

Stand Fast and the Elijah Voice Society

Many IBSA classes in the Northwest backed “The Finished Mystery.” But Charles E. Heard of Vancouver B.C. and many others felt Rutherford’s recommendation in 1918 Spring to buy war bonds was cowardice, and sacrilegiously perpetuating harvest work.

The Stand Fast Bible Students Association was organized 1918 Dec. 1 at Portland. It published *Old Corn Gems* (Jos 5:11-12) and organized many conventions in the Northwest and throughout the U.S. Heard, Wm. B. Palmer, R.O. Hadley, W.M. Wisdom (briefly), Ian C. Edwards, H.A. Livermore, Allan A. Yerex, and Finley McKercher were all prominent. Many (non-doctrinal) divisions followed a Seattle convention 1919 July 25-27.

In 1922, John A. Hardeson and C.D. McCray (later dropped out) organized the Elijah Voice Society for an ambitious regathering and witness work. They published the *Elijah Voice Monthly*. The E.V.S. became the most prominent Seventh Volume group.

In the Fall of 1923 Edwards and Heard organized Stand Fast into the Star Construction Company in Victoria (although Heard was persuaded by his wife to stay in Vancouver). Anticipating the time of trouble, Edwards in the Fall of 1924 took the company of more than 300 to Sooke and then to Port Renfrew and the Gordon River on the southwest part of Vancouver Island. When the business failed in 1927, Dr. Alec McCarter (dentist) and Oscar Kuenzi closed out the property.

These movements numbered twelve hundred adherents or more in 1919 in the Northwest and near Wisconsin.

A personal record of the movements follows:



August and Edith
Swanson



(Below is a copy of some History of interest to all Bible Students. This was contributed through the kindness of Sister Rachel Rice. This History was written by her father, our beloved Brother August Swanson, who finished his course a number of years ago. This History was originally printed in the *Bible Student News*, Summer 1936, Volume 2 #1.)

TRUE HISTORY OF THE “STAND FAST” MOVEMENT

Its Origin, Growth and Present Status, as Told by One Who Worked With It From the Start And Passed Through Its Several Schisms. A Helpful Story Interestingly Related.

The following historical account of the inception and rise of the Stand Fast Bible Students Movement, and of the activities of the brethren associated therewith, was written by a brother in the Northwest who for many years was associated with these brethren. He has suggested that his name be omitted. We publish the article in the belief that its news value will be appreciated by the friends generally inasmuch as but few Bible Students, aside from those residing in the Northwest, know much if anything about the experiences of our Stand Fast Brethren.

This article was not written for the purpose of criticizing or “showing up” one group of brethren and exalting another; both the writer and the publishers realize that all of us have made many serious mistakes in the past, for which we should strive to make Amends. The last 20 years has been a special trial period for all, and none of us have come through it so success fully as to warrant our feeling superior to anyone. In connection with the following historical account of this particular group of Bible Students, the writer has set forth some timely Christian counsel, observations and admonitions, which are just as applicable to other Bible Students as they are to our Stand Fast brethren—all of us can profit by such sincere suggestions. We publish the article in the hope that it may prove to be a special blessing to many friends, and help all of us to appreciate more fully the great verities of truth and to apply their principles more faithfully in our lives.

* * * * *

“If ye abide in My word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.”—Jesus.

The Stand Fast Bible Students Movement was one of the results of the peculiar trials that began after the death of Pastor Russell in 1916. This movement was confined mainly to the Pacific Coast States, and to Western Canada. Because brethren elsewhere apparently know little of it, and chiefly because some valuable lessons may be learned therefrom, the writer undertakes to relate some experiences and observations from the year 1916 onward to the present time, 1936.

Many Present Schisms

First we shall briefly mention conditions among Western truth brethren in general, as they exist today. In one city alone there are no less than eleven groups of Bible Students. They range in number from a few dozen individuals in a class down to one or two. Quite similar divided conditions exist in other Western cities, in proportion to their size.

All of these brethren believe in and are trying to serve the same Jehovah God, and are trusting in the same Savior, Jesus Christ. All of them were enlightened with the same Present Truth, as it shines in The Divine Plan of the Ages. All once entered into the same consecration, and all rejoiced in the same blessed hope. Whence, then, came these Many divisions? In what respects, if any, are these groups different from the sects of the "old nominal church"? What does the knowledge of God's Plan, and of the second presence of Christ mean to all of these different brethren? What responsibilities has each incurred? How does God regard these different groups? These are interesting and vital questions.

Of course, not all of the classes see alike in respect to liberty, activity, etc. But here and there are classes and individual brethren who comprehend the true situation more or less clearly; and such are endeavoring to fulfil the terms and conditions of their high calling just as all did in the former days.

But if any one has come into sectarian conditions, or one of lovelessness, or coldness toward any of God's people, the first necessity is to come to a realization of his condition. Certainly no one is able to help others to become free unless he himself is free. To whatever extent the writer may have mistakenly used his influence in times past to foster sectarian conditions, he desires to assume his full share of blame. With this introduction we now begin a chronological account of some personal experiences and observations of the past nineteen years.

Origin of the "Stand Fast" Movement

We begin our narrative with the eventful year 1917. The writer, a consecrated child of God, was then living with relatives on a farm in one of the North Central States. The Great World War was in progress. The writer was a "Conscientious Objector," though his relatives were very patriotic. America had entered the war, and the "Selective Draft" was occupying everyone's attention. The very air seemed charged or electrified by the war spirit.

One day there came to him through the mails a book entitled "The Finished Mystery." This book was represented to be the long looked-for "Seventh Volume," from the pen of the late Pastor Russell, published posthumously. Was it indeed the "Seventh Volume"? The writer, like many others, accepted it as such; not because of critical examination, but mainly because of his confidence in the brethren who sent it forth. Upon reading it he found therein various interesting and helpful things, and also several pages devoted to a discussion of war and "patriotism."

Shortly after receiving the book the writer journeyed to another state to attend a convention of Bible Students. One of the discourses at this convention was given by the brother who had compiled that portion of "The Finished Mystery" dealing with Revelation. In that sermon some of those who had refused to accept the "Seventh Volume" as such were represented to be the "murmurers" of the "Penny Parable" in the 20th chapter of Matthew.

The president of the Society was also present at that convention. His addresses and his personal private conversations made it quite plain that he believed that true Christians should not participate in war. He gave personal advice to this effect, to various "conscientious objectors." That convention made a profound impression on the writer, as well as on many others.

Yielded Under Pressure

Early in 1918 Governmental pressure was becoming very great against the Society and its Board of Directors, of whom the president was one. That Spring the writer visited a family of very dear and well known "truth people" in a neighboring State. These friends had refused on religious grounds to support the war in any manner. Consequently their neighbors and fellow townsmen had begun a boycott against them. They could not buy or sell; they were threatened with mob violence and annoyed in various other ways. In the public square, close to the railway station, had been erected a large monument of concrete, painted yellow. Upon its four sides in large black letters were all their names, with the word "SLACKERS."

In their extremity they had sent a telegram to the president of the Society, asking for further advice. Imagine their surprise when they received his answer now advising them to yield!

Most Bible Students are familiar with the subsequent rapid developments—the orders from Brooklyn to delete certain pages from "The Finished Mystery," because they were objectionable to the Government, and later the entire suppression of the book itself; the change in the attitude of the Watch Tower Editorial Committee, which was reflected in the columns of the Watch Tower, in which they sought to show that they had not been opposed to the draft nor to the war, and finally their conviction and imprisonment.

We are not here discussing the merit or demerit of their case or of their actions, but are merely directing attention to the fact that these brethren under pressure changed their course. That change or compromise in the policy and teachings of the Society's leaders marked the beginning of an exodus of many brethren from the I.B.S.A., especially in the western states. About one-half of the number of our little class formally withdrew from the Society and from its fellowship at that time. Thus it is noted that the aforesaid reversal in the teachings and policy of the Watch Tower Society was the first cause for the "Stand Fast" Movement.

