

HOW “PRESENT TRUTH” WON EARNEST CHAMPION

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(Story of How He Was Led to Full Appreciation of the Divine Revelation and Plan is Told by W. H. Bradford.)

St. Paul, Minn., Aug., 1915. Editor St. Paul Enterprise:

I am constrained to join your “weekly testimony meeting,” the Voices of the People, and let your readers hear something else from me than disputation. I prize the spiritual things as much as do other friends, and find my chief delight in a good experience meeting, as Brother Russell has often told us should be the case. My experience in coming into the light of Present Truth will interest some, especially since it emphasizes several encouraging truths. To bring them out clearly I will be more frank than natural impulse would incline me.

Through the heroic self-denial of a father who in youth was denied educational privileges and had vowed his children should not be handicapped as he was, I was kept in school continuously till twenty-one years of age found me a university graduate with honors. Naturally of a very inquiring turn of mind, this tendency was partially offset by my training to be intensely loyal to my affiliations, and at the time of graduation was further offset by the pride of the successful schoolman, the “know it all” spirit.

Religiously, this loyalty meant devotion to the Methodist Episcopal Church, in which my father was an honored clergyman, and in all the traditions of which I had been faithfully trained. This would not seem promising soil for the seeds of Millennial Dawn. However, as a mere boy I had asked my father many hard questions, and had reserved them in mind for a day when perhaps they might be answered; chief among which was always this: What will God do with the heathen? I felt that I could never fully trust my own case in God’s hands till I was sure He would be fair to all other men. The sense of justice was always a predominant one in me. As a college man, moreover, I had always loudly professed to be a truth seeker, and had often declared I would investigate anything that put forth a reasonable claim, from any source or by whatever hands it might come. Such was the soil Present Truth found in me.

Chiefly through the influence of my mother I had learned that idleness is a sin, and that the humblest job is more honorable than inactivity. Graduating in debt, and needing work at once, and being unable at once to secure the kind desired, I took the best I could get, which was a position in the big round house of the C. & N. W. [Ry. at](#) Huron, S. D., hoeing fires out of incoming locomotives in the “cinder pit,” wiping the grease and dirt

off the running gear and frames of the engines, helping the boiler washer and calling outgoing engine crews to their runs. It was night work, from seven till seven, every night in the week, at \$1.25 a night, affording no chance for going anywhere evenings,—a slave's life, it might seem. My old college friends were scandalized to think I would degrade my culture with such surroundings. The president of my college class did no work for two years rather than degrade himself by taking an unworthy job.

But “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,” and in the dirty round house at Huron I found a pearl of great price. My exaltation was the reception of the pearl of Present Truth. It was cleverly given to me by a man whom I was then much inclined to despise, because he had enjoyed practically none of the advantages which had been mine. I perceived all too much that he was, like Peter and John, an unlearned man. But now for many years I have known of him that he had been with Jesus and learned of Him. It makes a great difference. The man was George G. Hodgeson, night engineer in the powerhouse of the railroad shops. All the workers brought their midnight lunches in tin buckets. Engineer Hodgeson had once been a member of my mother's big Sunday School Bible Class, and thus felt an interest in her boy. He knew the midnight lunch would taste better hot, and so invited me to put my pail every evening on the manhole of his big boiler. He invited me to eat sitting in an arm chair in his cheerful room, and he always saw to it that there was a comfortable cushion in the chair. Though his mind was full of Millennial Dawn, and his zeal was great, he never breathed a word about it till, after many nights, he felt sure I was thoroughly in love with his hospitality, the hot lunch and the cushioned arm chair. Then one night he said to me, “Haven, my boy, I have a book I want you to read. It is a wonderful book. It tells all about the glorious plan of our loving Heavenly Father.” I received his suggestion coldly, and he dropped the subject. A few nights later he tried it again, in the same way; then later again. I began to be vexed about his book; I said to myself, “This fellow cannot give me anything worth my while. Who does he think he is? Doesn't he know who I am?” Still he cautiously continued to ask me to read the book, telling me what happiness it had brought to his mind.

Wearied at last of his importunities, and ashamed to do despite to his hospitality, knowing the only way to silence him would be to take his book, I took it, and promised him I would read it; but charged him to beware that I would tear his book to shreds with my merciless criticism. “All right,” said he, “if you only read it.” His consummate persistence had won my promise; and my promise, once given, could not be broken. I began the book, simply and solely to keep my promise. It was entitled “*The Divine Plan of the Ages, a Helping Hand to Bible Students*” volume one of the series of Millennial Dawn. As I began reading, the thought occurred to me that I had for years professed to be a Truth seeker, willing to look into anything, and here I was unwilling to fairly meet the very first test that came to me in practical life. I was ashamed of myself for such hypocrisy, and resolved to really give the book a fair reading. Only a few pages, however, and it began to answer questions I had asked in vain since early boyhood, and it

continued answering them in rapid succession till dozens of previously mysterious problems had been made plain. Criticism, fairness, every attitude was now lost to sight before the all-conquering fascination of the most wonderful book I had ever read. Instead of tearing the book to pieces, the book tore me, tore me down from my lofty seat and made me willing, yes anxious to be taught. The humble man whom I had once scorned now drew me as a magnet; I could scarcely keep away from him to do my work and let him do his.

