



Bible Students in Britain

The story of a Hundred Years

BIBLE STUDENTS IN BRITAIN

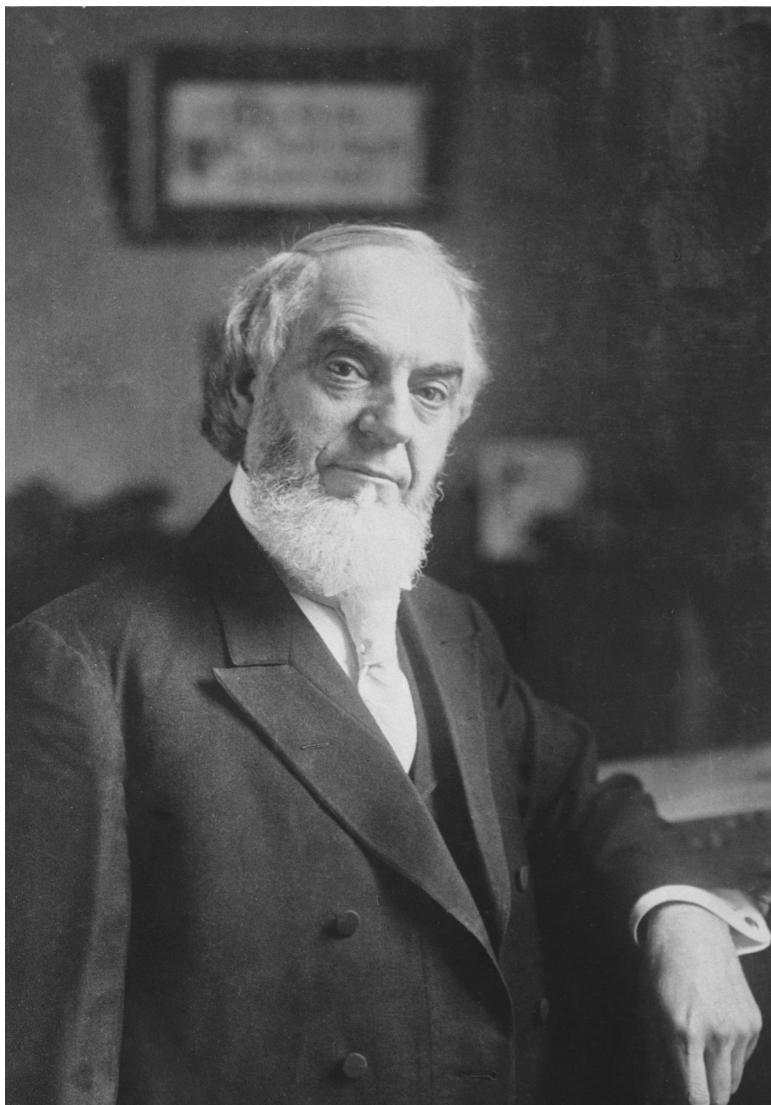
The Story of a Hundred Years

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PASTOR CHARLES T. RUSSELL
1852-1916

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PREFACE

A would-be humourist once defined history as “the consolidation of doubtful legend into undisputed fact”. This is perhaps hardly applicable to the present case; the author enjoys the advantage of having been closely connected with the events he relates insofar as the latter seventy years of the story are concerned, and for the earlier thirty-five, possession of records supplemented by notes of reminiscences related to him in bygone years by early stalwarts who have long since departed this earthly scene. So there emerges the history of a fellowship which conducted a remarkable Christian work during the early years of this century, survived the sad interlude which imperilled its future, and rose above the threat to continue its witness, albeit in lower key, into the present. This is the story, so far as the United Kingdom is concerned, of the “Harvest of the Age”.

1

EARLY DAYS

THEY CAME off the boat at Southampton, that autumn day in 1881, two American evangelists, J. C. Sunderlin and J. J. Bender, commissioned by Pastor C. T. Russell to plant in Great Britain the message he was assiduously preaching in the United States. They set foot on these shores with the enthusiasm of men entering upon virgin territory. The States had known this evangel for two years past; it was as yet unknown in this country. The time had come to proclaim it.

This understanding of the Divine purpose, telling of a coming era of life, peace and security destined for the human race, was being proclaimed in the United States by the widespread free circulation of a fairly massive booklet entitled "Food for Thinking Christians" and a great deal of interest was being thereby generated. The old orthodox theology of gloom and doom was superseded in its pages by a conception of God and his attitude to mankind which stressed the inevitable supersession of the injustice, misery, disease and death inseparable from this world as it now is by an everlasting world of justice, happiness, health and life under the oversight of the Lord Jesus Christ, Man has made the world what it now is; God will remake it to the world of his wish, and all who elect to come into conformity with that wish will eventually come into this world and enjoy it for ever. All this leaves untouched the heavenly expectation of Christians who have lived their lives in expectation of union with Christ in the heavenly realm after this life. The conception was that of two worlds, a celestial and a terrestrial, in each of which those best fitted for either will find themselves at the end – and be perfectly satisfied, living each in their own environment yet in eternal communion with each other. That was the vision which inspired these two men as they

made their way to London.

Their mandate was to have some three hundred thousand copies of "Food for Thinking Christians" printed in London and have them distributed at church doors in some of Britain's principal cities. Unfortunately Sunderlin was taken rather seriously ill soon after arrival and had to return hurriedly to the States, leaving Bender to carry out the distribution by himself. This he did, starting out by having one hundred thousand distributed in London alone, by boys of the National Messenger Service – long since defunct – at church doors all over the Metropolis after Sunday evening service. He travelled north, personally distributing the book in the same fashion, in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Newcastle, Darlington, Huddersfield, Hull, Nottingham, Leeds, Carlisle and Manchester. He then returned to the States, leaving the seed to germinate.

The green shoots were not long in appearing. From all of the cities visited came enquiries for more information; some enquirers became readers of Pastor Russell's magazine, "Zion's Watch Tower". The bulk of the enquiries came from London, Glasgow, Nottingham and Manchester, for ever afterwards the principal centres of the new faith. The salient feature of this understanding was that the long-promised Second Advent, usually visualised as a fiery descent from the skies to execute judgment, was in fact already in progress as a winding up of the present social order in preparation for the setting up of a Divine government on earth which would effect world conversion and the elimination of evil with all its concomitants, oppression, disease, death. Such new order would afford a full and complete opportunity to all to amend their lives in accord with the principles of truth and equity, so that earthly affairs would be conducted along lines of justice and peace into all perpetuity. An increasing number of people caught the light of this bright vision; this "Food for Thinking Christians" found its way into towns far removed from the points of distribution, and quite soon an appreciable response was forthcoming.

So far there was no suggestion of organised meetings. Russell's intention and desire was to initiate an interdenominational interest among members of existing churches, not to form

a new sect. It was inevitable, however, that groups of people drawn together by interest in this new understanding of Scripture should wish to congregate for mutual discussion and progress. This was already happening in the States. Now, in June 1882, little more than six months after the distribution of the booklet in this country, a dozen people in Glasgow, chiefly menfolk, commenced to hold a regular meeting for the study and discussion of the Bible in this light. This was the first Bible Students' meeting in this country, so far as records and recollection can tell. Rather appropriately, perhaps, it was a humble beginning. The organiser and leader of this initial meeting was apparently a man in a lowly walk of life – his name is lost to history – and the meetings, as described by one who joined them a few years later, were held in a “tiny, dingy hall in a poor locality”, which reminds one of Russell's own description of his entry into vital Christian faith when he “quite by accident, dropped into a dusty, dingy hall in Allegheny where I had heard that religious meetings were held, to see if the handful who met there had anything more sensible to offer than the creeds of the Churches”. So be it; some of those in Glasgow who spearheaded the faith in such lowly circumstances were to witness, almost thirty years later, five thousand people packed into their city's largest hall, and hundreds turned away, to hear the message that had captivated their own hearts in these earlier years. As in the days when the Christian faith was young and the Apostles went out preaching, “so mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed”.

That, though, lay yet in the future. Of the first ten years or so of this little meeting three names only have survived, a Mrs Hodge and two men destined in later days to become well known in the growing fellowship. William Crawford and Robert Cormack were two of these pioneers, and Crawford at least had much to do with later events. At the moment, though, they studied and discussed quietly with that little group in that “tiny dingy hall in a poor locality”.

During that same period events were happening elsewhere. Solitary individuals, in some cases two or three together, were in communication with Pastor Russell, asking questions and querying what they could do to make the message known in

their own areas. Apart from the continued free circulation of "Food for Thinking Christians" there was little else to feed the growing demand for more information; the real handbooks of the movement, Russell's six-volume series "Studies in the Scriptures", had yet to be written and published, and the wonder is that these interested enquirers held on so long on so little. But hold on they did; all over the country, to the tune of some three hundred individuals by 1885 who were assiduous readers of "Zion's Watch Tower"; in the light of this they made progress in what later became generally referred to as "Present Truth". (It has to be admitted that this term has also been used in the same sense by other Christian communities, before and since.) Already in two other areas, Nottinghamshire and London, individual Christians found others in their own localities following the same line of thought, and joined up to form little groups for study and discussion. In East Kirkby, a Nottinghamshire mining village, Thomas Smedley, the village chemist, round about 1890 put a notice in his shop window, "Bible Class held here" and immediately a group was formed; Smedley in after years performed yeoman service almost up to his death, travelling the country preaching the faith he had accepted. The Nottingham area has been an important centre of the Bible Students ever since.

At the same time activity was manifest in London. Since the first distribution of "Food" in 1881 there had been a number of interested individuals in touch with the Pastor and it was in the year 1883 that a study group to discuss these things was commenced in the North London home of a rather remarkable woman and her husband.

Elizabeth Horne was the type of person, who having acquired an exposition of the Divine Plan which resolved all her theological doubts and misgivings, must needs tell it out to others. Within a few years she, in common with others in her group, was conducting open-air meetings in Hyde Park – perhaps the very first of the "public meetings" which became so pronounced a feature of the fellowship in later years. It is recorded that this redoubtable lady preached in the Park for three hours at a stretch, to "attentive, respectful crowds of orderly, thoughtful looking people gathered to listen", to quote

the records. At a slightly later date, 1891, she organised the meetings for the first visit of Pastor Russell to this country, entertaining him at her home, from which she appears to have been as good an organiser as she was preacher. This Elizabeth Horne must have been quite a girl!

Like the sister group at Glasgow, this was apparently a small and inconspicuous company of earnest students – names that have survived are those of Samuel Bather with wife and daughter, John Brookes, Arthur Carey, but nothing very definite. As a company it grew in numbers until it was ultimately absorbed by the larger meetings which developed in London in later years. But, as with Glasgow, it lit the flame, in humble surroundings, which was destined to burn brighter and clearer in coming years, until eventually the London congregation was the largest Bible Students community in the world, with the largest church building in which to worship. The little Glasgow meeting continued in its quiet way for fifteen years before the enlargement associated with a well-known family name, the Edgars, came upon the scene. The London meetings continued for fourteen years before the work associated with another well-known family name, the Guards, had its rise, and in the meantime other London groups were started, Ealing in 1890, Stoke Newington 1891, Crouch End 1892, Lewisham 1894, Surbiton and Forest Gate 1896, and Kensington 1899. The growth of the Bible Student faith in what from the start has always been its two principal centres, London and Glasgow, commencing with the lowly and unnoticed, well illustrates the principle of the Divine operation: “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts”.

All this was to change. The year 1891 saw a sudden acceleration of the witness. Pastor Russell made his first visit to these shores. It was a hurried visit. It would seem that this visit to Europe was more of a personal and sentimental one, for he spent most of his time in Ireland. (Although a third or fourth generation American, he was ultimately of Scotch-Irish descent.) Landing at Queenstown, he did visit various interested people in Cork, Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry and a few other places. His purpose in Ireland accomplished, he came to London, where he arranged with the North London group to

establish a London depot, for the storage and distribution of Bible Student literature, under the supervision of one of the North London elders, Thomas Hart. (By this time the first three volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures" had been published and were eliciting widespread interest.) He ministered at several meetings arranged in London by Elizabeth Horne, where a hundred and fifty gathered together, left for a brief visit to Glasgow to meet the interested there, thence to Liverpool for the same purpose, and so back to the States. Very few people knew he had been in the country at all. At Liverpool he met Charles Elam, an interested man who was minister of a small mission hall where a hundred and fifty gathered to hear him. Charles Elam became the founder of the Liverpool church of Bible Students whose history runs from this date, with a starting membership of forty. Already there had been meetings established at Manchester, Hucknall in Notts, and the Surrey village of Penshurst where the local stationmaster, one Pearson, had electrified the village with the message. 1891 saw Nottingham, Liverpool and Dublin come on the scene and by 1892 Bristol, Edinburgh, Sheffield, followed by Belfast in 1895 and by Birmingham, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Dundee, Dumfries; and by Sevenoaks and Chatham in Kent. (Kent, not having any big cities, was noteworthy for its proliferation of small groups. Most towns and a great many small villages possessed a local community from a very early date.) These groups were usually commenced by the zealous labours of some active individual such as Arthur Riley of Bristol, James Bright of Belfast, John Green of Sheffield, William Raynor and William Drinkwater of Nottingham, George Mullens of Sevenoaks, - names which lingered long among the national community.