The Movement Organized

The brethren in the West now appointed a "Committee of Seven," consisting of elders from various classes, principally of the Pacific Coast region. A little paper was started, called, "Old Corn Gems," based upon Josh. 5:10-12 as a type. It consisted mainly of excerpts from the old Watch Towers which seemed to have a bearing upon the issues involved. This little journal was compiled and edited chiefly under the direction of a brother in western Canada.

It became apparent that the "Stand Fast" brethren in general were in need of some personal service, hence several elders of ability offered to go forth as Pilgrims. These were called "Comforters," and their mission was to encourage the friends to "stand fast." Two or three of these Comforters came into the Central States. The writer was impressed with their sincerity, their stand, and their message.

A special feature of their message was the suggestion that the closing earthly activities of the church must be enacted in the West. A few Scriptures were cited which seemed to support such a thought, but the conclusion was based mostly upon deduction. They reasoned: Has not the Gospel message always spread westward throughout the age? Is not this Stand Fast movement confined principally to the West, where it also originated? One of the slogans was, "The Lord's business requires haste." This was later proved to be wrongly applied, for the Lord has not been in haste in His dealings with His people.

The general division taking place in numerous ecclesia—many members withdrawing from the I.B.S.A. to form new classes—was believed to be the separation of the "Elijah Class" from the "Elisha Class"—the Little Flock from the

Great Company. Soon, we believed, the Little Flock would manifest itself, separate and distinct from all others. We said, “Did not ‘The Finished Mystery’ plainly teach that it was the ‘chariot’ which would separate the two classes, and that the ‘Elijah Class’ would use it to mount to the skies? And is it not the center of controversy in the church, as well as the object of attack by the worldly powers?”

Dissension Begins

It was in the Autumn of 1919 that we arrived in the West, to live among the “Stand Fast” brethren. We had anticipated joy, harmony and sweet fellowship among the “little flock”; but imagine our surprise when we found that already murmurings and dissensions had begun. As usual, these differences began among the leaders and elders. At first they concerned general policy; but later, individual as well as class conduct, interpretations of Scripture, and applications of types also became factors for controversy.

A general convention was arranged for the end of the old year (1919) and the beginning of the new year. On the first day business matters were to be considered, leaving the rest of the time for devotional meetings and fellowship. After the conventioners had assembled, the first business matter that was laid before them was with regard to continuing the Committee of Seven. One of the Pilgrim brothers had criticized some of the Committee members. The meeting had not progressed far when some one called for a “church trial” of this Pilgrim or Comforter. He expressed his willingness to stand trial, provided first that he could be assured who constitutes the church.

Among the texts displayed on the walls of the Convention Hall was one that read, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” The reader may recall the “Manna” comment on that text. It is about idolizing leaders. Right there at the beginning of this convention favoritism toward various leaders was much in evidence. We, “newcomers” from the East, feeling also that we were regarded as such, naturally had very little to say. Confusion reigned.

It became evident that harmonious agreement could not be reached at that gathering. Finally many arose from their seats and began to leave the hall. And we “newcomers” were among those who left in dismay. Those who remained consisted of the majority of the Committee of Seven and their sympathizers. Thus began the major break in the Stand Fast Movement. But little did anyone then realize the further “splits” and heart-saddening experiences that were to follow.

The group that walked out soon found another hall where the business meeting was resumed and “finished.” One of the first acts was by a vote that was practically unanimous, to “abolish” the Committee of Seven. Then followed their convention proper, with its fellowship, and addresses by several speakers. Meanwhile the “Committee” brethren continued their convention in the original hall.

After the Division

Even though there had been this separation, both groups still held many views in common. Both believed in and held to the “Finished Mystery” as the Seventh Volume. Both believed that the saints were all “sealed,” that the door to the High Calling was closed, and that the Harvest ended in the spring of 1918. Both believed that the majority of those who had remained in the I.B.S.A. were of the “Great Company Class.”

From the beginning of 1920 our knowledge of events among the “Committee brethren” was necessarily limited to observation, reports, and only occasional contact. Therefore, we can relate in detail only our own personal experiences among the separated friends with whom we were directly associated. It is our desire to

simply state the facts, without bias, and as kindly as possible.

One of the burning questions in those days was, What shall be our attitude toward the I.B.S.A.? We said, Surely there should be no fellowship with any who had deliberately “compromised” the Truth. Hence some of our speakers taught that it was wrong to shake hands with I.B.S.A. members, for handshaking was “fellowshipping.” A considerable number of us hastily accepted that teaching, and among them was the writer. He did not retain such an idea very long, however but long enough to do no little harm. One dear old sister crippled and nearly blind, and very dear to the writer, had remained in the I.B.S.A. He now deemed it his duty to actually disfellowship that old sister. But it was not long before he saw the error of such an attitude toward those who claim full consecration. One day later, in a business meeting, he arose and tried to tell of that experience and of his subsequent convictions, but was ruled “out of order” by those who controlled the meeting. They did not want anything said against their teachings on “fellowship.”

This incident illustrates only one example of the strange vagaries in doctrine and conduct which gained a foothold among the “Stand Fast” groups. Later many of the friends came to see that their “no shake” theory was unreasonable, and relinquished it. For a considerable time, however, many still avoided calling the I.B.S.A. friends “brothers”; but the very logic of events during the years that have followed have compelled most of the “Stand Fast” brethren to discard such “hard boiled” doctrines. All the while their hearts have been better than their heads—otherwise the Lord would have cast them off.

Another Division

That very extreme attitude on “Fellowship” was the principal cause of the next division in the “Stand Fast” ranks. A number of us soon found ourselves separated from the other brethren who still held these extreme views. Though we could see later that unwise methods were used to bring about this separation, yet we could not but rejoice in the measure of Christian liberty that had been regained. But we did not yet realize that we still held another major misconception. Neither did we see various snares and pitfalls that lay ahead of us.

As already stated, nearly all “Stand Fast” Bible Students regarded their departure from the I.B.S.A. as a separation of the “very elect” Little Flock from the Great Company. But now that the S. F. brethren themselves were dividing, there must be some explanation for that—since there can be but one “little flock.” The explanation was that the Lord is testing and sifting the “very elect” from all others—“gathering out all things that offend.” So the individuals in each aggregation tried to believe that their particular group constituted the “very elect.” On this point some of our brethren had some very strong convictions. Others of us saw that the friends of the other groups had just as good a right to claim this precious relationship for themselves as we had. Seeing this, some made it an issue; with the result that several brethren left our class, either to form another class or else to join one of the existing classes.

Meanwhile all the friends in most of the Stand Fast classes were diligently studying the “Seventh Volume,” and almost, if not quite, neglecting the Six Volumes. For the time being, many of the teachings of the six were overlooked or forgotten—even such subjects as “Character Development,” “The Basis of Christian Fellowship,” “Abiding in Christ,” and “bearing Witness to the Truth.” Instead of devoting time to these necessary things all were interested in “The Standing Period,” and in trying to fathom “the time and manner of our deliverance,” or “the mark of the beast.” The last named subject occupied much time and attention for a long while. Anyone who had bought a Liberty Bond, or had supported any of the war

issues was deemed to have received the “mark of the beast.” We felt that it was wrong even to buy “war bacon” from the Government after the war was over.

Clearer Vision

How clear it seems to us now that the “mark of the beast” has existed all down through the age, and that each and all of the 144,000 must needs pass that test. Though the modern issues just named doubtless have some bearing on the subject, yet its meaning is much more comprehensive than that. By a comparison of Scripture we find that the “mark” in the hand and forehead had to do with the characteristics of the Papal Beast. But it is not necessary to be a Roman Catholic to have the “mark of the beast.” The matter includes religious intolerance and sectarianism generally. Each member of the Little Flock, on the other hand, will have the character (or characteristics of the Heavenly Father and of His dear Son as a mark or “seal” in their heart, forehead and hand. How evident it is that some who stood all the “war tests” later have demonstrated that they were deficient along other lines of Christian character. Our hearts go up in gratitude to God for granting us an opportunity to learn of Him and develop in Christlikeness. How very few of us were ready for the Kingdom in 1918, even though we were opposed to war!

