord's work. Though they lacked so often their father's care and oversight, nevertheless the Lord's blessing has abided with Brother Oleszynski's family. One daughter has consecrated her all to the Lord and others of the children are greatly interested in the message of Truth. All of them have been and still are of comfort and assistance during trying times. Though Sister Oleszynski was not favored with the opportunities made possible for her husband, and though unknown personally to many of the Polish brethren, yet "she hath done what she could." Her management of the home even during times of great physical infirmity permitted Brother Oleszynski to devote all his energies to work for the friends. "They also serve who stand and wait."

By 1915 there were several hundred Polish brethren in Chicago alone, with large classes in other cities, particularly Detroit. In this year Brother Russell called Brother Oleszynski to Brooklyn to serve as editor of the Polish Tower. The Photo-Drama was brought out at this time also and was the means of a great witnessing work among the Polish people who, it must be remembered, were nearly always strict Roman Catholics and very difficult to approach with dissimilar religious teachings. In Chicago alone, which always was and still is the center of the Polish work, thousands crowded into one of the largest theaters and hundreds were turned away for lack of seating space, a far cry indeed from those days of twenty-odd years before when a class of 20 was considered quite large. Brother Oleszynski had lived to see such a small beginning, literally himself alone, grow to such large proportions as to necessitate

dividing the friends into a dozen small classes in one city alone. All these friends had been members of a religious system, adherents to which Brother Oleszynski had long felt invulnerable to the message of Present Truth by reason of their inbred, traditional reverence and superstitious awe for the greatest man-made theological organization in the world. In fact, his explicit advice for some years had been for colportage to be avoided in the neighborhoods where these people predominated. He was, therefore, much surprised to see the great interest manifested in his later years, but such is the power of the Lord's message even unto those who are "blind and wayfaring" in comparison to the more enlightened Protestants. No doubt Brother Oleszynski's heart rejoiced to see such great numbers of his fellow countrymen coming out of darkness into the "marvelous light" and must have rejoiced for the share he had in their liberation.

But, alas! in a short while much grief of mind was to be his portion to see this liberty so short lived. The painful days following the decease of Brother Russell were great days of trial for the Polish friends as well as the English and in the Spring of 1917 the Polish Chicago Class, passing through a severe ordeal, requested that Brother Oleszynski be permitted to return to that city from Brooklyn, which was done. To him was relegated the translation of one of the publications brought out at that time and termed by some the "penny" of the parable. After laboriously struggling through four chapters he realized that this kind of spiritual food, or "ice cream" as he termed it, was not for him and before a united gathering of the class sorrowfully though firmly he expressed his viewpoint on this matter and also his determination to sever all connection with the organization with which he had been affiliated for 23 years. Being in such a prominent position amongst the Polish people, his statement created a great furore with the ensuing result that a division occurred in the class. The friends who craved liberty formed their own class under his leadership and these friends he served faithfully until his death. Similar severings occurred throughout the country and also in Poland. Many of these classes gradually became united through correspondence or visits and though there is no formal official organization of these brethren today nevertheless they are more united in the invisible bonds than they were ever before. Each Ecclesia rules itself and is independent of all others. Their only connection with other classes of similar minded brethren was Brother Oleszynski, who being the one brother known to all, was now invited by the various classes to make pilgrimages. In this way he was able to unite the friends more and more, being the invisible bond, so to speak, by which the union was effected. By reason of these peculiar circumstances on him devolved, as it had on the Apostle, "the care of all the churches." His passing now will no doubt be felt by many. In 1922 he made another trip to Europe, visiting the stricken sheep in Poland and he returned in 1923. This was to be his last visit to his native land. In this year also sufficient organization being effected amongst the friends, once more the issuance of a monthly journal was begun of which he was editor until his death. The various