With some forty regular meetings established and an increasing number of people all over the country becoming interested, it was deemed desirable that someone from the States should come to England and organise the work of proclamation of the message on a systematic basis. The man selected was one S. D. Rogers, who arrived at the end of 1893 to show the British brethren how to preach the Gospel. His assignment was to organise a system of colporteurism, viz, the

going from door to door advocating and endeavouring to “place” the “Scripture Studies” volumes. Since there had been for quite a few years past a fair amount of this work going on, this became largely a matter of preaching to the converted. It soon began to become apparent, however, to the brethren of the London church, with whom he was billeted, that there was another side to S. D. Rogers. He began to advocate a plan whereby he himself should be supported financially by the brethren so that he could go from town to town as an itinerant preacher, being given free board and lodgings at each place, the necessary halls and facilities being provided at local brethren’s expense. This proposition and attitude, so alien from the tenor and spirit of Pastor Russell’s principles and practice, which relied entirely on unsolicited gifts for the support of his work, alarmed the London church. The outcome was that Elizabeth Horne communicated with the Pastor to say that the London church felt it necessary completely to reject S. D. Rogers and his ideas, and to ask for guidance. Eventually he returned to the States and so far as the UK was concerned the matter was closed.

During this period there was a considerable amount of “public witness” carried on, consisting not so much of public meetings but the patient distribution of tracts and pamphlets from door to door, and the provision of the book “The Divine Plan of the Ages”, being Volume One of “Scripture Studies”, to those who evinced sufficient interest. Men were thus brought into the ambit of the brethren who afterwards became doughty champions of the faith.

It was thus that in 1893 Frederick George Guard, an open-air evangelist and leader of a local evangelical choir, became possessed of a copy of the “Divine Plan of the Ages”. Its contents gripped and persuaded him. He found that some of his acquaintances had also seen and read the book. A resident of Stratford, East London, he was ignorant of the established group in North London. He did the obvious thing; in collaboration with his friend William Thirkettle of Forest Gate he established, in 1896, a group in his own home in Stratford. This was the beginning of the later well-known Forest Gate Church. With an initial membership of 18, Thirkettle was

appointed to organise a massive programme of tract distribution and open-air preaching. In the next twenty years that congregation came to number more than four hundred. London was shaping up for the greater things yet to come. The Metropolis was seeing the beginning of a process which was to lead to class meetings scattered all over the city and its environs, and a work of evangelism which ultimately resulted in meetings crammed to capacity at the Royal Albert Hall, London's leading auditorium.

This infusion of new blood into the capital with the coming of Forest Gate in 1896 was paralleled by a similar development in Britain's second city, Glasgow. For some years a certain Mrs Hodge, a member of the original Glasgow group, had been trying to convert her own sister, Sarah Ferrie (known to later generations of the fellowship as "Aunt Sarah"). After reading the first three volumes of the "Scripture Studies" in 1897 Sarah Ferrie was convinced. Being a person of positive convictions and apparently limitless energy, she commenced a week-night meeting in her own business premises in 1898 and promptly proceeded to evangelise her customers and business contacts. An illustration of her unconventional methods was related many years later by an observer who was with a party of Scottish brethren in 1906 on the railway station seeing off an American visitor. As the train stood in the station Aunt Sarah approached the engine-driver, leaning out of his cab waiting for the starting signal, handed him some tracts, and bade him "drive very carefully, for one of the King's sons is on the train". The engine-drivers' immediate reaction is not recorded, but the longer term consequence was that he came into the Truth and was present at the big Glasgow convention two years later when Pastor Russell visited the city. One is tempted to surmise that this Sarah Ferrie was perhaps a Glasgow version of London's Elizabeth Horne!

William Crawford and Robert Cormack, of the existing Glasgow group, began to attend this meeting in addition to their own. By 1899 Dr John Edgar, senior surgeon at a leading Glasgow Hospital, had become a member. John's father and one of his sisters had espoused the faith something like ten years earlier; now, within a few years, five more of the Edgar family

embraced the Truth, and with them another couple, Alex Tait and wife, thereafter to be active workers with the Edgars. These, with Crawford and Cormack, constituted a formidable team which set the Glasgow church on its feet. Records are silent as to the history of the original group dating from 1882 but it is virtually certain that they merged with the Edgar effort and so all the brethren in the city presented a united front.

The year 1899 marked another circumstance which was to have a marked effect in later years. Jesse Hemery, of Eccles, near Manchester, paid his first visit to London in the interests of the expanding work. Brother Russell first met Jesse Hemery on his first visit to Britain in 1891. A young man of twenty-seven, he was in trade as a baker and confectioner in Eccles. He must have been among the earliest in this country to become interested, manifesting considerable zeal and enthusiasm for the cause, and spending considerable time in the north of the country to interview people becoming interested. He was in fact the decisive factor in the conversion of Sarah Ferrie of Glasgow, so setting in motion the sequence of events which brought the Edgar family into the faith, with the consequent implications for the future of the Glasgow church. Brother Russell had formed a high opinion of his capabilities and now had him visit London to assess the progress of matters there. Hemery made his visit – not a very long one – spending most of his time with Frederick Guard and the incipient Forest Gate church, by now numbering some seventy-five, where he conducted five or six meetings, followed by a quick run round London to look up various individuals known to be interested. He apparently did not know of, for he did not visit, the group associated with Elizabeth Horne, nor any of the other older established meetings in London. He returned north, not having achieved much, except to forge a link with Guard and his group; the visit would have had little significance were it not for the fact that Jesse Hemery later became Brother Russell's representative in London and so of nation-wide influence.

With the increasing number of regular meetings and something like fifteen hundred vitally interested people scattered over the country constantly writing to Brother Russell, the Pastor judged the time was ripe to centralise British

activities in Britain itself. In May 1900 he sent one of his co-labourers, E. C. Henninges and his wife, to England for the purpose of setting up an office and depot in London from which all future work in the UK should be conducted. (It should be explained that this work comprised the import, storage and distribution of the Pastor's publications, tracts, books, etc, and was not in any sense an effort to control or direct the organisation and individual work of the British groups. At all times each such group was completely independent, managing its own affairs and linked to the Pastor only through the medium of the common faith.) The office and depot was set up in Gipsy Lane, Forest Gate, London, and Henninges entered into friendly co-operation with the Forest Gate Church. Joint efforts resulted in the acquiring of a hall for their meetings in Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate. A system of wholesale tract distribution, public meetings, "pilgrim visits" (a capable brother visiting outlying incipient groups to encourage and instruct them) and "colporteur work", (involving calling house to house to interest occupiers in the "Divine Plan" book) was established, and Henninges travelled the length and breadth of the country suggesting and encouraging all who wished to have part in this organised outreach of instructed evangelism. The first few months' work, from June to November, resulted in three thousand copies of the "Divine Plan" and a quarter of a million booklets being distributed, 50,000 of the latter in London alone. Thirty-nine British towns so far untouched by the message now heard it for the first time. So far as London was concerned Forest Gate took a prominent part in what was going on and early in 1901 Brother Henninges was unanimously elected Pastor of the Forest Gate Church. That year, 1901, saw a one hundred per cent increase in the circulation of literature and general activity. A change in oversight, however, was imminent. In November of that year the Pastor recalled Henninges for briefing in a new sphere of activity in Germany and appointed Jesse Hemery to take his place.

Thus Jesse Hemery became manager of the British office of the Society, a position he retained for most of his life. He inherited the Gipsy Lane depot. He was also unanimously elected Pastor of the Forest Gate Church in succession to

Henninges. During the next twelve months the circulation of literature increased again, to nearly three-quarters of a million copies, and twenty thousand volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures". All of this involved quite laborious door-to-door work at a time when the number of active workers could not have exceeded fifteen hundred. In 1902 a representative of the Pastor, J. Hope Hay, coming to England on a business mission, spent some time travelling the country visiting some of the centres convenient to his commitments; he managed to consult with the existing groups in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and the established groups in some other cities, reporting a definite upsurge of interest in Ireland, largely due to the efforts of James Bright of Belfast, responsible for starting the meeting there. C. H. Houston had achieved considerable progress at Edinburgh and a newcomer to the field was Dan Murray of Dundee; the group he founded there endured until 1965.

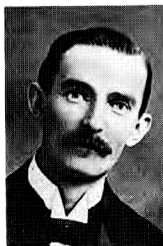
1902 was the end of the day of small beginnings. The following year was to see a fantastically rapid growth of the movement commencing with a visit of Brother Russell, his tour of the principal city centres where meetings existed, and well attended conventions in London and Glasgow. The next fifteen years was to witness what was afterward, and correctly, termed the work of harvest, the "Harvest of the Age". A fundamental aspect of Brother Russell's views was that the end of the present era, which he believed to be imminent, would be signalled by an unprecedented clarification of theological views regarding the purpose of God in creation, and a realisation of the time, manner and nature of the Second Advent clearer by far than that of the previous few centuries. He pointed out that the idea of a Harvest of the Age is implicit in the teachings of Jesus and that the gathering together of Christians of all denominations and of none to an understanding of these things, and a living faith that the Presence of the Lord was an accomplished fact, was in itself a harvest in this sense. The fact that the message was going forth world-wide and receiving enthusiastic acceptance from all quarters served to buttress his faith, and that of those, too, who accepted these views from him. The story of the next twenty years shows how well-founded was the general outline of that belief.

There were now about sixty regular group meetings existing in the UK, ranging in membership from fifteen to several hundreds, a total membership of active supporters approaching twenty-five hundred. Additional to these there were many interested attendants at the meetings who did not go so far as to join in the active work.

Early in 1903 the father of John Edgar died. He must have been one of the first in the United Kingdom to accept the message and throw in his lot with it. He saw the seed sown and he saw the promise of a rich harvest. It was left to his sons, John and Morton, and their sister Minna, to play their part in the stirring events that were to follow.



A. Pearson
Penshurst



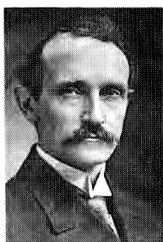
W. Crawford
Glasgow



T. Smedley
East Kirkby



W. Thirkettle
Forest Gate

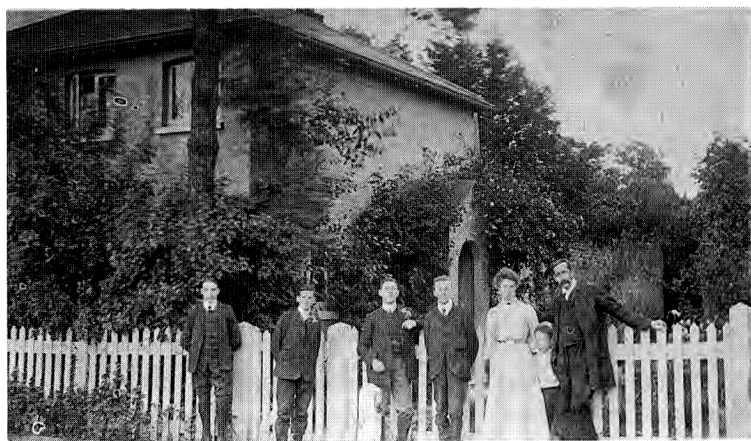


F. G. Guard
Forest Gate



J. Gentle
London

SOME OF THE EARLY PIONEERS - LATE 19TH CENT.



ONE OF THE EARLIEST VILLAGE GROUPS LATE 19TH CENT.
Penshurst, Surrey



Sheffield



Bristol

TWO OF THE EARLIEST CITY GROUPS LATE 19TH CENT.

2

HARVEST OF THE AGE

A DISTINGUISHING feature of the Bible Student movement was its insistence that the early 20th century was to witness a “Harvest of the Age”, a period during which the sum total of all Christian evangelical work effected during the two thousand years of Christian history would head up into a climax heralding the fact that the Second Advent, so fervently anticipated by many ministers and laymen of every denomination during the 19th century, had now become reality. There was, however, a fundamental difference. The old-time orthodox view of the event looked for a humanly visible appearance of the returned Christ in the upper skies with attendant angels, coming to earth to conduct a twenty-four hour Day of Judgment, in which dead and living are to be summoned before him to be adjudged worthy of everlasting life or everlasting punishment – in older times the terrors of a fiery Hell, although this aspect was becoming increasingly rejected in the present. The Bible Student position was that the Advent covers a period, that its initial stage is one in which the returned Christ is present, although unseen, overruling the actions and affairs of men so that the powers of this world will, by the ordained time, yield to his rule and from then on this world will be under his benevolent administration. This was the vision, and when compared with the more sombre and even terrifying outlook on things theological which it was set to challenge there is small wonder at the zeal and energy with which the early converts set about proclaiming the message, nor the interest aroused and the acceptance it received. “Good tidings of great joy” they insisted, and so it was. The salient principle, that none – whether unbeliever, unreached heathen, or reprobate – could be eternally lost without first being brought to a full “knowledge of

the truth”, to use the New Testament phrase, thus solving all the enigmas of those who in this world have died without even hearing of the means of eternal life, had been widely discussed in Christian circles for half a century past. It was left to Charles Russell to point out that this precisely is the purpose of the coming Millennium and because of his conviction that the Millennium was at the doors he was bound to lead this world-wide proclamation.

So, in the year 1903, Pastor Russell landed at Southampton to commence a series of visits in which he became as widely known here as in his native America. (His first visit in 1891 was a preliminary one to “get the feel of the country”, so to speak.) There was a sizeable number of enthusiasts waiting to greet him. The principal London church, which had existed since 1883, now numbering some 400, were his hosts as at his 1891 visit, and there was the younger Forest Gate church of about 125. These between them arranged the first London Bible Students convention, a function which has continued more or less without intermission since; on this initial occasion the attendance at the five sessions started at 400 and reached a maximum at the last session of 800. After a short trip in Scandinavia the Pastor returned to visit Glasgow, where the comparatively small church there had gathered a thousand interested people to hear him. (This established their fortunes; within the next eight years their church membership had increased to 500.) Of the fifty or so other local churches which had by now been established in the UK he was able to visit seven and address public meetings with audiences up to 600. A final visit to London to find, in conjunction with Jesse Hemery, a more convenient London office for the expanding work, in succession to the existing one at Gipsy Lane, Forest Gate, duly acquired and opened at 24 Eversholt Street, Kings Cross, in central London, and he was away.