Brother Hodgeson soon told me of a little Sunday afternoon Bible study class where these things were discussed, and asked me to attend. I gladly went. There I found as leader Mr. W. E. Van Amburgh, terminal agent of the Great Northern [Ry. at](#) Huron. This was before the day when elders were elected and the man best fitted for leadership gravitated naturally into the position. Mr. Van Amburgh had been President of the Epworth League in the Huron Methodist church at the same time I was its secretary, and teacher of a big Bible class in its Sunday School when I was assistant secretary of the same school, before I had gone to college, and before either of us had gone to college, and before either of us had ever heard of Millennial Dawn. A fellow workman at the railroad shops, John M. Beck, now an elder of the Huron Ecclesia, was also a member of the little class; he also had been a Methodist. Both Brothers Van Amburgh and Beck were quick to welcome "Haven" to the class, as they then familiarly called me and still do when they meet me, much to my joy. I bought two sets of the four volumes—there were only four out then. One set I set to work studying; the other was sent out on missionary work. A single first volume was sent to the parental home, but was consigned to the fire without reading; and has found no more favorable entrance there since.

In March, 1898, upon being offered a much better job in St. Paul, Minn., I borrowed \$25.00 and a suit case from "Brother Van," as we familiarly called him, and made my first entrance into a large city. I soon found the St. Paul class, and joined it. There was then no "Twin City Class" and no class in Minneapolis, the two or three friends in the latter city coming over to the St. Paul class for fellowship. Sister Doctor Crawford was one of these. Brother Thori, an architect, was leader of the class, and none who ever witnessed his zeal and ability and consecration have any doubt of his presence now in the glorified kingdom class. John P. Peterson, now an elder of the Twin City class, and Henry Hoskins, now an elder of the Chicago class, were then members of the little St. Paul class, also Sister Townsend, who is still a member of it. We had some very spiritual meetings in a humble home up in the Arlington Hills district which I would now be more than glad to identify, if it were possible; but memory does not serve that purpose.

After a few delightful months in St. Paul, a still better position with headquarters at my former home in Redfield, S. D., was offered and taken and it proved to mean the severance of my direct relations with the Millennial Dawn people for a number of years. Convinced that I ought to come out from Babylon, I directed the Methodist pastor at

Redfield to make me “withdrawn” on his records; and for some time I supposed he had done so. After my marriage, however, I was soon informed that I was still a member, and a concerted and successful effort by all my relations was made to keep me, for the time, at least, in “*the fold*.” I drifted to Chicago, and finally became the most active member in one of that city’s suburban Methodist churches. I still kept the Dawns and read them and enjoyed their message; and as a young people’s Bible study class teacher took the Dawn to class frequently and read from them to the class. The minister knew what I was doing, but offered no objection. One week, when I was unavoidably away from the class, the pastor reluctantly took my place. On my return, he came at me in some such words as these: “Don’t ask me to take that class again. I can’t give them any of that stuff you are giving them. But, Bradford, honestly, I would gladly give a thousand dollars if I could believe as you do.” This man is now, or was, the last I heard, located in Pilgrim Bro. Robie’s home town, and probably hears all the Millennial Dawn he cares about.

About this time we lost a beautiful little girl in death, and our physician at our request, attended to the calling of an undertaker, as we knew none. He called William H. Stott of Des Plaines. After performing his duties in a matter that was touchingly tender, Elder Stott, for such he was, handed us a copy of John Edgar’s “Where Are the Dead?” This put us again in touch with the Millennial Dawners, and proved to be good seed in ground that was slow but sure. Principally to escape the intolerable burdens heaped upon us in the Methodist church because we were willing workers, especially the burden of the treasurership of a struggling church, we moved to another suburb, where there was no Methodist Church, and for six months our shadow never once darkened a church door. Then the pastor of the only church in Town, Congregational, heard what good church workers we had formerly been and laid siege to us. Meanwhile, however, we had made two persistent but unavailing efforts to find the Chicago class. Apparently our due time had not yet come. We told this preacher frankly, with almost brutal frankness, that we did not believe as he did at all, and that we were not going to stultify ourselves for any church in Christendom. But he persisted, and pleaded that if we would only be good fellows and cast our influence as good citizens with the moral forces of the community and help them out, they would be glad to let us believe whatever we pleased. We finally yielded to that plea, and joined with that distinct understanding, that we were under no obligation whatever to their creed. For a time all went well, and we served as choir leaders, Sunday School superintendent, etc. Soon interest began to drag, the preacher got alarmed and began to give out the loyalty talk and put on the pressure. We sang in the choir one Sunday morning, and then heard the denominational brakes go on. That very afternoon Bro. Stott and his dear family drove over in their automobile and made us one of the most timely calls that ever was made. That evening our withdrawal from Babylon was written,—the one that went through. It was a thunderclap to that little Congregational church. The next Sunday we found the Chicago class (my devoted wife and I, for our “we” here includes the helpmate who is my loyal “sister in the Truth”), and

we joined it—as much as dear Brother Seely would let us; for when we told him we had come to join, he replied in his quaint way, “If you wish to be one with us, just come.”

We have been just coming ever since, and our course has been an open book to the friends. When we think of how we came to be in the light of “Present Truth,” our hearts always swell with gratitude to our Heavenly Father that He moved Brother Hodgeson, now of Pierre, S. D., and Brother Stott to introduce us to the writings of Charles T. Russell and the meetings of the Brethren. Brother Hodgeson’s portrait has a place in our chief room, and we regret that we have not one of Brother Stott for its companion piece.

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