When we looked about us we soon saw that other Stand Fast classes were having similar difficulties to our own. Since nearly every one believed that the Harvest had ended in 1918, it was deemed impossible to resume the witness work that had been interrupted, and improper to attempt; and to cooperate in the work of the Society was entirely out of the question, since it was now on a bypath and had begun to corrupt its former clear message of Present Truth. Consequently the time of the Stand Fast brethren was taken up in waiting, in watching the world’s developments, in studying the volumes, especially “Volume 7,” and in discussing the faults of other groups of brethren.

Gradually it began to dawn upon us that we as Bible Students had wandered away from the green pastures of the true Shepherd.

In our study, even of “Volume 7,” which we accepted as a “divine message” we found statements about the “regathering” of “scattered sheep.” But what were we doing about it? We then began to see our other brethren in a friendlier light; and our own faults and mistakes began to appear more prominent. Finally we were prompted to send out a circular letter to all Stand Fast classes and others, expressing our regrets for our mistakes, and signifying our desire to cooperate with all consecrated brethren who were still loyal to all the volumes of Scripture Studies. But this letter brought little response of encouragement.

The “Elijah Voice” Movement

Later, in the summer of 1922, some Stand Fast brethren came up from the South, who too were tired of inactivity and were now trying to “do something” amongst the Bible Students. One of them was a dear brother who had been confined in Federal Prison for refusal to bear arms for conscience sake. While in prison, and solitary confinement, he had studied the “Seventh Volume,” even to memorizing many quotations from Brother Russell about “executing judgments” on “Babylon” (Christendom) and about our helping the “Great Company.” Like the writer, he also had come to believe in a “regathering” of the “scattered sheep.”

This dear brother had conceived a plan of action and had presented it to some of the other Stand Fast classes, but without response. But when we heard his plan, we decided to adopt it and to help put it into operation. A little society was then organized for doing a “regathering” work and for “proclaiming the Truth” as a witness—especially the message against Babylon as emphasized in “The Finished

Mystery,” which we regarded as a timely, prophetic voice. It was thought then that such a proclamation would gradually attract the Lord’s scattered people to true “standard,” awaken the Great Company, bring deliverance to the Little Flock, and finally cause the destruction of mystic Babylon. This movement was named “The Elijah Voice Society.”

We of the E.V.S. fully believed that the true “Elijah Class” would be gathered into it and clearly manifested as being separate and distinct from all others. Membership cards were provided for all who would join in the movement; “by-laws” were adopted; and a small monthly journal was issued. Tracts were also printed from time to time. All literature was free, the work being supported only by voluntary contributions. Public meetings were held wherein special stress was laid on “executing the judgments written,” “The Battle of Armageddon,” and kindred subjects. Every member helped with the work; and the brother who originated the plan labored early and late, writing, speaking and teaching.

False Hope and Disillusionment

It was confidently expected that as the little movement gathered momentum, all right-minded Bible Students everywhere would rally to our cause. This was based on the picture of “Gideon’s Three Hundred.” At least a literal 300 were looked for to take active part. We reasoned that there must still be that many of the Little Flock left on the earth. For a time we were very happy, because here at last was an active “truth” movement with something definite as an objective. We had escaped from the rut of idleness and we were animated with a genuine desire for the blessing of others.

But again sad disappointment was in store for us. Not only did the public give but little heed to our message, but we also found that many of the independent Bible Students were now suspicious or fearful of “organizations” of all kinds, or else had become indifferent to activity if not to the truth itself. Hence only a few here and there, mainly in the West, became interested enough to join in the “Elijah Voice” movement.

“Glorification in the flesh,” from 1918 onward, had been one of the strong tenets of the Stand Fast movement. This doctrine, based on Psalm 149:5-9, was now brought forward, “explained” and elaborated upon in the “Elijah Voice” literature. Twelve Papers were issued, setting forth the essential doctrines of Present Truth, and particularly the duties of the “Elijah Class” relative thereto at the present time. These papers were called “The Twelve Stones”—so named from the typical twelve stones which Joshua set up when the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. The “altar of stones,” which Moses instructed Joshua to erect in Mount Ebal (Deut. 27: 1-8; Josh. 8:30, 32) was also regarded as a type of the “memorial” to the Truth which we the church, must leave behind.

Truth Is Seldom Complex

Our so-called antitypical “Twelve Stones” were quite involved, complicated and difficult to understand. They were accompanied with masses of references and cross-references, citations, comments, and quotations from the Bible, the old Towers, Scripture Studies, and especially from the alleged “Seventh Volume.” As we look back upon them now we cannot but contrast them with the “simplicity that is in Christ.” Small wonder that many of those who have fed upon such complex spiritual food now have “spiritual indigestion.”

From 1916 onward many Bible Students have consumed much of their time trying to find “types,” or pictures in the Bible and in speculating upon the meaning of their “discoveries.” Apparently such have forgotten Brother Russell’s sound advice to the

effect that types should be used only to corroborate teachings already plainly taught in the Scriptures, and not as foundations on which to build new teachings or theories. How much time has been wasted in such vain speculation! And how much have we neglected the things that are really essential to saintship—the study of Christ; our relation to Him and to the members of His body; sanctification; character development; and faithfulness in bearing witness to the Truth!

But let no one think that the Stand Fast, or E.V.S., or other movements retained nothing that was good—though we did waste time in many idle speculations. Like most of the brethren who passed through the original Stand Fast movement, we in the E.V.S. continued—in theory if not always in practice—to cherish all of the old Truth literature which had been published before 1917. But it was regrettable to have mixed the pure truth with error, which tended to make the error attractive to truth lovers. If a religion were “all bad,” without anything good mixed with it, very few would ever be deceived or misled by it.

Various Activities

As time went on it became more and more apparent that few of the Bible Students would give any heed to the teachings or activities of the E.V.S. We then concluded that if we are now really “glorified in the flesh” and commissioned to “judge” it must be our duty to point out to all exactly wherein they come short. Accordingly a tract for Bible Students was now published in which all brethren who had “compromised” during the war or otherwise were given their share of criticism. Those who were still “idle” also received special warning to bestir themselves to service. The bringers forth of “new light” were “shown up.” Those who had rejected the “Seventh Volume” were sternly warned and reproved. Apparently the only effect produced by that paper was to make a few more strong opponents of the E.V.S.; though most of the brethren ignored it altogether.

Those who are familiar with the “Finished Mystery” will recall that it contained numerous predictions for various events to occur at certain stated times. In the Revelation portion of the book it was suggested that the great “Time of Trouble” in which “no man can work” would break in all its fury about 1918; while some of the Ezekiel comments suggested that the last members would be still on earth and doing a great work after 1918. The “last of the Republics” would probably disappear in 1920, it said; while 1921 was to mark “the end of the heavenly way”; and the resurrection of the Ancient Worthies was to occur in 1925.

The Year 1925

Most Bible Students understand the Scriptures to teach that both the Little Flock and the Great Company must finish their earthly course before the Ancient Worthies can come forth from the grave. (Heb. 11:40) We expected that event in 1925. Hence as the year 1925 drew near, the question loomed large, “How will the Lord take us out of the world? and what will be the means of our glorification?” The E.V.S. brethren felt that surely we must be engaged in some special activity now, for 1925 is out last year on earth! We shall not detail the activities that followed, but only mention them generally.

Public lectures were given, announcing Christendom’s impending downfall. In these, special emphasis was laid on the evils of War, Patriotism, and False Religions. Literature containing “rebukes” was mailed to leaders in the political and religious world. We reasoned that even as our Lord had reproved the Jewish leaders of His day, so now we should reprove their modern counterparts within “Christendom.” “Fiery” tracts were distributed especially around the nominal churches. On a certain day special prayer-meetings were held for the specific purpose of praying for the

removal of “this mountain” (“Christendom”) because we thought the time had come for it to occur.