This set the pattern for the next ten years. In 1905 he sent one of his co-workers, M. L. McPhail, to conduct the first of what became known as “pilgrim visits” throughout the country. The function of a “pilgrim”, always a mature brother in the Faith, was to visit each local church on a planned route, stay with them one or two days, conduct meetings of the church at

which features of the Faith could be more fully discussed, address a public meeting if such had been arranged, and put them in touch with other adjacent churches of whose existence they had not heretofore been aware. This was the commencement of a close acquaintanceship and co-operation between local churches which has always been characteristic of the movement. The members regarded each other as brethren in Christ and in fact this word "brethren" became a common and much-used descriptive epithet. In this particular instance McPhail was able thus to visit forty-eight of the seventy churches existing at that time, ranging from Brighton, Portsmouth and St Leonards on the South Coast, through Chatham, Maidstone and Sevenoaks in Kent, to Greenock, Glasgow and Dundee in the Scottish lowlands, with Belfast and Dublin in Ireland. During the next few years more pilgrims followed, Benjamin Barton in 1906, A. E. Williamson in 1907 and 1908, and Frank Draper in 1911, by which time the number of individual churches had increased to at least 120.

In all of this the UK brethren had by no means been idle. During the seven years 1903-1909, still not much more than 3500 strong, they had distributed by hand more than twenty million large four-page folders and twenty-seven thousand volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures". Much of this work had been done by individual brethren; the institution of Saturday afternoon "tracting efforts" whereby parties freed from daily occupational obligations gathered to distribute folders and tracts door-to-door over a prescribed area, leaving the seed thus sown either to bear fruit or wither by the wayside, as the case might be, became a practice which subsisted through the years. There was always the element of light relief, as for instance when a somewhat surly-looking individual, taking the proffered tract, demanded "What are you, Socialists?". "No, Bible Students!" "H'm, just as bad!" The work was onerous, the tracts were not like those of modern times, a few inches each way in size, but were the dimensions of newspapers and relatively heavy to carry in quantity. The younger members of the fraternity adapted their bicycles (cars were few and not possessed by many in those days and certainly not by teenagers) to carry the heavy weights of tracts; thus loaded they pedalled

their way somewhat uncertainly at imminent danger to life and limb to strategic points from which the distributors would replenish their stocks from time to time. The writer distinctly remembers, when thus loaded, coming a cropper on the tramlines in the Old Kent Road, South London, on one such occasion at a much later date, with considerable damage to the bike and some to the rider. What happened to the tracts is not remembered.

An appreciable part of this activity was carried on by colporteurs, a term meaning an itinerant distributor of religious literature. From time to time, various brethren in a position so to do, gave themselves to this work, travelling from town to town and calling on householders to introduce what by this time was being called "the Truth". The ordinary literature was free but a nominal charge of one shilling (5p today) was made for the "Divine Plan" which for a clothbound book of 350 pages was not bad even in those days; this was to avoid frivolous acceptances and give some assurance that the book would be valued and used. In the earlier years, 1887 to 1903, there was not so much of this in evidence. C. H. Houston of Edinburgh travelled fairly extensively in Scotland and on one occasion disposed of 420 volumes in fourteen days. By 1900 there were four colporteurs in regular service and in that year a quarter of a million books and tracts were placed in thirty-nine towns. In 1901 that output was doubled and in 1902 attained 700,000. But the real day of the colporteurs was from 1910 onwards, when public awareness of the Bible Students was becoming general and the generally more or less Christian outlook of people in general facilitated acceptance and a hearing ear. The visits of the Pastor to this country and the public meetings addressed by him were evoking much public interest and the itinerant colporteurs found much to encourage them in their work, self-sacrificing though it was. Going from town to town, they had to find lodgings where they could, sometimes, but not always, with brethren of like faith. More often, when in country districts, they did find themselves at times like the Master they served, having nowhere to lay their heads. When it is realised that between 1910 and 1915 the brethren of this country had succeeded in distributing fifty-four million pamphlets and

three-quarters of a million volumes of "Scripture Studies" one has to accept that the achievement meant sheer devotion to what was universally accepted as the work of Harvest – the Harvest of the Age.

Much of the work of these colporteurs is of necessity incapable of being put on record. They served, in the main, largely in the background, rarely able to attach themselves to a regular meeting and only able to fellowship with their brethren when operating in a town where a meeting existed; the nature of their calling meant that in the main they worked in areas where there were no meetings. It was largely in consequence of their endeavours that new groups were formed and regular meetings commenced. The colporteurs were of all types and from every strata of society, having this one thing in common, the burning passion to give themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. There was Archibald Rock, ex-military man, still erect and stiff as a ram-rod, who could be seen in the period 1907–1916 in the towns and villages of South-East England and the Home Counties. There was his brother Robert, converted prize-fighter, still bearing physical signs of that life, who could chill the blood with occasional reminiscences of his victories and defeats in the prize ring and experiences on the more seamy side of London life – yet now as gentle as a child and utterly persuasive as he went from door to door with tracts and books. Down in the far South-West was Mabel Coombes, a diminutive semi-crippled lady of uncertain age and the heart of a lion. Until sheer old age compelled her to stop, she dragged herself from door to door and more than one group in Devon and Cornwall owed its inception to her labours. And when she could do no more she retired uncomplainingly to an old peoples' home and went quietly to meet her Lord in 1951. Lily Blake, not very tall, looking as if a puff of wind would blow her away, trudged from door to door in central England through rain and shine, unperturbed and quietly confident. Her irrepressible sense of humour came to the top when she recounted how on one occasion the Rector of the parish had warned his flock in his parish magazine to "beware a little lady with a silver tongue who is going from house to house in the village seeking to interest people in Millennial Dawn". For ever afterwards Lily

was referred to among the brethren as “the little lady with the silver tongue”. Albert Lloyd, whose origin was a bit of a mystery – he used to say that he was born in the gutter and brought up in the gutter – brought his natural exuberance of spirit to bear upon his work in the North of England, as for example when upon one occasion, receiving no answer to his knock but feeling certain that there was someone inside, and noticing a butcher’s cart in the road, he reasoned that the butcher would soon be calling. He rapped again and called through the letter-box “Meat! Meat!” and sure enough the lady came. “Oh, I thought you were the butcher!” “So I am, madam, and here it is. Meat in due season, for the household of faith.” Whether the lady recognised the Scriptural allusion is not recorded, but at any rate Albert disposed of another Divine Plan. Victoria Wright, statuesque and every inch a lady, impressed all upon whom she called with her reasoned and dispassionate exposition of the Divine Plan. Thomas Stracy worked the South Coast and half a dozen groups in Southern England owed their inauguration to his work. And despite the discomforts and hazards, the colporteurs maintained a serene happiness which stemmed from the fact that they were preaching a happy gospel. The Lollards of the Middle Ages were known in their time as “God’s glee men” because they went about with happy faces singing praises to God. The colporteurs were something like that. They had a message for all who would listen, a message of hope and happiness, good tidings of great joy for all people, and it had to shine out from their faces. In these later more prosaic times it must be difficult for anyone who never knew those days to visualise the spirit of spontaneous joy which animated these who went out with the news of earth’s coming glory.

In 1894 there was one colporteur in full time service, in 1900 there were four. By 1913 there were ninety-three, and every part of the country was being covered. The modest book depot which had been started in North London in 1891 under the supervision of Thomas Hart, one of the elders, had long since been outgrown by successive moves, first to Forest Gate and then to Eversholt Street; by 1911 it was in more commodious premises at Craven Terrace, Paddington, and the demands of the colporteurs for more and more supplies were taxing even

those facilities. A major portion of the 130,000 volumes of "Scripture Studies" which went out in that year were placed by the efforts of the colporteurs, not to speak of several millions of pamphlets on various subjects which also went into the hands of the public.

It was inevitable that the fervour of the brethren, coupled with their steadily increasing numbers, should begin to call for the holding of conventions in the principal cities, usually lasting several days and at a public holiday time, at which the tenets of the Faith could be expounded from the platform coupled with exhortations to Christian living and reflections on the signs of the times in connection with proclaimed expectations of the imminent Millennium. Such conventions remained, and still remain, a feature of the fellowship. After the memorable London and Glasgow conventions associated with Brother Russell's second visit to this country in 1903 the pattern was set; national conventions were held year by year in London and Glasgow, and, commencing in 1907, Manchester, which by then boasted more than three hundred members with a considerable number of small groups located in adjacent towns. What had by now become an accepted feature of church life in the growing community was maintained by similar conventions in 1908 and 1909, and thus the ground was laid for what was probably the most momentous year in the history of the movement – 1910.

1910 became legendary. It was the year of the Royal Albert Hall meetings at which Brother Russell, on his fifth visit to England, caught the imagination of the British public. Nothing like it had ever been seen before; nothing like it was ever seen again. The conventions of that year were associated with public meetings attended by thousands of people, and the brethren caught the infection. Public meetings there had been previously, from 1908 onwards, in cities like Bristol, where Brother Russell spoke to a thousand people on "The Overthrow of Satan's Empire", at St Andrews Hall, Glasgow, to nearly five thousand on "The Return from Hell", and in four or five other cities with a combined attendance of eight thousand. It was in 1908 that a somewhat humorous episode occurred when A. E. Williamson, one of Brother Russell's colleagues accompanying him, was

giving a similar public lecture at Otley. Otley was a small mining village not far from Bradford, and in the early 1900s six Methodist ministers and lay preachers in the vicinity had all accepted the Truth and commenced a group. This, coupled with the visit of the American preacher, evoked the villagers' interest, and the local reporter, making the usual enquiries appropriate to his calling, misheard the appellation "Millennial Dawnists" as "Aluminium Dawnists", by which name the brethren at Otley were, locally, for a long time subsequently known.

This activity continued throughout 1908 when Brother Russell addressed three thousand at Manchester after the Manchester brethren had distributed 150,000 leaflets advertising the meeting, another two thousand in the City Hall, Glasgow, twenty-five hundred in Edinburgh and twelve hundred in London. All this was only a "run-up" to the most eventful year of public meetings the brethren were to know.

In May of 1910 a party of American brethren arrived in England with Brother Russell – his fifth visit – for the purpose of conducting a planned series of public meetings all over the country commencing with the Royal Albert Hall in London. The party was preceded by one of his co-workers, G. C. Driscoll, who was also an official of the USA Press Association; his presence was for the purpose of enlisting the co-operation of the British Press. A month later the main party, which had been on the Continent, arrived and were met by a hundred brethren of the London community, headed by one of its most active elders, John Gentle. The church had put out three-quarters of a million large four-page leaflets advertising the Albert Hall meetings and were ready for the fray.

The first meeting at the Albert Hall was on May 8. Seven thousand five hundred people packed the auditorium to hear Brother Russell. The occasion was a sombre one, for King Edward VII had died the previous day and the nation was in mourning. The advertised subject was "The Great Hereafter" and the mood of the people was to listen.

The Chairman of the meeting was Brother (Colonel) Sawyer, a bluff old soldier who had known the Truth for a number of years and had the habit, in private conversation, of

referring to Brother Russell as "the Archbishop" and to Jesse Hemery, now manager of the London literature depot, as "the Bishop of London". After the opening hymn he introduced the speaker, "Pastor Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, New York, a well-known preacher of the Gospel, and author of 'Studies in the Scriptures'". Pastor Russell, he said "magnified and illuminated the majestic Plan of God, the mind and purpose of God in creation, the fall, the redemption, the restoration, perfection and salvation of the human race, through the name and merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

Before commencing his address, the Pastor referred to the death of the King the previous day, and expressed his sympathy. He suggested that as a mark of respect his hearers should stand silently for a minute. The entire concourse rose in their seats and stood, quietly, until the voice of the Pastor was heard upraised in prayer, and then, the tones of the great organ pealing what was said to be the deceased King's favourite hymn, "Nearer, my God, to thee".

Only then did Pastor Russell commence his discourse, to which the vast audience listened with marked attention. At its end, and after the closing prayer and the benediction, the audience started for the doors. Their progress was suddenly arrested. The organist, Brother Thomas Stracy, commenced to render the "Dead March in Saul", a final tribute to the late King. The entire concourse stood still with bowed heads until the music died away, and then, as it was recorded at the time, remained still "in a silence so profound that it was necessary to pronounce the benediction again in order to disperse them". So ended the most momentous witness to the coming Kingdom that has ever been known in the history of the movement.

Two more meetings were held in the Albert Hall on the two following Sundays, with attendances of 6000 and 5000 respectively, to hear the Pastor speak on "Millennial Refreshing" and "The Overthrow of Satan's Empire".

Five months later he returned to England to address a second series of Albert Hall meetings. The response was equal to that of the first occasion. For three Sundays in succession he faced increasing audiences; 4000 to hear "God's Message to the Jews", 6000 for "God's Message to Christendom", and 7600 for

"The Great White Throne". Public interest was such that nearly seven hundred British newspapers carried reports of the meetings, quoting his words at greater or lesser length. It was obvious that something more had to be done and so six further meetings were advertised for local areas in London; the Pastor addressed these at Acton Baths, Alexandra Palace, Bermondsey Town Hall, East Ham Town Hall, and Woolwich Town Hall. The attendances at these local meetings ranged between six hundred to twelve hundred at each venue.

All this activity gave reason for holding a national convention of the brethren in London, which, in order to accommodate the numbers who would be attending, was held in Whitefield's Old Tabernacle in City Road, Central London. Here Pastor Russell addressed the conventioners from the pulpit in which both George Whitefield and John Wesley had preached in the 18th century.