classes agreed to the oversight of this publication by some of the older and more spiritual brethren in the Detroit class. Brother Oleszynski inserted in this monthly practically nothing but translations of the articles of Brother Russell; rich spiritual food indeed for the Polish friends and much appreciated by them. Within the last few years also one or two of the brethren have been able to serve as pilgrims for limited times, one of whom, Brother A. Stahn, is even now in Poland where he has been the means of greatly-blessing the friends during the last two years. This pastoral work among the Lord's sheep will be more appreciated when it is realized that there is no organization, no charter, no by-laws, or such and yet an invisible understanding has so sprung up among these people none of whom is highly educated, many even being unable to read or write and all having to toil daily in various humble occupations for their living, that they are able to cooperate in the issuance of their monthly journal and in gathering sufficient funds to help their more needful brethren in Poland, both in spiritual as well as temporal needs. Where the need has been greatest there has the Lord's grace been more abundant.

And so Brother Oleszynski continued his labors until this spring. He was now 73 years old, much beset with physical infirmity which caused great suffering; nevertheless he continued traveling from class to class, meanwhile translating article after article and in-between-times managed to translate the comments and references in the Berean Bible. This book when published represented 600 pages of difficult work, as each citation had to be found in the Polish volumes of Scriptural Studies and the proper page designated. The printing of this work was very expensive and yet was made possible by the assistance of several brethren who made great sacrifices to put it before the friends.

On April 20th, 1930, he led the meeting for the last time in Harvey, Ill., where the family home was located. He then set out for a journey east where a convention of the friends had been arranged for Memorial Day. On the following Sunday, April 27th, he delivered his last discourse to the friends in South Bend, Ind. During this discourse his internal ailments, which had troubled him more than usual the preceding week, now became so painful that he was forced to leave the rostrum, but after a few moments, returned and concluded the service. At the home of anxious friends a little later he assayed to assuage their fears, saying that he felt better and still believed that much work remained for him to do. (He probably had in mind the fact that several branches of the Polish friends who had been separated were now striving to become united once more and this, in a great measure, has now been accomplished.) However, the Lord's plans are not mens' plans and the following evening he becoming weaker and weaker, it began to be manifest that for him there were to be no more earthly journeyings. Several of the elders gathered at the home of the brother where he was being cared for, but when he fell asleep they left, thinking that all was well. But about midnight his moanings caused by pain awakened the host and members of his family who found him struggling to maintain a sitting

position. The sister left at once to summon a physician and the brother strove to make Brother Oleszynski as comfortable as he could, but it was evident that Brother Oleszynski was in great physical pain. He was so weak as to be barely able to whisper but the host was able to distinguish the words "It is time now to go to the Lord" and then his breathing gradually subsided, and so he finished his course as if in a deep quiet sleep. Thus ended the life in whose history we have the history of the Polish Bible Students. As he understood the Lord's will, such he strove to fulfill for 38 years. Abundantly had he been used in the Harvest Work of these last closing days of the Gospel Age; to so many of the friends he had been the means of revealing the Wonderful Plan of the Ages. Faithfully had he striven to let his light shine, even being on a traveling mission when the end came, away from his home, and now who will deny him the words "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of thy Lord." We rejoice in hope that our brother is counted amongst the "Saints of Light." Blessed hope, which can so sustain the soul through long years of service and suffering.

The funeral rites were held from his home in Harvey, Illinois, where by reason of the multiplicity of friends (about three hundred) an outdoor service was arranged on the adjacent lawn, two brothers addressing the gathering— Brother Tabaczynski in Polish and Brother Jones in English. We were favored with delightful spring weather and after the services at the home the long procession wound its way to the cemetery, where the body of Brother Oleszynski was laid to rest in a grave on a beautiful hillock amongst stately trees. After the singing of a hymn and the utterance of a prayer, we left for our several homes, strong in the determination that the example of our brother's faithfulness should remain with us throughout the remaining days of our earthly pilgrimage. May we all remain faithful to Him who loved us and bought us with blood of His own. "BE thou faithful unto death and I will give to thee a crown of life." May we all rejoice more and more in the Lord. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth." ❀