Unwise Protest and its Aftermath

Then followed what was probably the most unwise action of all. Several of the parents among us purposely withdrew their children from the public schools—in protest against the teaching of patriotism and saluting of the flag, which had become compulsory in certain states. Some felt that this would be a test of true discipleship. The E.V.S. elders (of whom the writer was one) gave tacit or express approval. The results of that action (the State law taking its course) should have been sufficient to prove to all of us that the Lord’s people are not yet “glorified” and “in authority”; but evidently it was not. And it now seems that such unwise action on our part proved an unfavorable reaction toward the Truth—at least in the lives of the children concerned, and also in some of their parents. Subsequent developments prove this to be a fact.

As the end of 1925 approached we were still looking for the deliverance of the church and the culmination of “Armageddon.” Accordingly, a “last message” was prepared and sent out to Bible Students. Just as Moses at the close of his career gathered all Israel and exhorted them to be faithful to their Law Covenant, we felt that so we should now exhort the brethren of Spiritual Israel to fulfill their responsibility toward the Truth. This “Valedictory Appeal” was a mingling of confused reasoning and pathos. It fell on deaf ears. But it was apparent that many Bible Students then, as now, had elapsed into a “dead” condition like that of Sardis, and were little interested in spiritual appeals of any kind.

Trials in 1926

The year 1926 came on apace. All the predictions in the “Seventh Volume” concerning events that were to occur in 1918, 1920, 1921, and 1925, had failed. Our “spiritual interpretations” of these events also now appeared to be failures. These “spiritual interpretations” represented frantic attempts to find some sort of “fulfillment” that would seemingly fit the various dates in question. Then one dear brother began to point out that our E.V.S. card-membership system was an unscriptural attempt to “number” the Little Flock. He backed his argument by citing King David’s experience when he brought upon himself the Lord’s displeasure for “numbering Israel.” Several admitted that his point was well taken.

The conviction gradually came over us that many of our activities had been unauthorized by the Lord; that much of our “judging” was wrong, being “before the time,” and that a great deal of our E.V.S. literature was pure speculation. That being true, the writer felt that he could support the movement no longer. It was evident that there was but one proper course, and that was to formally withdraw from the E.V.S.

Our withdrawal became an occasion for the issuing of some more literature by those who remained in the E.V.S. It was said that those who withdrew were “lacking in faith and humility.” One of the writer’s former discourses, “Why We Stand For the Finished Mystery,” now came back upon him like a boomerang. He recalled the Scripture, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.” We were now receiving some of the same kind of “medicine” that we had been helping dispense to others. But we felt that had we remained in the movement, believing as we did, we should have been lacking in honesty. It is impossible to continue conscientiously to hug to one’s bosom any creed in which one no longer believes. And anyone should admit his mistake when he recognizes it.

Mistakes Should be Acknowledged

We are reminded of some comments that appeared in **Zion's Watch Tower** in 1896. A religious writer, Mr. Totten, had made predictions of various events which he thought would occur between 1891 and 1895. When all the dates had passed without any of the predicted events happening, Mr. Totten either ignored his former predictions, or else assumed the attitude that they were not to be questioned. Concerning this, Brother Russell wrote:

“We must remind our readers that it is nothing uncommon for people to deceive themselves, as well as others. Saul of Tarsus, one of the most zealous and God-fearing men in Israel, was deceived to the extent that he persecuted the church while verily thinking he did God service. Hence, while charging these gentlemen with serious errors, we do not believe they were originally actuated by any desire to deceive. . . . But we do find fault with them in that afterward, when they became involved in difficulties from which they could not extricate their theories, either logically or Scripturally, they taught or still teach them instead of refuting them.

“Mr. Totten, instead of coming out frankly and admitting that thus far his calculations and predictions are certainly erroneous, still infatuated with them, writes in the same positive manner as at first.” (A quotation from Mr. Totten follows, after which Brother Russell continues.) “. . . who has staked his all, and as it disappears, will not believe the evidence of his senses, but continues to mutter to himself, ‘It is so.’ It must be so, even if it isn’t so.”—Z. 1896, pp. 103, 4, 8.

The Proper Attitude

Contrast with the above, Brother Russell's own attitude, as expressed in the beginning of 1914. He then wrote:

“As already pointed out, we are by no means confident that this year, 1914, will witness so radical and swift changes of dispensation as we had expected. It is beyond the power of our imagination to picture an accomplishment in one year of all that the Scriptures seem to imply should be expected before the Reign of Peace is ushered in.

“If October, 1915, should pass, and we should find ourselves still here, and matters going on very much as they are at present, and the world apparently making progress in the way of settling disputes, and there were no time of trouble in sight, and the nominal church were not yet federated, etc., we would feel that evidently we had been out somewhere in our reckoning. In that event we would look over the prophecies further to see if we could find an error.”—Z. 1914, pp. 3, 5.

One of the dear leading brethren who remained in the E.V.S. had previously stated that if the year 1925 should pass without the fulfillment of our expectation, a changed course would become necessary. But when the final year had passed, he with others remained in the E.V.S., still endeavoring to “execute judgments,” etc. Later, however, they came to see that the “card membership system” was Babylonish, and eventually discarded it.

Further secessions from the ranks of the E.V.S. have followed; while some new recruits have also been gained from the other groups. Despite our differences, we esteem these zealous brethren greatly, and truly desire for them the blessing of the Lord.

An Attempt to Make Amends

After leaving the E.V.S. we found ourselves a very small class, separated from all other classes. About seven months later the following letter was sent out by our class:

“Dear Brethren in Christ Everywhere: After long consideration and prayer this letter is sent forth. Recalling the words of our Lord, ‘If thy brother have ought against thee’ (Matt. 5:23, 24), we desire if possible to conform with his instructions.

“For months we have felt keen regret for our part in the many wrongs amongst the brethren during the past nine years. However, by the grace of the Lord we trust that some valuable lessons have been learned through these experiences.

“From 1916 to 1925 we were successively identified with the I.B.S.A., the Stand Fast Bible Students, and the Elijah Voice Society. We accepted the ‘Finished Mystery’ as ‘divinely provided.’ A prominent doctrine of that book was that the time had arrived for the ‘execution of judgments’ upon professed Christians, and upon the ‘world,’ in order. In conjunction with this teaching was one made so prominent in the Stand Fast Movement—our ‘glorification’ while still in the flesh. The many divisions and factions among Bible Students today are both directly and indirectly the results of these teachings of the ‘Finished Mystery.’ Believing in these teachings, we began to judge the brethren, relegating groups and individuals into the Great Company or into the world.

“From 1923 to 1925 while in the ‘E.V.S.’, we (the writers of this letter) shared in the publication of a monthly journal, one issue of which (December, 1923—January 1924 Elijah Voice Monthly) was expressly devoted to judging and condemning the various groups of Bible Students.

“Now we wish to apologize and ask forgiveness for all such misjudging, condemning, and dis-fellowshipping; because we see that most of it was contrary to the Scriptures.

“Furthermore, in seeking to oppose the present order, as per ‘The Finished Mystery,’ we indulged in wrong conduct, dishonoring to the great cause of truth. For a time our influence was used in causing some children to be separated from their consecrated parents over the question of patriotism, as taught in the public schools. This was in direct violation of the Scriptures, and an injustice toward the children.—1 Tim. 5:8; F. p. 603: Manna comment January 15th.

“Now we fully acknowledge our wrong in all these matters, as well as any other wrongs we may have done toward anyone. Our fault began in trusting in leaders, instead of the Lord. ‘Prove all things, hold fast that which is good,’ should always be the rule with both leaders and their publications. **Christ alone is the unerring-guide, and God’s Word alone is infallible.**

“Candid investigation reveals that both brotherly love and justice were violated when the publishing of ‘The Finished Mystery’ was ‘railroaded through’ by those who assumed charge at that time. These facts are open to any one. There ‘a little leaven’ (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9) began to manifest itself.