The rest of the country was not neglected. Between these two sets of meetings Brother Russell toured the country, meeting with enthusiastic responses both from the brethren and the public at each place he visited. A convention at Glasgow mustered five hundred brethren and over 3000 at the public meeting; Manchester, now a rapidly growing community, contributed four hundred brethren and two public meetings of over one thousand at each. Some half dozen other Midland cities together with Belfast and Dublin were visited with public meetings at each place, and so a memorable year came to its close.

One of the consequences of the 1910 meetings was the onset of the "newspaper work". The noticeable increase of public interest in the message and work of Pastor Russell soon brought the daily Press to the doorstep and it was indicated that the British newspaper world would by no means be averse to featuring his sermons in their columns. The consequence was that a syndicate was set up with an office in the Strand, London, fulfilling the function of receiving the sermons as they were preached in USA or England, and distributing them to every daily and weekly newspaper in the scheme. Commencing in 1910, by the end of 1911 no less than three hundred national dailies and provincial weeklies were publishing the sermons at

length as a regular feature and the combined number of copies of such papers reached a maximum of twelve millions annually which implied that virtually every newspaper reader in the country came into contact with the message. Many thousands of enquiries were received in the London office in consequence. The onset of the 1914 war with its paper shortages began to limit the scale of this witness, but it continued during the ensuing ten years in diminishing volume, eventually developing into a system whereby local churches and individuals found local paper editors who were willing to accept news and details of their activities and special functions for their columns and this practice continued for many years thereafter.

It is impossible to say how many people thus received and believed the message without avowedly throwing in their lot with the Bible Students. The number of known active members of the movement bears no relation to the number of those who believed, attended meetings when they could, and carried the vision with them to the end of their days. Workers in later years frequently came into contact with such, who had the “Scripture Studies” on their bookshelves and still avowed belief. The fruits of the Harvest were by no means confined to those who became “members of the brethren”. There were many thousands of others.

The euphoria created by these events was now to give rise to a significant proposal. The London Church was the largest and most influential in the country. It comprised eight mutually independent self-governing churches in various parts of the Metropolis. Brother Russell was now to suggest that they combined forces to establish an impressive congregation in an appropriate building in Central London – and so events moved forward to the opening of the London Tabernacle.



A. Tait



W. Knox



J. Edgar



W. Johnston



D. Morrison



A. Kirkwood



E. Mackenzie



J. Wilson

GLASGOW



A. Raynor



W. Drinkwater



A. Hodson

NOTTINGHAM



— Ward



— Glass



S. Smith



— Gates

MANCHESTER SOME ELDERS OF PROVINCIAL CITIES CIRCA. 1910



Royal Albert Hall, London

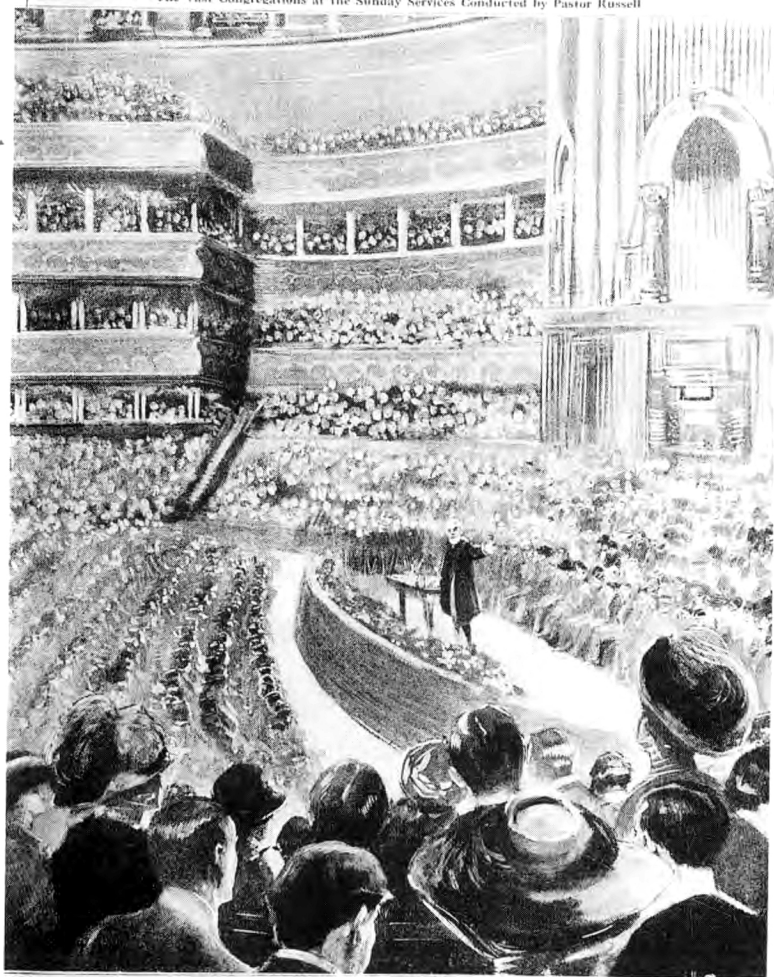


Pastor Russell preaching at the Royal Albert Hall,
May 8, 1910

(Reprint from "Black & White", London, 1905)

A Great Preacher at the Albert Hall

The Vast Congregations at the Sunday Services Conducted by Pastor Russell



A Great American Preacher in London

Pastor Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, N. Y., as he appeared preaching in the Royal Albert Hall on the past three Sundays. Pastor Russell possesses a delightful personality; he is modest and unassuming; to meet him is to be stimulated to greater Christian endeavor. His firm belief in the gospel of Christ is, without doubt, the secret of his wonderful power as an exponent of the inspired Word, and the great auditorium of the Albert Hall on the occasions of his appearances there as a preacher has been crowded.

**Report in "Black and White", London,
of the three successive Albert Hall meetings**

3

THE LONDON TABERNACLE

THE RISING tide of enthusiasm in this country, especially in the London area, following the Albert Hall meetings, led Brother Russell to consider the merit of establishing a central London church of repute which should stand as a visible symbol of the Faith and a rallying point for those in Britain who had espoused it. The two principal centres were London and Glasgow, followed closely by Manchester. As the national capital, London was the obvious choice, and one object of the Pastor's visit in 1911 was to find and acquire such a church and see it established. By now the London brethren numbered in all something like three hundred at Forest Gate and eight hundred spread over the eight area groups affiliated together as the London Church, – Lewisham alone is known to have exceeded 100 in 1911, and while the original North London group was still the largest, most of the others did not fall far short of Lewisham. The meeting at Eversholt Street where the Society now had its headquarters was the smallest but had outgrown its capacity; altogether London had the largest congregation of Bible Students of any city in the country.

So Jesse Hemery found himself accompanying the Pastor on a tour of London in the search for a suitable building. Jesse himself must have felt some satisfaction at the turn of events. Eversholt Street was by no means in the most salubrious part of London and he may well have embarked upon the quest with visions of a fine church building in a high-class quarter with himself as pastor-in-charge. If there were any such dreams they were rather rudely shattered when the Pastor found a place which he thought would be an admirable choice for the purpose.

That building was the Ring at Blackfriars, south of the

Thames, in an area compared with which even Eversholt Street would seem palatial by comparison. The Ring was a large circular building built and used for boxing tournaments, and at the relevant time was apparently up for sale. Why it took the Pastor's fancy is a bit of a puzzle; maybe its circular shape reminded him of the Albert Hall, but there the resemblance ended. As a solution to the problem it was entirely unsuitable; the fact that it was on the south side of the river and all the main line railway terminals save one were on the north side would have made access very difficult. Jesse Hemery lost no time in steering the Pastor to a more congenial area, the West End.

Here they met with better fortune. Craven Hill Congregational Chapel was for sale. About a mile west of Marble Arch, adjacent to Hyde Park, it was in the centre of Bayswater, at that time a favoured residential area for the "higher ups". Better still, the mansion adjacent to the Chapel, 34 Craven Terrace, was available for lease, an ideal location for the Society's headquarters. Negotiations were entered into and quite soon the building was acquired and renamed the London Tabernacle.

Built, it is believed, about 1750–1800, the Tabernacle (it is not there now) was a typical Nonconformist place of worship of the period. The seating capacity was 1200. Three short flights of steps led up from the street to three arched double entrance doors. The centre one gave access to an inner vestibule from which two doors led into the Tabernacle proper. The doors on right and left led into lobbies giving access to the interior and also to two stairways each, one leading up to the gallery, which surrounded the auditorium on three sides, and the other down to a lower storey known as the "schoolroom" extending over the whole area of the Tabernacle. One lobby also gave access to a long room flanking one side of the building, useful for auxiliary purposes. Below ground, similarly flanking the schoolroom, there were other rooms, store-rooms, kitchen premises and other amenities, and a baptismal pool. At the front end, below the pulpit, the auditorium widened out at each side into two flanks furnished with seating at right angles to the centre portion, the gallery following suit. The pulpit, raised fairly high, projected from the front of a semi-circular alcove large enough

to seat ten or twenty people, (as often happened at conventions) approached by a stairway. Thus the officiating minister was surrounded by his congregation on three sides, and sometimes by a fourth at his rear.

Externally it was – or had been in its heyday – a handsome edifice, with sculptured stone window embrasures and carved minarets pointing up to the skies. All in all, it was a building eminently suited for the seat of a vigorous and progressive church life.

The London ecclesias – with the exception of Forest Gate – fell in with the suggestion that they closed down their separate identities and amalgamated to form one congregation at the Tabernacle for weekly worship. This meant that instead of eight distinct churches, each having its own elders and deacons and managing its own affairs, there was one single and much larger ecclesia incorporating all the elders and deacons of its constituent fellowships. Sunday evening meetings were still held in several suburbs for the benefit of those who could not travel to the centre and there were a number of week-night meetings in various suburban districts associated with the Tabernacle. The intent was to gather a large and impressive congregation associated with a well-appointed building in a superior part of London to facilitate the work of spreading the good tidings. It is to be feared that in the enthusiasm of the moment the brethren failed to remember the Apostle's warning against "making a fair show in the flesh", that development into a large and powerful organisation with vested interests can bring its own problems. Five years later some of them began to wonder if it had been such a good idea after all.

Forest Gate did not join in the coalition. The Pastor tried to talk them into it and seemed unable to grasp their argument that to uproot an established Church of three hundred people in order to attend another Church on the opposite side of London to the detriment of their evangelical work in their own district was hardly the wisest use of their resources. It was left to one of the elders, Alex Guy, to try the diplomatic approach. He suggested that Brother Russell accompany him on a trial journey from Forest Gate to the Tabernacle. The Pastor fell right into this one. By the time he had travelled by bus from

Forest Gate to the nearest Underground station, thence to the City, a longish walk to the Bank Tube station, thence by Central London line to Lancaster Gate, and walked round to the Tabernacle, Brother Russell was completely exhausted. "I had no idea London was so big" he told Alex Guy. "I quite agree with you that your brethren could not be expected to make such a journey every Sunday." So London henceforward possessed two main centres, Forest Gate for East London and London Tabernacle for North, West and South. (It has to be admitted that many of the South London brethren had even longer journeys to the Tabernacle; for some it meant two hours or more, morning and evening.)

The inaugural meeting of the newly opened church was held on April 3rd, 1911, Pastor Russell being the preacher. He had already, in 1910, been invited by unanimous vote to become the Pastor of the London Church and now the Tabernacle was to be the seat of that Church and his Pastorate. In view of his commitments – he was already Pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle and the New York City Temple – he expected to be in this country only for two periods in each year. This arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to the London Church which already had plenty of able elders available to conduct the meetings and guide their destinies. Brother Russell's Pastorate was very largely an honorary one.

The British Press was interested in this development and gave it good publicity. The national "Daily News" of April 18th, 1911, came out with a full-page account on page 3 with pictures of the Tabernacle and its Pastor. Under the caption "Timely interview and statement from Pastor Russell, London and Brooklyn" the leader-writer said, in part, "On Easter Sunday, in the London Tabernacle, Pastor Russell, of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, and a figure of international reputation and influence, became the official head of a large London congregation of Christians, thus securing an admirable centre of proposed religious activity At the Sunday morning session, Pastor Russell formally accepted the pastorate of the London congregation Following this, Pastor Russell delivered his Easter sermon on 'The Resurrection'" Both the words of acceptance, the Easter sermon, and his answers to

the interviewer's questions respecting his message and work, were reproduced in full, covering the complete page of seventeen by twenty-four inches, the usual size of daily papers in those days, seven columns wide. The interview, thus widely disseminated over London and the country, rendered the London Tabernacle well known overnight.

The "Daily Graphic" of April 8 said "Pastor Russell, who for a number of years has been a frequent visitor to our shores has accepted the pastorate of the London Tabernacle. The advent of Pastor Russell brings to this city and country a man of international reputation who is known almost as well in Great Britain as he is in America Reputed to be the most popular preacher in America, it is noteworthy that he should become prominently identified with religious effort in England We see the wonderful opportunity for doing good enjoyed by Pastor Russell, and there is every prospect that Londoners will be greatly benefited by his coming"

Said the "Daily Chronicle" under the caption "American Spurgeon; Pastor Russell's new work at Paddington Tabernacle". "Pastor Russell, of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, known as the 'American Spurgeon', has accepted a call from the congregation of the London Tabernacle, Paddington It is hoped to make the Paddington church the centre of carefully organised and sustained evangelistic effort for the metropolis on the lines which for many years made Spurgeon's Tabernacle in South London one of the largest and most powerful agencies of religious endeavour and social reform in this country"

The "London Globe" with a heading "American minister for London" had this to say: "Pastor Russell, of New York, has accepted the pastorate of the London Tabernacle, located at Lancaster Gate, W, and is to officially assume his new duties on the 16th inst"

The "Christian World" contributed "Pastor Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, has accepted the pastorate of the London Tabernacle, Paddington, which will be the London headquarters of his work Mr Russell will give as much time to his work in London as his other engagements permit."

And just so that America knew all about it, the London

representative of the "New York Herald" cabled an account to his head office in New York which appeared in the issue of April 17. He said, in part, "Brooklyn Pastor in pulpit of the London Tabernacle. The Rev Charles Taze Russell Begins Pastorate in British City". "The Rev Charles Taze Russell, known as Pastor Russell of Brooklyn, has accepted the pastorate of the London Tabernacle. Mr Russell, who is now here, hopes to make the Paddington church the centre of a great religious effort on lines similar to those of Dr Charles Spurgeon, the famous Pastor of the South London Tabernacle. Mr Russell occupied the pulpit of his new church this afternoon, preaching on the subject of the Resurrection"

With all this publicity, coupled with the effect of the Albert Hall meetings of the previous year, which at that time had also been fully reported in the newspapers, the London Tabernacle got off to a flying start. The congregation, which amounted to about eight hundred at the start, increased fairly rapidly and by 1916 was the largest congregation of Bible Students in the world, approaching the fifteen hundred mark. In that latter year there were nineteen elders and over fifty deacons serving the varied interests and undertakings of an active community. The 1200 seating capacity of the Tabernacle – fifty per cent greater than Brother Russell's own Brooklyn Tabernacle – also made it the largest Bible Students' church building in the world, then or since.

One of the earliest projects of the new amalgamation was a kind of intensive seminar on Bible archaeology within the precincts of the British Museum. One of the London deacons, Wordsworth Jones, Oriental prizewinner of Durham University, held an official position at the Museum, and was able to initiate and carry out a scheme whereby all who would of the congregation could be conducted around and have the exhibits explained from the Biblical standpoint as they went, in a much more thorough and detailed fashion than was afforded by the usual public conducted tours. By way of a start he selected six able deacons and gave them a thorough briefing on the technical aspects of the subject. They in turn conducted successive parties of brethren round the Museum to the satisfaction of all concerned. Something like three hundred brethren enjoyed this

facility during 1912 and the practice continued in lessening degree for four or five years thereafter. It is true that some of the co-relations of exhibits with Bible history have proved unjustified in the light of discoveries of half a century later, but this was, even then, no new phenomenon, neither is it now. The value of Wordsworth Jones' initiative was in its effect of relating the discoveries of science to the historical aspect of the Bible, and interpreting them in the light of the then modern knowledge, all of which constituted them an invaluable aid to faith, one which many Christians ignore or disparage to their disadvantage.

The continuing increase in the volume of work handled by the London office of the Society, now located at 34 Craven Terrace, adjacent to the Tabernacle, necessitated a corresponding increase in managerial effort; there was more to be done than Jesse Hemery with a few assistants could handle unaided. The establishment of the Tabernacle therefore became the occasion for Brother Russell to appoint two co-managers to constitute a managerial triumvirate of three, to reside at 34 Craven Terrace and administer the work from there. His choice for the two new managers fell on two well-known and respected brethren, William Crawford and Henry Shearn. These two were to figure very prominently in later history.

William Crawford had been a member of the first Glasgow church, established in 1882 – he probably joined it about 1885 – and was an elder of the enlarged Glasgow church when the Edgars came on the scene in 1897, until 1911 when he left that city to take up his new duties in London. Henry Shearn, a London business man, first came into contact with the “Divine Plan” in 1906 and entered into close correspondence with Brother Russell; he entertained the latter at his home on the occasion of the Pastor's 1909 visit and in consequence of that time of contact retired from his business, donated money to the Society to further its work, settled his family in a Somerset cottage, and took up full-time colporteur service travelling the country spreading the message. During this period he held office as an elder in the Bristol church. Now, in 1911, he came to London to reside with his family at 34 Craven Terrace, and found himself fully occupied supervising the Pilgrim work

among the brethren and the Newspaper work, the publishing of articles and sermons on the faith in daily and weekly newspapers all over the country.

The acquirement of the London Tabernacle brought to the surface various legal questions regarding the holding of property; in order to resolve these questions and others connected with a work of increasing magnitude, a British organisation to be called the International Bible Students Association was created. This name had been used to some extent in an informal fashion in the United States since 1910 to denote work carried on by individual churches as distinct from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, which legally was a purely business organisation under US law for the publishing and distribution of Biblical literature. The International Bible Students Association was to serve the same purpose under British law and it was formally incorporated in London on 30 June 1914 under the Companies Act of 1908. Its officers and trustees comprised C. T. Russell (President), J. Hemery (vice-president), H. J. Shearn (Secretary) and W. Crawford (Treasurer). The practical effect was to put the entire work in Great Britain under British control with the paternal oversight of C. T. Russell and the Society providing literature. In practice, of course, since there was no dissent from the leadership of Brother Russell, the UK and USA, organisations worked together in perfect harmony and the IBSA became looked upon as an adjunct to the main Society.

Brother Russell's last visit to this country was in 1914. After this year public lectures were organised by practically every local church in their own vicinities with varying degrees of success. Through the years of the first World War conditions were obviously not conducive to this kind of activity and it was very largely scaled down. After the war it was renewed and at first was as effective as in former times. In London a highly organised campaign of sets of four successive weekly lectures followed by the endeavour to establish a regular local meeting in the area resulted in such local meetings in north, south and west London shooting up from eighteen upon the establishment of the Tabernacle in 1911 to over sixty in 1916. These public lectures were often not without their humorous side, as for

instance when Hubert Thackway was due to address an audience of a thousand at a large West London cinema (cinemas did not open on Sundays in those days hence were always available, at a price, for public meetings). Upon arrival at the venue, the appointed Chairman found to his dismay that there was no platform. The screen came down sheer to the floor with a space in front bounded by a brass rail six feet high carrying a blue curtain behind which the orchestra sat. (In the days of silent films an orchestra or pianist, according to the size of the cinema, out of sight of audience, played appropriate music as the film proceeded.) A hasty search of the premises yielded nothing more than a kitchen table and a rather rickety chair. There was nothing for it but to make use of the materials available and hope for the best. At the time of opening the meeting the audience sat, gazing at a blue curtain surmounted by a white screen. There appeared, just above the rail, a head – a head, incidentally, acutely conscious of its position. A moment's lapse, and then, rather uncertainly, due to the rather uncertain state of the chair, the head rose several feet into the air to reveal the upper part of its associated body. The customary procedure ensued, the audience was introduced to Mr Thackway, who unfortunately was not visible because he was down below, behind the curtain. The visible body disappeared, downwards, followed by the head, again equally uncertainly. A short time elapsed, giving the audience opportunity to contemplate the white screen and the blue curtain. Another head appeared, surveying the, by now, rather bemused, audience impassively. A short interval, and the relevant body. For the next hour and a half Hubert Thackway had to remember that he was not on a platform but on a kitchen table which threatened to go to pieces under his not inconsiderable weight at any moment.

The lecture ended, the body disappeared, followed by its head. The first one appeared again, and then its body. The usual things were said; it was hoped the audience had enjoyed the evening's proceedings – they probably had – and would those who would like to know more leave their names with one of the ushers at the doors. Then the body disappeared, and the head. The chair held out gallantly to the last.

This was the kind of incident that provided light relief at

subsequent Sunday meetings when the faithful enquired “how did the lecture go?” – as for example when Theodore Seeck went to a village hall on the outskirts of London with his chairman, again to find there was no platform and only a table the condition of which rendered it a dead cert that if put into use the lecture would certainly experience a premature and catastrophic conclusion. The only other solid object available was a dead palm tree in a large pot. The chairman concerned, being at the time still technically a teenager, had no hesitation in ripping out the tree from its pot and standing his speaker on the earth, in the pot, behind the table hidden by a table-cloth. The speaker was under the unfortunate necessity of standing as stiff and as still as a statue during the entire course of his lecture and all would have been well if the pot, halfway through, had not begun to wobble. The chairman had to take remedial action for the rest of the meeting by kneeling on the floor, behind the pot, below the speaker, hidden by the table-cloth, holding the pot firmly to avoid a catastrophe. It is uncertain who was the more exhausted at the end of the lecture, speaker or chairman.

These public meetings were approached and carried through in a spirit of light-heartedness because the message they proclaimed was one of joy and happiness. There was no “flee from the wrath to come” element in the proclamation, no threatening the terrors of Hell for the non-believer. The evangel was one of hope and comfort, one which exalted both the Love and Wisdom of God, and extended a hope to all mankind, one which made sense of the apparent paradox that a world of evil and disease and death can exist contemporaneously with the existence of an all-loving and all-powerful God. Plenty of people came to these meetings and went away with a new hope in their lives even if they did not there and then throw in their lot with the Bible Students. Plenty looked out for the announcements of these public meetings and went to them time and again. The enthusiasm of the brethren and an increasing response on the part of the public combined to make the years from 1910 to 1916 the best ever. Attendances in the larger towns of the size of, say, Plymouth, Tunbridge Wells, Cheltenham, Hull, York, Stirling, were recorded from one thousand to fifteen hundred, the small towns registered five hundred upwards. Glasgow in 1913 had a

meeting attended by six thousand with over eight hundred enquiries at its close for further information and contact. In the same year over three thousand crowded into Manchester Hippodrome, many of whom stood for two hours listening to the speaker; even then hundreds were turned away.

The light relief continued. A meeting at Nottingham towards the end of this period was being addressed by one J. Faulds Ross who possessed the distinction of having been a professional actor before he came into contact with the Truth. He brought his dramatic skill with him and it coloured his style of delivery so that the brethren in Nottingham knew what to expect. Now one of the sisters possessed a small son who was renowned for mischief – a not unusual trait. He wanted to come to the meeting – most of the speakers had a style free from the sanctimonious which rendered them appealing to the very young as well as to their elders. He was allowed to come after the exaction of a promise that there would be no mischief. So the meeting opened in the usual manner and the speaker warmed to his subject. He came at length to the point where he dwelt upon the sufferings endured by men of God in Old Testament times and their endurance of unheard-of atrocities. Quoting the memorable passage in the Book of Hebrews, he told how their relentless enemies pursued and harried them from place to place, tortured them and put them to death; “they were stoned” he declaimed, striking a characteristic pose “they were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth!” He stopped for dramatic effect and fixed his gaze on his spell-bound audience, and there was a great silence.

And into that silence, from high up at the rear of the gallery, there came a clear, incisive voice, reaching to all parts of the building.

“Villains!” it said.

And the spell was broken.

There is no record of what happened when the small boy got home. He must at any rate have been listening intently to the lecture.

A variant style of meeting was initiated by the brethren in South Wales. They were mostly miners in the coalfields and not sufficiently endowed with this world's goods to engage large halls with all the outlay for extras entailed. They took to the mountain-sides outside the villages and held open-air meetings, night after night, with crowded audiences. For many years afterwards every South Wales town and village had its local community of Bible Students.

To some extent this great accession of public interest would have been due in part to the imminence of the widely proclaimed year 1914 which was expected to witness the commencement of the period of transition from the world as it now is to the world presided over by the Lord Christ at his Advent and the coming of the Millennium. Although the faithful were led to expect this transition to be effected over a much shorter period of time than has proved to be the case, the fact that the initial phase, the onset of devastating world war, predicted thirty years earlier, did occur right on time, had a profound effect; even the scoffers were temporarily silenced, and interest in the message continued relatively unabated during the dark years of the war, limited only by the effect of war conditions upon such functions as public meetings. Looking back from the vantage point of the closing years of the century, it is realised that C. T. Russell was correct enough in his expectations except that the programme has taken, or more correctly is taking, a century to work out instead of the expected ten years. No one familiar with his writings can deny that the world, politically, religiously, economically, and ecologically, is in just that state he foresaw nearly a century ago.

At this time, from about 1915 onward, there came what was called the "Class Extension Work". This was a planned arrangement directed to organise new regular group meetings particularly in the suburbs of the cities. By 1911 there were about a hundred and fifty regular groups meeting in "classes" or "churches" aggregating nearly five thousand brethren and the effect of the 1910 meetings was such as to inspire all these to follow that up by a further concerted evangelical outreach. The general system was to hold a series of four or five successive weekly Sunday public meetings in a suitable hall at which

salient features of the Faith were propounded. At the end of the series announcement was made from the platform asking if anyone present was prepared to offer their home for a regular discussion group on these themes – half a century later some of the established denominations tried the same innovation and have met with much the same successful outcome. Almost always an offer – sometimes two or three – would be forthcoming and all interested were invited to attend. Several of the mature brethren would be present at the start to organise and direct the general trend of such a meeting; after perhaps a year or so the attendants would be sufficiently mature to take over the oversight themselves. This was always the objective and so a new fully-fledged fellowship was born. Most of the larger city churches embarked on this activity on a fairly large scale with eminently encouraging results. Four fellowships on the North-East coast in the Newcastle-Hartlepool area held fourteen sets of such meetings in 1912 and in consequence twelve new fellowships were formed having a total new membership of over two hundred, some of these in later years grew to memberships of a hundred or more each. To advertise these meetings nearly half a million pamphlets were distributed, more than three thousand people attended and nearly a thousand “Divine Plan” volumes were taken by the more definitely interested of these.

Glasgow a year later had much the same experience. Seventeen sets of meetings attended by three thousand people in response to a leaflet distribution of three hundred thousand yielded six new fellowships. London conducted these Class Extension meetings on a generous scale; throughout 1915 to 1920 they were always being held in one area or another of the Metropolis, the scale of London suburbia offering plenty of scope. By 1917 there were more than seventy local weeknight meetings in North, West and South London affiliated to the London Church and something like fifteen in East London with the Forest Gate Church. The effect of Brother Russell’s 1910 visit and the Albert Hall meetings was still in evidence.