“We fully acknowledge our fault in not heeding sufficiently the Lord’s Word. By this neglect we have brought reproach upon the cause of Christ. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; John 17:20, 21.) Jesus Christ is the only basis of peace and center of unity. We desire to fellowship with all who are united to Him by faith and consecration. This is fundamental. our union with Him depends not upon any ‘Society,’ earthly ‘channel,’ or set of men (See Z. ’95:181; Poems of Dawn, pp. 13-18.) ‘If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.’ Therefore may we now enjoy the fellowship of all who are truly His.

“Humbly your brethren,

(Signed by fifteen brethren.)”

A Church Union Experiment

Having now the spirit of reconciliation, we looked about for opportunities to practice what we preached. We knew that for years some brethren in the east had been serving independent classes and isolated friends scattered throughout the country. Since they claimed no authority over any ecclesia, we were glad to receive their literature and traveling representatives, and were assisted to a further appreciation of Jesus Christ, of His Headship, and of Christian liberty.

The reader will recall that in 1920 we had separated from one of the original Stand Fast groups because of their extreme views on fellowship. But these brethren had by this time progressed in the direction of Christian liberty also. In our city they constituted one of the small local classes. We approached them, seeking affiliation. After some negotiations a class-union was effected, with one from their number as Elder, and one from ours. But as is often the case in such amalgamations, matters did not run smoothly. **They** still held to the "Finished Mystery," while **we** did not. We also desired the service of free traveling brethren from the East, but **they** did not; for they considered those brethren to be in error. A few from our group (the writer among them) unwisely pressed these matters, until considerable friction resulted. Hence the fellowship in our "union class" was only partial; and after a year together we separated. The experiment cost us several of our original class members, who now walk no longer with us.

As we look back to that experiment we can see that the essential elements of Christian union were lacking. It was an outward or nominal union, without real heart-union. In true Christian unity, Jesus is the center and at traction, and all find their place of relative importance. The body of Christ is not held together by splints or bandages, special agreements, man-made rules, or by-laws.

Since the aforesaid attempted class-union, which was in 1928, our little ecclesia has experienced both trials and blessings. Some mistakes have been made, but the Lord's grace has been sufficient; and we trust that all have profited by them.

Increasingly we appreciate "The Divine Plan of the Ages" and all of its glorious doctrines. These fundamentals of truth we must not compromise, even while endeavoring to maintain the proper attitude toward those of other groups who are our brethren. Truly one of the **great** final tests upon the church today is **love for the brethren**.

The Stand Fast "Committee" Brethren From 1920 Onward

Having traced our own experiences following the division at the close of 1919, in the original "Stand Fast" movement, let us now examine some of the experiences of those brethren of the original or "Committee" group, from which we separated at that time. Necessarily the writer's knowledge of these brethren, and what they passed through, is limited to general observation, direct and indirect information, and to occasional personal contact. Consequently a detailed report of them cannot be given as in the case of the E.V.S. In closing this narrative, we wish to emphasize that our object throughout is to call attention only to **principles** involved, and not to criticize individuals.

About three hundred Stand Fast Bible Students had assembled for that 1919 convention where the first major division occurred. A majority of these remained in the convention hall, when we separated ourselves from them. There they arranged to continue the original organization, with a Committee of seven to direct and oversee. They regarded themselves as the original "Stand Fast Bible Students." Soon thereafter the greater portion of all western Bible Students (excepting those who remained in the Watch Tower Society) aligned themselves either with the Stand Fast Committee Organization or against it. Of all these a majority stood with the Committee.

“To Stand” Now Meant Idleness

It was their firm belief that the “Harvest” ended in the Spring of 1918; therefore, that Harvest work was out of order; that the “sealing” was finished, and the door to the high calling closed; that the “dark night wherein no man can work” had begun to settle down. It was now the “standing period” after the Harvest work was finished.

What errors of doctrine and of conduct may be built upon a single false premise! “To stand” now meant to be idle. St. Paul’s description of what it means to “stand” (Eph. 6:10-20), was evidently forgotten. To the deceitful mind of the flesh it was agreeable to cease from former activity. According to St. Paul’s description, he and all the faithful soldiers of the Cross, have “stood”; but not inactively, like Stand Fast Bible Students.

A peculiar fact is that all in this movement started conscientiously. But all minds that are not occupied with bearing witness to the “Good Tidings” of the truth will soon find themselves otherwise occupied. Scriptures and facts will be overlooked, forgotten, or wrested to support the erroneous position. Further and further departures from the Truth and its **spirit** are sure to follow.

Among the errors built upon the false premise concerning the year 1918, one of the most harmful was that of judging, or misjudging, the brethren. It became almost universal. Just as we in the E.V.S. relegated **others** into the Great Company, the world, etc., so also these Committee brethren did likewise. According to their judgment, we who had left them could not be of the Little Flock. Eventually, as we shall see, they began also to “judge” among themselves.

An Experiment in Communism

After a time some of these Stand Fast friends decided that it would be desirable to live in a “community” where they could all be together. The idea grew until many adopted it. Accordingly a commodious, three-story brick apartment building was secured in a city in Western Canada. The two upper stories of this building consisted of numerous living apartments, while the lower contained various stores and workshops. Here about 300 persons, including children, started the new experiment in communism. They were from various parts of Canada and the “States.” Those brethren who disapproved of the undertaking were held in disfavor.

Under the leadership of two brethren—one the former Editor of “Old Corn Gems,” and the other a former Pilgrim—various activities were engaged in. Their resources were pooled under the name of “The Star Company.” Bungalows and houses were built and repaired; gardening work was done; an automobile garage and repair shop was maintained; textiles were made into clothing and sold in their store, etc.

Ere long these material activities began to crowd upon their spiritual interests. They continued their meetings and studies, much as before, upon the basis of the beliefs concerning 1918, which included much speculating and judging. Strange as it may seem, a majority of these Stand Fast friends finally reached the conclusion that they were not in the high calling at all; and adjudged themselves to be an earthly class, the “Modern Worthies.” But their leaders still professed membership in the high calling, and accordingly were honored by the rest. The leaders managed, and the rest worked most industriously. In the judgment of many of them, calloused hands and other works of physical toil were considered more honorable than marks of spiritual service.

But the financial success did not attend this communal experiment. It seems that Bible Students are theologians rather than business men. Reports of dissension soon reached those on the outside. Such results should rather have been expected, for the blessing of the Lord cannot attend His people of this age when they turn from heavenly to earthly things.

Disillusionment and Disintegration

After a time the opportunity came for the Colony to move to a forest covered tract of Government land at some distance from the city of the present experiment. Not all were in favor of the new move, but apparently a large proportion sanctioned it. Accordingly these, with one of the leaders, left the city to settle in the new location. The dissenters remained in the city, or else left and found individual homes as of yore.

The manufacturing and commercial activities were to be continued in the new location; but first it was necessary to clear some of the land and build houses to live in. In the meantime a temporary camp was set up. But the venture did not progress far beyond the camp-condition, ere it began to break up. The disillusioned brethren either returned to their former places of abode, or else drifted to other localities where they could earn a livelihood.

Soon after the removal into the forest, a Canadian Sunday Newspaper published an illustrated article about this Stand Fast Community in the Northwestern woods. Erroneously the Community was represented in this article as being founded upon the teachings of Pastor Russell. But all true Bible Students know that it was not based upon his teachings. In Volume Four of "Studies in the Scriptures," pages 474-481, he set forth the reasons why Communism should not be attempted by the Lord's people today.

"Gather My Saints"

It is gratifying to learn that many of those who professed to have relinquished their high calling hope in favor of becoming Modern Worthies, later reclaimed that hope, and continue to give evidence of being spiritually minded. We are glad for these who have "found themselves" again. Some, however, have lost all interest in the Truth. But the majority eventually returned to their old Stand Fast classes, or else started new ones in the localities to which they moved. A few have joined the E.V.S.; while scattered here and there are isolated brethren, dear souls, who have been unable to decide where to fellowship or with whom to meet.