The newly converted often caught the infection and started out on their own on a basis of enthusiasm untempered by experience. An infant fellowship in a Hampshire town round

about 1922 resolved to pass on the good news themselves in a neighbouring village and appealed to London for help by providing a speaker. Came an urgent message from the office to one of the London elders on a Saturday afternoon requesting him to go to the village concerned the next day to deliver said lecture, arrangements in the hands of local brethren. Never having heard of the place, recourse to appropriate works of reference revealed it as located in Hampshire. It had a railway station and the service was once in three hours. It was a January day, bitterly cold, and the snow was on the ground. When the hapless elder got out of the train he looked around and saw no village, just snow-covered fields, snow-covered trees, and one snow-covered cottage, bearing the magic sign "Teas". Enquiry at the cottage revealed that the village was a mile away. On the basis of the sign further enquiry elicited that the only available beverage was Horlick's Malted Milk. On the principle that beggars cannot be choosers the same was duly furnished and consumed. Then came the walk to the village, which when reached presented the usual collection of cottages, a church, an inn, and a village hall, all shut and no sign of life anywhere. There was, however, a notice on the village hall door announcing the meeting, so the – by now rather cold – speaker knew that he was in the right place. But no sign of any brethren. And still a couple of hours to meeting time.

In the circumstances it seemed the only thing was to return to the cottage. There was at least a fire there. And Horlick's Malted Milk.

Two Malted Milks later the return to the village began. It was still lifeless. And still cold. And still no brethren. And the door was still locked. The speaker recalled that one of the Christian virtues is patience. So he waited.

Half an hour before advertised starting time a motor coach drew up, and out tumbled a dozen people. This was the responsible fellowship and this their very first public lecture. And they themselves were the first to admit that they had not the faintest idea how to go about it.

Fortunately, they had got the key. The party trooped in. It was as cold inside as out. It was explained to the faithful that one could hardly expect people to be at their best listening to a Bible

lecture when the air temperature was more or less below freezing point. A quick search revealed several portable paraffin heaters in a back room and before long several stalwart countrymen were walking round the hall swinging the heaters like censers at imminent risk of setting the whole place on fire.

People started coming in. It was necessary to get ready. Enquiry was made as to which of them was to act as chairman and introduce the speaker. They had not thought of that. Finally one brother decided that as he was the leader in their studies he had better be the chairman. Progress!

"Have you been a chairman before?" "No." "Do you know what a chairman does?" "No." Have you ever spoken to people from a platform before?" "No." He began to look a little apprehensive. Perhaps the progress was a little illusory.

A quick retreat to the little room where the heaters had been found, and a careful instruction that exactly at the starting time he should precede the speaker on to the platform, explain to the audience who he and his colleagues were, a little fellowship of Bible Students with a message, and that Mr — from London would now speak to them on the advertised subject. He should remain seated on the platform until the lecture was ended, and then announce that anyone interested in receiving further information should give their names to one of the ushers. The speaker found himself fervently hoping that there would be some ushers. In the meantime the chairman should slip down to the door to welcome the people in and come back five minutes before time to be ready. He vanished.

Came five minutes before starting time. No chairman. Came starting time. No chairman. A slight change of routine appeared to be indicated. The speaker emerged from his hiding-place and walked alone to the rostrum, did all that the chairman should have done, and commenced his talk. A few minutes later the door at the end of the hall opened slightly, a face appeared, surveyed the well-filled hall, and was as quickly withdrawn. The missing chairman!

The meeting ended; the audience left. A few lingered behind to ask a question or two of the speaker. Upon finally emerging, he was just in time to see the party of organising brethren

climbing into their motor-coach and away. A local inhabitant was waiting with the key to lock the hall. And the village was as it had been, devoid of life, and the Londoner standing in the snow.

Back to the station to find no train due for another two hours. Another Horlicks Malted Milk and finally the train – but that speaker retained an antipathy to Horlick's Malted Milk for a long time thereafter.

In justice to those zealous brethren, they became a well-established and well-known fellowship, and later exchanged with him reminiscences of their first public meeting.

During these years of intense activity the London Tabernacle church, being the largest in the country – by 1916 notching up to twelve hundred at the Sunday evening services – and closely associated with the office of the Society next door, became automatically involved in much of the witness work carried on in the southern part of the country, as Glasgow equally was towards the northern part and in Scotland. At least six hundred of the twelve hundred were in attendance at the Tabernacle all day every Sunday and a system of providing meals – of a sort – had to be and was introduced. These were the acme of simplicity, comprising corned beef sandwiches and tea or coffee at lunchtime and jam sandwiches with cake and tea in the afternoon recess, all provided by the labours of a large force of deacons and other men helpers. For a great many brethren this was their unvaried Sunday fare for many years. No one took this amiss since all who came for the day came for the meetings and the hurried snack was just a necessary interlude. It is doubtful if many of them knew what they were eating, which may have been just as well, especially when during the war for a time corned beef became unavailable and was replaced by a supply, from an unknown source, of tinned rabbit, which, found to be complete with small bones, was cheerfully put through the mincing machine inclusive of said bones and so turned into sandwiches. So far as is known, no one ever noticed. (It does have to be admitted that for a long time thereafter among the brethren of Southern England the expression “Tabernacle sandwich” had a particular technical – or is it gastronomic – connotation and it may be that the clients were in fact more

observant than the caterers assumed.) So far as the caterers were concerned – directed by a committee of half-a-dozen youthful deacons, led by an equally youthful elder, their duty was interpreted as the ability to get the congregation downstairs into the schoolroom, seated on long benches with cup, saucer and plate on laps, feed them with sandwiches and tea, and get them back upstairs to their places in good time for the next meeting. Provided that this eminently desirable result was being achieved, the higher authorities took little interest in, and had little knowledge of, what went on down below, which, for the sake of their peace of mind, was, had they known it, a good thing.

One other incident in the history of this period deserves mention. It was only an isolated incident but it high-lighted an important principle of which enlightened Bible Students were fully aware but which in the ardour of the times tended to be overlooked. Towards the end of this decade Jesse Hemery suggested to the elders that in view of the location of the Tabernacle in the best residential part of London there ought to be an effort to reach the higher strata of society, the lords and ladies of the land, the captains and the kings, so to speak, by means of a special invitation to a special Sunday evening service at which he himself would expound the message of Present Truth in a manner they would understand and appreciate. None would dispute that he would be fully capable for the task. Hemery was a superb orator and could – and did – hold the largest audience spell-bound for an hour or more as he expounded the Scriptures. The suggestion was hailed as a good idea and plans laid to put it into effect. In the ardour of the moment no one remembered that the Apostle Paul tried this out on the upper-crust senators and philosophers of Athens on one noteworthy occasion and the outcome of that experiment was, as he remarked to the considerably lower-class Corinthians later on, that he felt that he would be much better employed preaching Christ to the down-and-outs.

At any rate, the plans went ahead. Handsomely ornate printed invitations were sent to Lord this and Lady that, to Dukes and Duchesses, Knights of the Garter, army generals, naval admirals, princes of the Church, anyone with a title, to

hear Jesse Hemery preach on the message of hope for the world and the solution of its troubles, presented in the Bible. Enough invitations went out to ensure a “full house” of visitors; at least it was hoped that there would be a full house, and the despatchers of invitations completed their labours and sat back in the assurance of a good job well done. (It was perhaps a little too well done. One invitation is known to have been addressed to a certain noble Duke in Belgravia in ignorance of the fact that the said “Duke of —” was actually the name of a local hostelry. It is not known whether the licensee accepted the invitation for himself and came along to hobnob with the nobility and gentry, but it is true that for some time afterwards some of the more facetious among the brethren had the habit of asking one or another of the responsible elders if they had heard from the Duke of — lately!)

A major difficulty presented itself. The twelve hundred seats in the Tabernacle were already normally fully occupied on Sunday evenings. Where would the expected visitors sit? Jesse had the answer to that one. At the evening meeting on the previous Sunday he entered the pulpit and described the entire plan to the assembled brethren. Then, leaning forward, “but, brethren, this is not for the likes of you!”. The congregation were not sure whether to smile or look disappointed at this rather unusual mode of address. Waving his hand up and down – a characteristic habit of his – he went on to tell the rather astonished assembly that their absence was to be preferred to their presence on this occasion and he expected them to leave the Tabernacle vicinity after the afternoon meeting and disperse to their homes, so leaving the locality clear for the expected distinguished visitors.

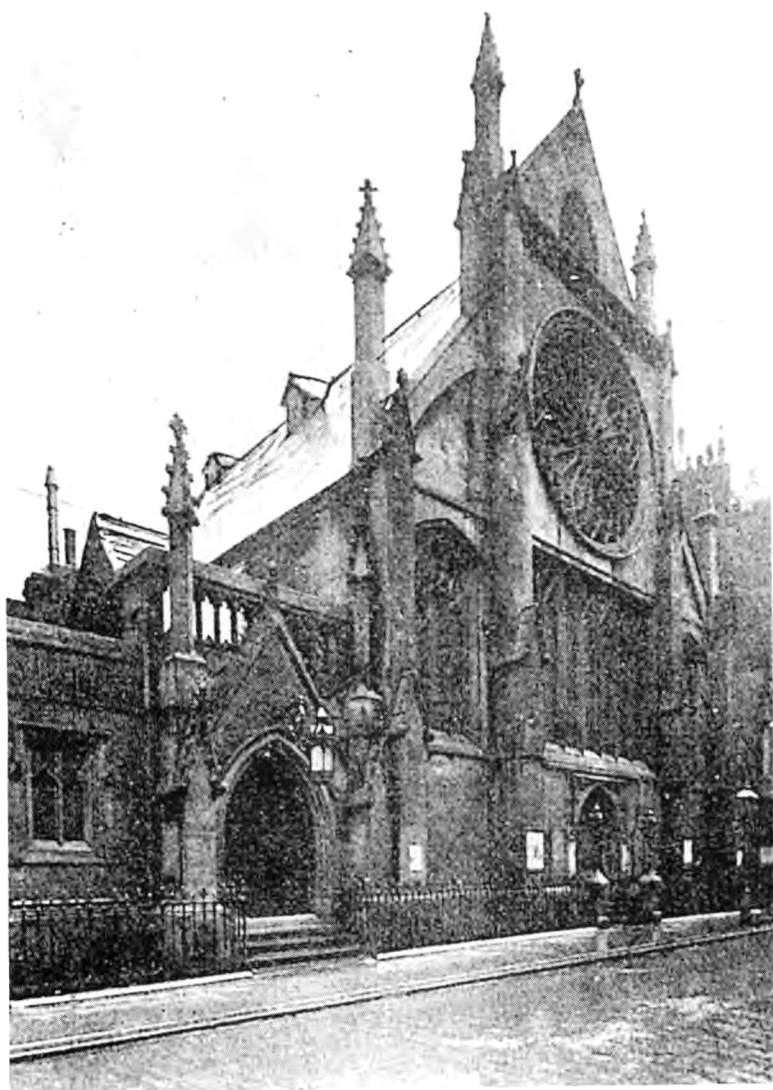
And it was even so – except for a small party of the younger brethren who determined that they were not going to miss anything, and so assembled in an inconspicuous corner on the other side of the road to observe what went on. Sure enough, at the appointed time the carriages-and-pair – occasionally a motor – appeared in Craven Terrace and drew up in-front of the Tabernacle. Footmen leaped out and opened the doors to allow his Lordship and her Ladyship to alight. Some of them looked about a little uncertainly as if wondering to what kind of place

they had come. Waiting at the top of the steps, resplendent in new frock coats specially bought for the occasion, were the two Tabernacle doorkeepers, Fred Pett and Samuel Martin, (Fred, short and rotund, looking what he was, a suburban grocer, and Sam Martin, every inch a military sergeant-major type, for which reason the younger fraternity usually referred to them both rather irreverently as “Gog and Magog”). So the visitors were duly ushered in and shown to their seats, and when the uniformed generals and admirals, and a few clerics of the Church, had all entered and the carriages had gone and the street was quiet, and it was getting a bit cold, the watchers in their turn went home.

It is not recalled that there were many converts. One titled lady did throw in her lot with the Bible Students, and was faithful to the Cause in spirit and with her means until her death some thirty years later. It is true that the discourse of Paul at Athens produced as converts Dionysius the Areopagite and “a woman named Damaris”. Perhaps our titled sister of these times was a modern Damaris. Perhaps it was for her sake that the Lord allowed the whole thing to go ahead.

But the experiment was never repeated.

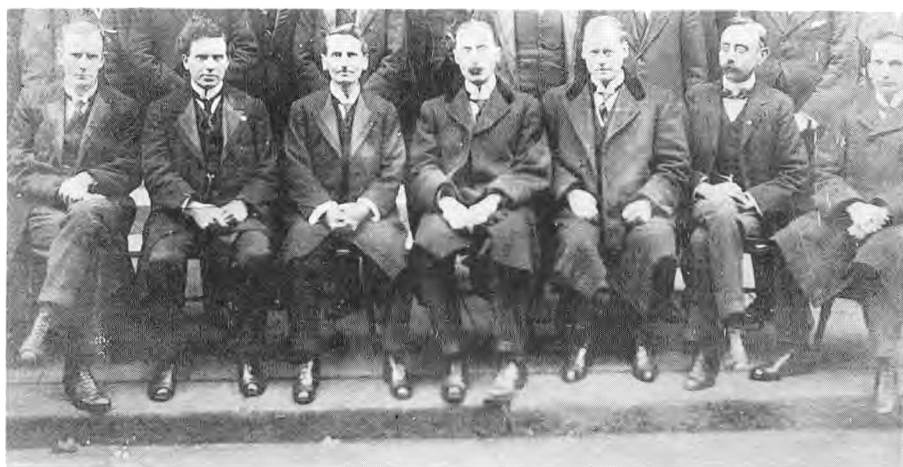
And now had come the time for the most extensive and effective witness to Present Truth ever given in this country – the public showing in London and throughout the United Kingdom in 1914–15 of the audio-visual presentation of the Divine Plan entitled the “Photo-Drama of Creation”.