Many of the older Bible Students can remember how some parted company with us about the year 1909, when Brother Russell wrote on the "Covenants," "Sin offering," and "Mediator." A few of the brethren who went through the Stand Fast movement have more recently aligned themselves with those dissenters of 1909.

A small number who were in the Stand Fast movement are now engrossed in the writings of a former prominent Pilgrim whose specialty is "types." Many "types" have been "discovered" and are specifically applied to certain Bible Students—placing them in various "divisions," "tribes," "families," etc. Like many other groups, these brethren also claim to be sticking "very close" to Pastor Russell's teachings.

A number of other Stand Fast brethren have now embraced some literature which claims to set forth much clearer light than ever before upon the subject of the New Creature. They, too, profess great esteem for the works of Pastor Russell; but it seems to us that their literature smacks very strongly of Christian Science philosophy.

Speculation and Spiritual Stagnation

For several years a small group of sisters, formerly Stand Fast members, have been issuing literature, which abounds with citations and quotations from the "Seventh Volume," old Towers, etc. They claim that there are many "secondary" applications of Biblical types; for example, "Jehovah's Witnesses" being called "Babylon No. 2."

Another former Bible Student has published a mass of comments on Revelation, in which he claims that Pastor Russell was the Lord Himself! It is remarkable that any intelligent person would waste five minutes reading such literature—but some do.

The country has been flooded with pamphlets, papers and booklets; many of them filled only with vagaries and speculations by those who claim to be Bible Students. Every idea, it seems, must need be rushed into print .

A few former Stand Fast brethren have returned to the W. T. Society, being attracted largely by the activity and “work,” being wearied of the schism and the idleness in the Stand Fast divisions.

The classes of “Associated Bible Students” are made up of some who have been standing free from both the Society and the Stand Fast movement; some who have come out of the Society in recent years; some who were in the Stand Fast movement; a few who have been alone; and some who only within recent years have received a knowledge of the Truth. While these classes are not perfect, yet they deserve credit for two things: they endeavor to maintain a proper attitude toward outside brethren and they try to let their light shine. **All** brethren are invited to attend their meetings and conventions. They also hold public meetings, and distribute tracts setting forth the truths of the Divine Plan of the Ages. In some cities these classes are known simply as “Bible Students,” or as “Bible Students Ecclesias,” and sometimes as “Berean Bible Students.” But all stand free in Christ, and are not controlled by outside organizations.

Present Spiritual Conditions

In this narrative not all of the “Scattered” Bible Student groups have been mentioned nor yet all the events which have caused the Western brethren especially to become divided into so many camps. Now let us consider the present spiritual state within the individual classes, as well as the attitude of the various groups toward each other.

Though the logic of events and the force of circumstances have mellowed the attitude of many brethren in the various groups toward each other, yet with few exceptions, the present relationships are far from being the kind that existed between the congregations in the early church or among the ecclesias in Brother Russell’s day. But the great doctrinal storms, the “wire pulling,” and actual plotting to bring about divisions, seem now to be mostly all in the past, although the baneful results of all the carnal activities are still painfully manifest. Formerly all Bible Students denounced the papacy, sectarianism, clergy-rule, the coldness and formalism of the nominal church, and the creed-worship and superstition of Christendom generally—little dreaming that after 1916 these works of the flesh would flourish in our own midst.

Now that the storm has abated, many of the brethren seem to have settled down to a complacent, easy going life. They meet in their exclusive little classes to perfunctorily recite their lessons; perhaps they listen to a sermon, and chat pleasantly, shake hands, and then return to their homes, feeling that this fulfils their entire duty as Christians and ambassadors of the incoming Kingdom. And with a few exceptions, each class seems quite oblivious to the existence of other classes or groups of Bible Students, even in the same city. In what way, then, are we different from the “Old Nominal Churches”? “Ah,” some say, “we have the Truth.” But have not the other classes of brethren the same fundamental Truth? Did the Truth originate with us, or for us alone?

Work While It Is Called Day

And the above complacent course is pursued conscientiously, too. The majority seem to be resting upon the false premise that all opportunity for public work in the Master's vineyard ceased in 1918. What has become of the blessed missionary spirit that once actuated all of us—the burning zeal to “do good unto all men, and **especially** unto the household of faith”? How many there are who have placed their lights under their comfortable creed-beds, and are now fast asleep! A person who is sleeping cannot be interested in activity, not realize that there is still a measure of daylight and opportunity of service for his Master. Even if the sun were high above the horizon he would not know it. He must be awakened to appreciate that fact.

How evident it is to those who are now awake that our important commission, as given in Isaiah 61:1-3, is still in full force. Those beautiful verses outline all proper activities for all who have received the Lord's spirit-service both within and without the church. False premises and false doctrines are causing many to neglect and violate the divine commission of the anointed. Unscriptural conduct and spiritual stagnation are the inevitable results of thus ignoring God's express instructions for His people in this “day of vengeance.”

But let us notice a still more grievous sin, based upon these same misconceptions; namely, the violation of our Lord's “new commandment.” “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye **love** one another, **even as I have loved you**; that ye love one another.” The Apostle John explains that this kind of love is the evidence that we have passed “from death unto life.” What has become of this evidence? Who are my brethren? Are they all in my own little ecclesia? Only a bigot could make such a claim. Yet the attitude in many quarters seems to be, “God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more.”

One is reminded of the attitude of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like the publican. Some of our classes today are like modern cold-storage plants. If an outside brother comes along he is greeted with suspicion and a frigid atmosphere. Does God prepare or preserve His people for the Kingdom in that way? If we really believe that there are brethren in other classes, why not act in harmony with that belief?

Contend For the Faith

We are not here placing peace before purity, in doctrine or conduct. “Earnestly contend for the faith”; but first let us make sure that it really is the faith and not unproven theories, that causes the “contention.” Then let us take heed **how** we contend. It becomes necessary sometimes to withstand a brother to his face (never behind his back); or to reprove one who walks disorderly; or to draw a distinct line between ourselves and those who hold not “this doctrine”—the doctrine of the Ransom.

If we finally are accounted worthy to meet each other in heaven, surely we shall not find it necessary to make apologies over there. That must all be attended to while here. Neither will we find heaven to be a cold-storage plant, nor a place where there is “mere tolerance” toward certain brethren. Instead, there will be a glowing love, devotion, sympathy, everywhere. And those qualities must be developed in our character **right here on earth** or we simply will not be in that Little Flock.

And how can we ever expect to be blessers even of the wretched world, unless these qualities be in us and abound? Right here and now we must attain such a character—the character of Christ Jesus our Lord and Head. And He has purposely arranged so that the most practical way it can be developed and demonstrated is among and toward **all the brethren**. We have a practical example of this in Jesus

and His apostles. It is impossible to bless others without having such a character; and it is equally impossible to have such a character and not bless others.

Some brethren are so fearful of “compromising” that they will not meet with another class nor attend a convention sponsored by Bible Students with whom they are not affiliated. They fear they might become “defiled” by other brethren, who are consecrated to the same Lord and who hold to the same **fundamentals** of Present Truth. Thus have they become “strangers” to their brethren, and that **mostly over** issues that are nonessential, unimportant or imaginary.

Barriers Can Be Forgotten at Funerals

There is one place where Bible Students are generally willing to meet and that is at a funeral—though some hesitate to come together even then. The writer has been present at funerals where the friends from half a dozen factions were met to pay their last respects to the memory of some deceased brother or sister (whom most of them had known well). While looking over the well-filled room; seeing the beautiful flowers brought by the many friends, all intently listening to the “truth” discourse; and noting how they joined together in the singing of Hymns of Dawn; such thoughts as these have come to mind:

Are not most of the barriers erected between us really unscriptural? Do not these funeral flowers represent genuine sentiments of love and sympathy still existing toward the deceased and the bereaved? Do they not shed some true fragrance backward over the weary road? How does God look upon each of us? What would happen if His judgment were to be manifested on us all right here and now? These are serious thoughts. The sermon at almost any Bible Student’s funeral, regardless of the faction which the speaker represents, usually tells “the old, old story” of the love of God and of Christ; of man’s fall, condemnation and future restitution; and of our own High Calling hope. Seldom does a funeral discourse consist of the vagaries and speculations which have abounded in other meetings since 1917. If we can drop non-essentials and think of fundamentals at a funeral, why not on some other occasions?