LONDON TABERNACLE



Tabernacle Interior



**D. H. Cronk J. Hemery J. Gentle H. C. Thackway
H. Hooper G. T. Swain T. M. Seeck**

SENIOR ELDERS - 1918



**F. Pett S. Martin
TABERNACLE DOORKEEPERS**

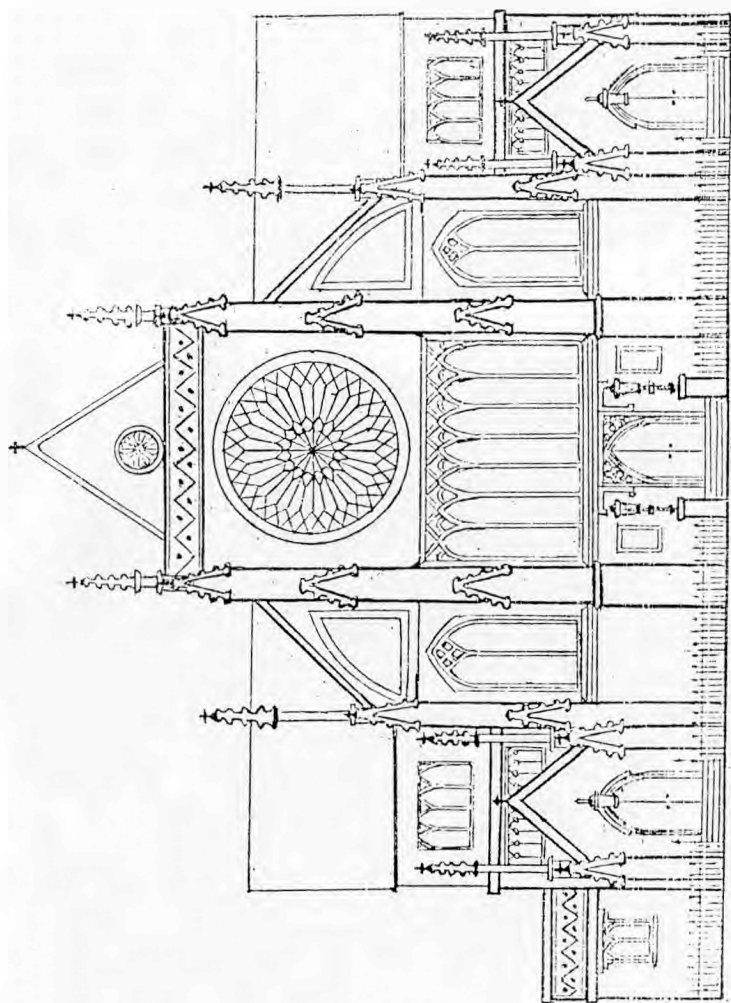




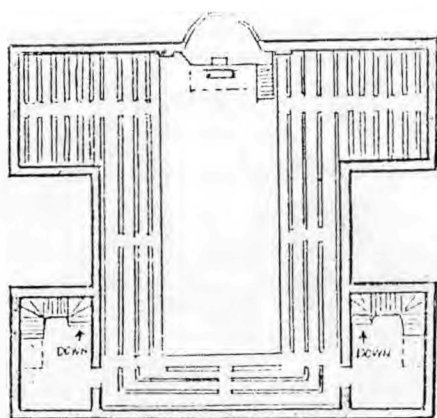
After the service



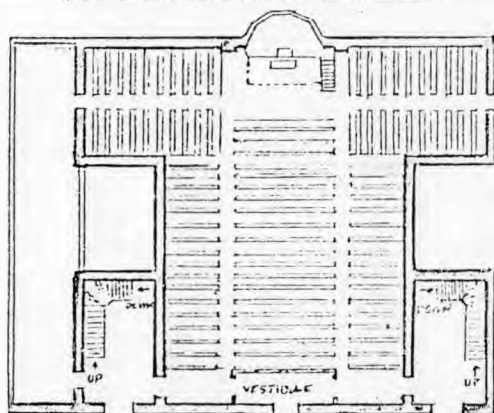
Tabernacle main entrance



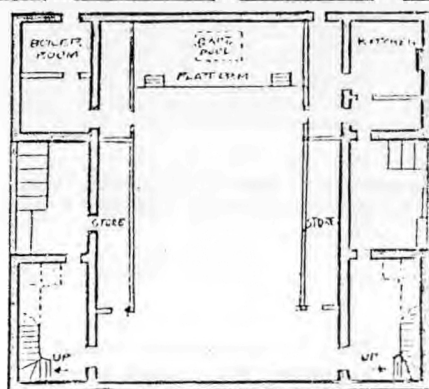
LONDON TABERNACLE



Gallery



**Ground
Floor**



Basement

**LONDON TABERNACLE
Floor Plans**

Timely Interview and Statement from Pastor Russell, London & Brooklyn Tabernacles

**World's Metropolis to be
the Centre for Extensive
Evangelistic Efforts.**

On Easter Sunday, in the
London Tabernacle, Pastor
Russell of the Brooklyn
Tabernacle, past a figure of
international reputation and
influence before the British
head of a large London
congregation of Christians,
thus serving an admirable
example for personal religious
activity.



Pastor Russell
of London &
Brooklyn Tabernacles.

...the world's metropolis to be the centre for extensive evangelistic efforts. The London Tabernacle, under the leadership of Pastor Russell, is a place of international reputation and influence. It is a place where the world's metropolis is the centre for extensive evangelistic efforts. The London Tabernacle, under the leadership of Pastor Russell, is a place of international reputation and influence. It is a place where the world's metropolis is the centre for extensive evangelistic efforts.

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**Full-page account of opening of London Tabernacle in the
London "Daily News" of April 18, 1911**

4

PHOTO-DRAMA OF CREATION

THE MOST ambitious – and the most effective – means of propaganda ever devised by the Bible Students was the public presentation of what was termed the “Photo-Drama of Creation”. The Photo-Drama was an assemblage of moving pictures and optical lantern slides accompanied by a spoken commentary on gramophone records, illustrative of the history of the world from its beginning in the distant recesses of geological time, through human history and onward to the end of the Millennium and the consummation of the Divine Plan for man. Interspersed with the sequences of “talking slides” were short runs of silent films in colour depicting Bible incidents from the time of Abraham to scenes from the life of Christ and the Apostles. The entire presentation occupied eight hours continuous display; this was divided into four presentations of two hours each, usually at weekly intervals at any one venue.

Two factors rendered the Photo-Drama of absorbing public interest. One was the fact of the films being in colour, at a time when even black and white films were relatively new and colour photography had not been invented. The art of imposing successive pictures on a moving film to produce the illusion of movement had been invented by Edison only so recently as 1892 and it was early in the present century before public “cinematograph theatres” began to open. These Photo-Drama films were the first colour films ever to be seen and they were regarded at the time as sensational. They were in fact produced by hand colouring, frame by frame, a colossal task involving the treatment of nearly a quarter million individual pictures each measuring only one and a quarter inches by one inch – the work must have been done under magnifying glasses. The second

factor was the employment of "talking" coloured slides. These were the orthodox three-inch square glass optical lantern slides of the times, specially made for the purpose; others were photographed from existing scientific data as for instance the series depicting the evolution of the earth from its original formless state through geologic ages to the appearance of man. Special slides were made describing the early events of Genesis such as the story of the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and so on. Use was made in some cases of the availability of existing commercially available slides of later Bible stories but these had to be heavily supplemented by ones specially made to meet the requirements of the series, including the final parts covering the expected events of the end of the Age and onward into the glories of the Millennium. There were just under fifteen hundred of these slides altogether. Each of the four presentations comprised twenty-four gramophone speech recordings descriptive of and synchronised with the associated groups of slides. At appropriate intervals there appeared a short film which covered a particular Bible story or theme for about twenty minutes accompanied by appropriate musical pieces on the gramophone (musical accompaniments to silent films were normal in those days and talking films had not been invented).

The "mechanics" of the operation were quite complicated. There had to be an optical lantern with its operator for the slides, focussed on the screen. Secondly, a cine-projector for the films, with its own operator, similarly focussed. Down below, at the foot of the screen, two gramophones, each having its own operator, working alternately to ensure continuous speech consistent with the removing and replacing of records (which at that time could only run for a few minutes each). This, incidentally, did not always work as planned. At the commencement of each showing there was a short film of the Pastor himself, coming into a curtained studio, introducing the Photo-Drama, with a few words from the gramophone, descriptive of the aims and objects of the enterprise, and with a gracious gesture of farewell leaving the studio and passing out of sight. On at least one occasion, and according to reports, on several others, a short hiatus in the gramophone reproduction due to some slight operating fault caused the Pastor to bid farewell and

leave the studio whilst his speech continued for a minute or so thereafter, which tended to spoil the desired effect.

The novelty of this, the first talking film ever seen on either side of the Atlantic, outweighed this small demerit, and the audiences were suitably impressed. But what with operators and ushers there had to be quite a team with each set of the Photo-Drama equipment, and there were in the UK sufficient sets to allow for five simultaneous showings in different towns. Twenty British brethren gave up their normal occupations to travel from town to town with the equipment to set up, operate and dismantle it. These twenty were trained in its use by American brethren who came over for the purpose. In succession to this, brethren from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and France spent a while in England to be similarly trained by their English counterparts in anticipation of the later exhibition of the Photo-Drama in those countries.

The project was hailed by Press and public as the most ambitious pictorial presentation of the Bible story ever attempted. Part 1 commenced with an account of the development of the earth from chaos, the "six days of Creation", culminating in the coming of man and the Eden story, Noah and the Flood, and on to the time of Abraham. Part 2 continued the story to the time of Moses and the Exodus, thence to the Israelite monarchy, David and Solomon, and to the Babylonian Captivity. Part 3 dealt with the coming of Christ at his First Advent, the events of his life, his death and resurrection. Part 4 concluded the story by depicting history from Pentecost and the Early Church throughout the last two thousand years, to the present, with foreviews of the expected disordered state of the world during this present century, which have proved startlingly accurate in the light of current events, merging finally into a series of representations of scenes in the Millennium which have yet to be vindicated by reality in coming days. The one criticism which could now be levelled at these final pictures is that representations of human skill such as buildings, cars, aeroplanes, and the like, taken from the finest examples of such known in 1913 and put forward as the acme of man's inventive genius, to be characteristic of the Millennium, would now,

seventy years later, be considered decidedly out of date. But the principle remained and at the time these pictures of postulated Millennial conditions often drew audible expressions of admiration or wonder from the audiences.

An ambitious publicity campaign was mounted, carried out by hundreds of active brethren. Descriptive literature was distributed door to door in the first place giving dates and times of imminent local presentations. Nearly thirty millions of these leaflets were distributed and since the population of the United Kingdom was only a little over forty millions at the time it follows that virtually every adult in the country must have seen one. Advertisements in newspapers and popular journals, placards on advertising hoardings, showcards in shop windows, every conceivable means of making the project publicly known was brought into play, and this without doubt contributed in major degree to the enormous public interest. Each person who attended was given, upon leaving, a memento "scenario", a twenty-four page folder which reproduced all the spoken dialogue of the particular presentation and a selection of thirty or so of the pictures appertaining thereto. Later on the complete four parts of this scenario were published in bound volume form; in addition sets of coloured postcards of many of the pictures were made available and by these means memories of the Photo-Drama were kept alive for many years afterwards.

The net outcome of the enterprise, which continued in this country from June 1914 to late 1915, was that close to two million people attended the exhibitions and about one in thirty followed up their interest with enquiries which kept the local classes busy for a long time afterwards.

The first public exhibition of the Photo-Drama was staged in London on Sunday, June 14, 1914, at the Princes Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London. The building was packed and the audience was rewarded by the sight of Pastor Russell on the stage personally to introduce the Photo-Drama to this country. On Sunday, June 21 it commenced to be shown in Glasgow at St Andrews Hall. There then ensued a run of five weeks at the London Opera House, where continuous afternoon and evening showings resulted in packed houses with hundreds turned away. From then until the end of the year a hundred cities and

towns in Great Britain and Ireland were visited by the Photo-Drama, the five teams with their equipment working “flat out”, as the saying goes. The original expectation had been that by the end of that year the effort would have achieved its object and be coming to its close, but the public clamour increased rather than decreased. A re-appraisal of the situation resulted in Henry Shearn of the London headquarters being appointed “superintendent of Photo-Drama” to exploit and fulfil the needs of this constantly expanding interest.

The immediate outcome of this was the organisation of another London exhibition involving seven days at the Royal Albert Hall and another seven days at the London Opera House. Both, as before, experienced full houses; forty-two thousand Londoners attended. Following this the Photo-Drama went on a further tour in the provinces and was shown in another two hundred towns with a total attendance of six hundred thousand. With two exhibitions a day in London this implies an average of 1500 at each showing in London and between 300 and 1500 in the provinces varying according to size of town.

The cost must have been considerable. The films were professionally made by one of the then major film companies to scripts furnished by Brother Russell so that the Biblical presentations were as accurate as Bible Students could make them – unlike, regrettably, many modern film versions of Bible stories – (perhaps one minor slip occurred in the choice of headgear for the patriarch Abraham, which was immediately dubbed and known for years afterwards as “Abraham’s tea-cosy”). This involved professional actors, actresses, and film sets, many of which had to be out-door scenes. And the hand colouring of the resultant films added appreciably to the cost.