Doctrinal Anarchy

The apostasies and schisms of the Gospel age usually required many decades or centuries for development and fruition. Who then could have believed in 1916 that the same carnal condition would be manifested in **our** midst, and that within the short space of a few years? The solemn warnings of dear Brother Russell apparently fell, with some few exceptions, on ears that were “dull of hearing.” In 1908 he predicted that anarchy would come into the church. (See Z. 1908; pp. 214-218.) Recall also his last message, “The Hour of Temptation.” (Z. 1916; p. 328.) Anarchy is lawlessness. The royal Law of Love has been grievously violated in our midst. How easy it is to have only the letter of that law and be without its **spirit!** The spirit of Christ is not one of faction, formalism, fear, pride or prejudice.

With some exceptions here and there, the foregoing represents the general condition now prevailing among those who once were brought into the same glorious light of Present Truth. Who is to blame for it? It is a trait of fallen nature to place all blame upon others. But let us place the blame where it belongs, **upon ourselves.** Some have been able to do this, responding with repentance and amends. Why can’t more of us do likewise? Isaiah instructs; “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto My people their transgressions.”—Isaiah 53:1.

How can Bible Students become free? Jesus said, “If ye continue in My word ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” How were we first made

free? By facing the fact that we were sinners—by embracing this fundamental truth. Only then could we begin to enjoy the freedom which Jesus alone can give. Similarly, if we are ever to “inherit the Kingdom” we must not shrink from the truth, even though it humiliates us. If we do not **humble ourselves, God will humble us**. Let us then obey the Truth until every vestige of prejudice, pride and party spirit is effectively effaced from our hearts.

When a person becomes sick, the first great need is a correct diagnosis of his ailment. But it is of still greater importance to locate and **remove the cause** of the disease. Nearly all human diseases are crises brought on by the gradual accumulation of poisons in the system. If the body is kept in good condition by proper living, it will be able to eliminate accumulating toxins and also destroy or resist disease germs.

It is exactly the same with spiritual health and well-being. If we Bible Students had been in a state of good spiritual health, we would not have assimilated the “bait” which our great adversary had prepared for us in 1917. In fact, we would not have eaten it at all; our spiritual “taste” would have been sufficiently keen to reject it.

Here and there throughout the world there were brethren who were awake and in spiritual health. They soon discovered the nature of the “food” proffered and refused to partake of it. These dear brethren did not enter into the same difficulties in which we found ourselves—though they, too, have had their own difficulties. But they have been free all these years—most of them—from the false “channel” complex and theoretical vagaries. Though severely tried, many have continued active in the service of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, to the extent of their opportunities. It might have been the same with all of us. But evidently the lessons of all past history, and the more recent solemn warnings of Brother Russell, were not sufficient for some of us. Like Father Adam, we needed the hard lessons of experience.

The Sin of the Church

Let us now consider one of the most fruitful sources of sin in the church all down through the Gospel age. It is the doctrine of “The Channel.” Briefly stated, this false teaching is that the church of Christ must have some visible, earthly, headship, or “headquarters.” This idea when once accepted, becomes the fountain-head of many other errors in doctrine and practice. This false “channel” doctrine began to appear very early in the history of the church. It reached full fruition in the Papacy and was later planted in the various Protestant denominations. Last of all in these last days it was revived and re-planted among Bible Students.

In the comments on Revelation 8:3-5, in the “Finished Mystery,” the “Angel” with the “much incense” “for the prayers of all the saints” (Diaglott translation), was said to represent the “Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.” Just as the Papacy—with its head, the Pope—had assumed authority, place, and prerogatives which belonged to Jesus Christ alone, just so now did the Society, with its leaders, **assume** authority over the Lord’s people. Whenever the professing people of God assent to such assumption by fallible men, whenever they permit Jesus Christ to be pushed into the background—even for a brief time—evil results are sure to follow. The truth of this statement is proven by all church history.

We should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is the Head of the true church. How fittingly the “Angel” with “much incense,” “for the prayers of all saints,” would represent our great High Priest, without whose “sweet incense” our prayers or service **could not** be acceptable to the Heavenly Father. Also, how fittingly the **results** of the Angel’s casting of the fire-filled censer upon the earth would picture the fiery trials and judgments that came upon the Jewish nation after the Pentecostal experiences of the church. Jesus Himself had foretold all this.

Today, as in the days of Rome, an earthly business organization was permitted to establish and entrench itself as a spiritual “channel” of Truth, and to exercise supposed authority over the Lord’s people. What blighting results have followed! How rapidly a little leaven can leaven the whole lump!

Did not dear Brother Russell state and restate the truth—that Jesus and His inspired apostles, together with the inspired writings of the Old Testament, are the **only** “channel” of Divine Truth? Did he not correctly teach that it would never be necessary to go to other sources for guidance? Did he not always urge us to judge the Truth and value of his writings by the Divine Oracle, the Word of God?

“But,” some will say, “he called the Society a ‘channel.’ Why did he do that?” It was because he was humble, and desired to keep **himself** out of sight. All of us know that he was careful to keep control of the Society himself, so long as he was here. Note these his words: “So far as the headquarters at Brooklyn is concerned, and my identification with the work there, let us say: everything is under my supervision. Nothing emanates from there contrary to my conscience.”—Question Book, “What Pastor Russell Said,” page 350, Q. 1.

Now let us carefully note what he wrote about the Society. In 1894 some “Cards” or “Letters of introduction” were issued for the Pilgrims, in the Society’s name. Seven months later these Letters were withdrawn, because some people had mistaken them for “ordinations to preach.” Only **the Lord** ordains His people to preach (See Z. 1894, page 299, and Z. 1893, page 181) Following are Brother Russell’s own words about the true status of the Society which he founded:

No Corporation Has Authority Over God’s People

“**Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society** is only a business association (has no creed or confession). It merely represents a fund entrusted to its officers for use to the best of their judgment in the spread of the Truth; especially of those truths set forth in **Millennial Dawn** and **Zion’s Watch Tower**, by means of which many of the donors have been brought, by God’s mercy, out of darkness into His marvelous light. The funds donated are used under the direction of the Editor (who is President of the Tract Society), just as they , were used before the Society was organized. It was chartered at the request of some of the friends and contributors with a view to the continuance of the ‘Harvest’ work , should the Editor die before the end of the ‘harvest.’

“This Society, therefore, would have the same right as any other business firm to give a Letter of Introduction to any one it might think worthy. But we find that the very word ‘Society’ is liable to be misunderstood by some to mean ‘church’; and that some are in danger of regarding this Society’s ‘Letters of Introduction’ as if they were commissions, authorizations, or ordination papers. We discontinue these Letters because we wish to ‘avoid the very **appearance** of evil.’

“Neither one man, nor many men unitedly, can either give or take away from anyone authority to preach in the name of the Lord. God only can give such authority; and He alone can cancel it. He has given this authority to all His people, saying: ‘He that hath My Word let him speak My Word.’ We sought especially to guard against such an idea as that the Letters of introduction were letters of authority, and the letters themselves state this most explicitly; but since they are misunderstood by some, they might later on come to be misunderstood by many.

“Hence they are being recalled before they can do harm. Indeed they may do good, by leading to this emphatic calling of attention to God’s Word as the only competent authorization; and the pointing out afresh that **Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society** is not a religious but a **business** association. It makes no creeds; it merely keeps accounts of money received and expended; just as a banking firm

receives, deposits and returns checks or vouchers showing what was done with the money. It makes no demands nor assessments, nor does it beg or importune for money. It merely gives notice that it is ready to receive and use, as wisely as possible, whatever money may be sent by the interested ones, who have been helped out of Satan's darkness into the sunlight of God's loving plan by its aid"—Z. 1895.

“Channel” Idea Gains Ascendancy Despite the Foregoing Warning

The idea that the Society was the Lord's "Channel" or mouthpiece had begun to appear among Bible Students before 1916. All know that it is one of the strong tenets of "Jehovah's Witnesses," as the adherents of the Society call themselves today. Stand Fast Bible Students held that the Society ceased to be the "channel" in the Spring of 1918 when it "compromised" and "began to teach error." All of its previous writings and publications were accepted, and they still are held by many of the original Stand Fast brethren.

Let it once be clearly seen that the Society is only a **business** organization without religious or ecclesiastical authority, and its spiritual claims and assumptions fall like a house of cards. Thus the almost superstitious reverence in which it is held by its supporters today would soon disappear. Its proclamations would be seen to be but "empty words"; issuing like the loud swelling claims of the Papacy, but without authority from the Lord.

Many Western brethren have not yet freed themselves from the spell cast over them by "The Finished Mystery." We have seen how the speculative teachings embodied in the book became the basis for still further speculations, both in the Society and **among** the Stand Fast brethren. Let us observe now why dear Brother Russell did not even attempt to write a "Seventh Volume." He said, "therein I do not wish to give any guesses. Whenever I write the Seventh Volume on the Book of Revelation, I will have a satisfactory understanding of the teachings of that book. Until then, I will not write it."—Question Book, page 645.

“Posthumous Work” Repudiated in Advance by Its Alleged Author

Again in 1916, only a few weeks before his death, in answer to a question on Revelation 12:12, he said: "We will leave this until God shall give us some further light on the Book of Revelation, and we will try then to explain the book as a whole. We think that the Book of Revelation is important, and we would therefore love very much to write on it; but because it is not yet clear as a whole, and I do not wish to put any speculation or guessing into it; therefore I do not wish to write anything until the Lord shall make it all plain, so far as the Bible is concerned and its interpretation. Therefore we are waiting—waiting on the Lord. In due time I believe He will give us the key that will unlock the book. Until then we will rest. You will get it just as soon as He gives the explanation, If the Lord shall give it through somebody else, all right; but I will not give anything until I am sure."—Question Book, page 646.

In the light of the events of these 19 years how can anyone still believe that the book that was palmed off on Bible Students in 1917 measures up to the standards set in the above quoted statement? Doubtless the power of its spell lies in the fact that Brother Russell's name was tacked onto it. It was represented to be his "posthumous work," but no amount of explaining ever made it such. If anyone today were to gather together into a set of volumes all that he ever said or wrote, that would not be his "posthumous work." Hence, "The Finished Mystery" was an error from the very start. How can good be built upon such a foundation?

We cannot but believe that Pastor Russell was the "faithful servant" pointed out in Matt. 24:45-47; yet his own statements, just quoted, show that he did not

understand all things in Revelation. In fact his statements evidence both wisdom and faithfulness on his part. Well would it have been if Bible Students had followed such example. We are all familiar with his oft-repeated statement that prophecies cannot be fully understood until the time of their fulfillment, or after. He refused to run in advance of the Lord. It would be thoroughly illogical to suppose that no further understanding of Revelation, or of other parts of the Bible would be granted by the Lord as time goes on. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day"—not merely unto 1914, 1916, or 1918. But we may be sure that any increasing or advancing light will be in harmony with the glorious fundamental doctrines of the Divine Plan of the Ages.

Unscriptural Test of Fellowship

Acceptance of the alleged "Seventh Volume" was made an unscriptural test of Christian fellowship. This accounted for the strange and unusual behavior on the part of many brethren. The various Stand Fast classes which even today claim to hold to the sacredness of that volume, and yet have little or no fellowship with each other, represent varying degrees of tenacity with which the book is held. The basis of all true Christian fellowship and service was already set forth in the Six Volumes. "The Finished Mystery" could neither add to nor take from that basis. Nothing in that book, nor in any other book, should ever have been permitted to cause us to violate those principles set forth in the Six Volumes, which are squarely founded upon the Bible.

When we were called out of Babylon we were called **to the Lord**, and not to a man nor to an earthly institution. How many seem to have lost sight of that fact, "not holding the Head." They leaned upon Brother Russell. When the Lord took him away they were ready to lean upon the Society. After leaving the Society, they leaned upon a Committee, upon another Society, or upon favorite elders. And some of the elders leaned upon each other. of course, there have been some noble exceptions all along; but we believe that we have not stated the matter too strongly. Societies, committees, and elders, are proper, so long as they keep within their proper spheres. Every ecclesia of God's people should ever remember that no Society, service organization, committee, or elder has any authority over it. All of these are but "servants," which each ecclesia may use as the spirit of the Lord indicates.

"Thou Hast Left Thy First Love"

All Bible Students readily apply the uncomplimentary descriptions in the messages to the Seven Churches, as given in Revelation, chapters two and three, to the "old nominal churches." But why not apply those principles to ourselves?

In the message to the church at Ephesus the Lord mentions her works, labor, patience; how she hates the deeds of evil men; how she has tried the false apostles; how she has borne and not been weary; and how she hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans. And yet, with all this, He solemnly charges her with having left her "first love." Except she repent He will remove her candlestick and will no longer permit her to be His lightbearer. He says, "Repent, and do the first works."

What is our "first love"? It is nothing less than our personal love for Jesus Himself. If the early church, with all its virtues and attainments, was thus criticized, what shall we say of modern Bible Students? Have they left their "first love"? How can we show our love for Jesus, since He is in heaven, and we are on earth? He tells us how: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you, that ye love one another." This excludes **none** of the brethren. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Can anyone deny that our Lord's "new commandment" has been grievously violated?

These Warnings Still Needed

In the messages to Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and especially Laodicea, there are solemn lessons and warnings for all Bible Students! What of the doctrines and deeds of the Nicolaitans? How many brethren are permitting themselves to be dominated by leaders, who have the Nicolaitan spirit? What of the dead condition in Sardis? Is not this also the condition in many classes today? It is generally agreed that we are living in the last, or Laodicean period. The “know-it-all attitude” that exists in many quarters is aptly expressed by the words, “I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” The Lord says, “Thou art neither hot nor cold.” How many Bible Students today are merely luke warm!

Why did God favor us with the light? What is the object of the Truth? Is it not that we might thereby know Christ and be transformed into His character likeness? Surely, neither our “works” nor our “stand” alone will make us worthy of the Kingdom. All who will attain that glorious reward must fully realize that Jesus is our Redeemer, as well as our Lord and Head. Without Him we would be “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked.” Are we permitting anything to push Him into the background, or to take His place in our lives?

“Repent and Do the First Works”

“I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.” Shall we profit by the fiery trials of these trying years? “And white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed.” Yes, we need a fresh appreciation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Without it all would be lost. “And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see”—the eyesalve of meekness (teachableness), humility (to acknowledge mistakes and sins), and submission to the divine will (to repent and do the first works).

Brethren, what shall be done? There is only one answer: Repent! Many have admitted, or will yet admit, that they have made mistakes. But that is not sufficient. To really repent one must be really sorry. This involves confession and amends. Let the truth be fully admitted. Thus only can anyone become free indeed.

In the Bible are notable examples of those who availed themselves of the privilege of prayer: for example, Moses, Nehemiah, Daniel. These all acknowledged transgression, and made intercession for their people. Let us follow such examples. Jesus is our great High Priest. Of Him it is written, “He maketh intercession for the transgressors”; and He ever liveth to make intercession for us. Blessed fact! It is our privilege to approach the throne of grace, there to acknowledge our faults, and to make intercession for one another. Let us avail ourselves of this privilege. And let us use every opportunity for serving the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. Let us “redeem the time,” realizing that “the days are evil” and that the time is short.

THE END