So this quite remarkable evangelistic effort came to an end so far as the UK was concerned. The country had now been more than a year at war and conditions were getting difficult. The Zeppelin raids over London deterred people from going out at night and their assembling in large halls was beginning to be officially discouraged. But all in all, it was a remarkable achievement, not least in the light of the sheer human

endeavour exerted by the many who laboured incessantly in all kinds of ways to make the project a success.

Thirty years afterwards there was an attempt to revive it in this country, using copies made from some of the old films and slides which had survived. But the old magic had gone; the pictures which were considered so wonderful in 1914 had now been superseded by the march of modern invention. Colour photography and sound films had been developed; it was not possible to reach the new generations as it had been with their forebears. The Photo-Drama was an essential and very potent factor in the work of what Bible Students called the Harvest of the Age. It played a great part in the reaping of that Harvest, but after that the inexorable march of events passed into the first post-war period in which nothing was the same, nor ever would be again. The nature of the "Harvest message" as it was frequently called, was to change, and change drastically. But the Photo-Drama of Creation was never forgotten.



Introducing the Photo-Drama



**From the film
"The Trial of Stephen"**



Carboniferous Era



The Age of Reptiles



Garden of Eden



The Flood



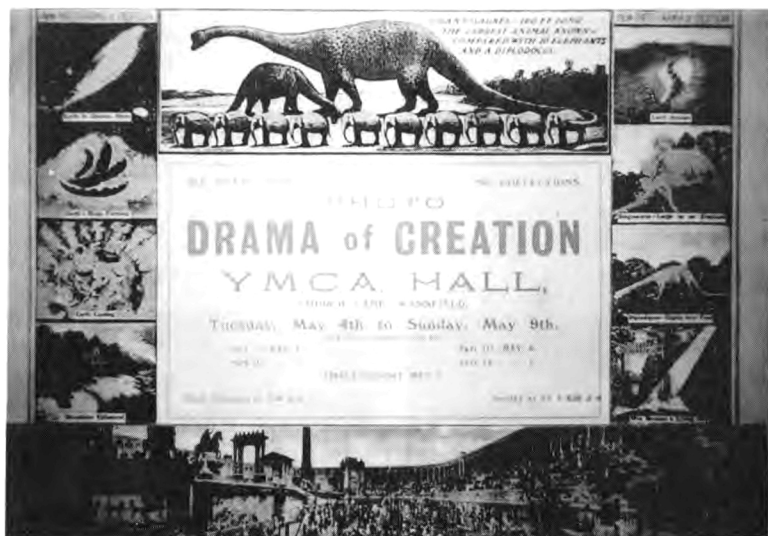
Baptism of Jesus



Gethsemane



4-page 16" x 20" folders distributed to
advertise the Photo-Drama



12" x 16" window card exhibited in shop windows
to announce local exhibition

5

END OF AN ERA

ON OCTOBER 31, 1916, Pastor Russell died.

Suddenly.

The news sent a shock wave through the Bible Students' community around the world. Somehow no one had ever visualised the possibility of the movement without its leader. That he should have been removed suddenly and without warning was unthinkable. And he was only sixty-four! The Harvest witness was in full swing and he had been universally looked upon as the inspiring force and leader of that witness. Now he had gone! The question uppermost in every mind was "What now?"

Of course re-organisation started. The Pastor's instructions were clear and unequivocal. In the event of his demise the affairs of the Society were to be managed by a Board of Directors the members of which he named, and since the Society was in fact solely a printing and publishing organisation having no powers of control over the individual Bible Student churches it should be that church life would not be affected apart from the loss of the inspiring example of the leader. There was therefore little or no expectation in the UK at this moment that the unlooked-for event would appreciably affect the conduct of affairs on this side of the Atlantic apart from the emotional effect of the loss. Unexpected though it was, some among them will have remembered that when in this country in 1913, three years earlier, the Pastor suffered a serious heart attack, and while under the care of two London specialists his heart stopped beating for five seconds. They did not expect him to survive. Their verdict at the time was that his was a most remarkable case, a physical frame almost worn out but a mind as fresh and virile as ever.

It is possible that he had some premonition of his approaching end. He had not been in good health for several years. Nearly forty years of incessant travel in every part of the world with continuous preaching, the editing of a fortnightly magazine, the management of a large and continuously growing evangelical organisation, had taken its toll. And there was another factor.

Pastor Russell was well versed in the history, the triumphs and the failures, of past Christian organisations and movements. He knew, only too well, what so often happened when the reformer who started and built up a movement passed on. All too often other men, lesser men, sometimes, alas, ambitious men, battled to gain control and bend the organisation to their ends or shape it in conformity with their own ideas. The principal characteristics of the movement get lost in the process. Some of his co-workers who knew him intimately claimed after his death that he had begun to feel that he was losing control of that which he had built up during his forty years' ministry. While he lived, personal loyalty to him ensured that these elements would remain below the surface, but after that?

There is not much doubt that the Pastor knew what was coming, and sought to warn the brethren against it, if perchance they might take heed, and avoid it. He could not have known, when editing the November 1st 1916, issue of the "Watch Tower", that his own words therein contained were prophetic of a situation soon to be created among the brethren. Entitled "The Hour of Temptation", it was a long message of pastoral counsel, of which just a few extracts are here given, to show how clearly he perceived the tendency of which, perhaps, he was about the only one to be fully conscious at the time.

"The selection of improper leaders is a reflection against the Church which has the improper leaders. How could such get into positions to represent the Lord's people, except by the latter's votes? When will the Lord's people learn that ability to talk in public is only one of the qualifications of an Elder? Time and again have we noted how the Lord's Cause has been hindered, and spirituality among the brethren has been stifled, by attempts to imitate the established churches in putting

forward persons glib of tongue, lacking in spirituality.

“In such a case, is it not pride on the part of the Church, a desire to make a fair show in the flesh before the world? If not, why do they elect such persons? When Elders seek to bring the Church under their control and succeed, does it not show that the Church lacks the very quality the Lord desires to see, – courage, overcoming? And does the Church not injure such a would-be ruler, as well as itself, by permitting him to succeed in his unscriptural methods?

“We have already alluded to the ambitious and selfish spirit in the world, leading on to anarchy; and we have just pointed out how the same selfish, ambitious spirit is leading on to anarchy in the Church. The world cannot purge itself, for the leaders and the led have the worldly spirit. But not so is the Church of Christ. Ours is the spirit of the Master, the spirit of loyalty to Truth, the spirit of the Golden Rule, the spirit of brotherly love, the spirit of liberty and helpfulness, the spirit of fidelity to what we believe to be the Truth. It is inexcusable for the Church, possessed of this spirit, to continue under the domination of ambitious men. If they have not been conducting their Church affairs along proper lines, should they not begin at once? We believe that this is the time in which to set the House of the Lord in order

“But, someone will say, ‘we would have a great disturbance if we attempted to do anything contrary to the wishes of those who have fastened themselves upon us as our leaders and rulers. To make a move at all would endanger a division of the Church, and how could we think of anything which would result in that catastrophe?’”

“But, we enquire, which would be the better, to have a smaller Church operating along the lines which the Lord has indicated, or a larger Church upholding principles contrary to the Lord’s provision, injuring themselves, hindering their influence, and encouraging as a leader one who is either a ‘wolf’ or else a ‘sheep’ which has been mistakenly misled into the wolf spirit? We encourage all the dear brethren who are in such trouble to be very heroic, to see that they do nothing from strife or vain glory, but everything in the spirit of meekness and love, that they may get back again to the liberty wherewith Christ

makes free, and do not get entangled again in any human bondage.”

Little did those who read those words in that month of November 1916 dream that within a few more months they would be involved in a controversy that was to be precipitated by men who, whether sincere in their motives or not, were to challenge the whole basis of self-government on which the Bible Students' movement was founded, and measurably to succeed. The new President of the Society, Joseph Rutherford, elected in the belief that he would faithfully continue in the path of Pastor Russell, almost immediately embarked upon a policy of dictatorial rule the very antithesis of that of the Pastor, and at once evoked strong protest by the brethren of the USA who were naturally the first to become involved. When by 1918 the confusion in the United States had begun to subside, there was a clear line of demarcation between the one body which maintained the principles promulgated by Pastor Russell and intended to continue the work for which he was celebrated, and the other body which willingly accepted the oversight of Rutherford and followed him into the conversion of the Society from the literature service organisation that it had been into a rather dogmatic religious sect in which all members were expected to be obedient to the mandates of its leader, a system which eventually possessed little or nothing in common with either the theology, the spirit or the outlook of thought from which it sprang.

Inevitably the British brethren were caught up in this maelstrom of conflicting claims, but fully to understand the position so far as the United Kingdom was concerned it is necessary to go back a little in history, to a point in time prior to Brother Russell's death.

The London Tabernacle had been acquired by Brother Russell in 1911 as a centre for his British work, particularly to represent his message before the British public. The building was at the first owned by the Society and a lease had been taken on the adjacent mansion, 34 Craven Terrace, for the Society's office and stockrooms. The eight existing London churches which had combined to constitute the congregation of this Tabernacle enabled the project to make an impressive start – or

so they thought at the time, forgetting for the moment that when Christians attempt to present an impressive appearance before the world there is usually trouble ahead. The three co-managers of the Society's work at 34 Craven Terrace, Jesse Hemery, Henry Shearn, and William Crawford, were all elders of the congregation and Hemery was by common consent and election Assistant Pastor and Chairman of the Board of Elders. All this caused the Tabernacle to be looked upon by the rest of the country as peculiarly representative of the Society even although in theory and fact it was an independent and self-governing Church of Bible Students as were all the others. The fact that London was the national capital and this fusion of eight London churches had produced the largest church numerically in the United Kingdom – a few years later it was the largest in the world – accentuated the situation, and this respect for the London Church on the part of the country generally had an effect upon the events of 1916 onward.

The key to those events is the fact that between 1913 and 1916 there was a growing tendency among a certain element on the Board of Elders to limit the freedom of congregational control of church affairs. To an increasing degree the preaching services were being monopolised by Jesse Hemery to the exclusion of other elders, under the claim that since the building was the property of the Society and that Pastor Russell was the unanimously elected Pastor of the congregation, his appointed representative, Jesse Hemery, also unanimously elected Assistant Pastor, should at least be the principal one to represent him in the pulpit. At first the position was tacitly accepted. There was, and is to those who knew him and still survive, no doubt that he was a superb orator and could hold an audience spell-bound for as long as he wished – easily the foremost Bible Student preacher in the country. The Pastor himself when establishing the Tabernacle had stipulated that only really qualified preachers should occupy the pulpit; this stemmed from his desire that the message should be ably and well presented in this, the central church of the British Bible Students, and this fact was a powerful argument in favour of this growing tendency. Unfortunately Jesse Hemery himself was fully aware that he was the best speaker in the country and

this was not so good. He could have been, and probably was, perfectly sincere in concluding that it was in the best interests of the Truth that he exert as much personal control as he could, in his role as UK representative of Brother Russell, rather than risk the congregation and its elders falling short of the high standard which had been set. Unfortunately, consciousness of one's own ability, the plaudits of men, outward success and prominence, is likely to add ambition to sincerity, and when ambition comes in at the door, sincerity is liable to fly out at the window. Traditionally, the elders of the Bible Students, true to New Testament teaching, set themselves to serve the flock, not to lord it over them. Jesse Hemery as a younger man at the turn of the century was an indefatigable missionary, never slow to go anywhere in the country to talk to one or two people who were feeling after the Truth. Now he began to see himself as the minister of a large London church, like so many churches around him, and that was a very different thing.

For the first three or four years all went well. The great days of 1910 were only just in the past. The succeeding evangelical work of the Photo-Drama of Creation occupied the minds and hands of the brethren throughout 1914 and 1915 and its aftermath lasted into 1917. Public lectures continued to be well attended and the number of brethren in fellowship together continued to increase. Brother Russell visited England and preached at the Tabernacle as at other places each year from 1911 to 1914 and it was fully expected that after the war was over he would be here again. But as the years drew on there was this nagging feeling that all was not quite as it should be. Why, if the other churches throughout Great Britain, including the other large London Church at Forest Gate almost next door, were completely under the control of their congregations through their elders; why, since Pastor Russell's own recommendations in his chapter on Church order in the Sixth Volume of the Scripture Studies outlined this as the proper scriptural course; why then was a system growing up in the London Tabernacle tending towards a different basis? Why were so many of the elders, elected to serve them in spiritual things, excluded from the performance of the duties for which they had been elected. Some among them recalled the days before the

fusion in 1911 when as much smaller individual churches they had received and learned by the ministry of these same elders; now they were all one large and impressive church things were different and some wanted to know why. They began to find that big is not always beautiful.

The upshot of this rising feeling was that in 1915 the Elders initiated a discussion between themselves aimed at probing the depth of this feeling and what should be done about it. A correspondence with the Pastor resulted; it is a little uncertain from such records as still exist whether the London church or the Pastor made the first move. A remark made by him in a discourse at a USA convention in 1915 shows that his astute mind was already foreseeing some kind of an imminent crisis – a “fiery tribulation to separate Elijah and Elisha” he said; he did not know whether it would first come in “Canada, or the States, or where”. The first record that survives is that of a letter dated June 20, 1915, from the Pastor to the London church, in which he suggested that the London church should now assume responsibility for the running expenses of the Tabernacle, that “the congregational and the Society’s work should be kept separate and apart”, “leaving the Society the care of the Bethel” (34 Craven Terrace) “and its expenses”. Two months later at a church meeting the congregation accepted the suggestion and the Pastor was advised accordingly. In the meantime he had written the three co-managers suggesting that Jesse Hemery occupy the pulpit on alternate Sundays and the other two, with others of the Elders, on the remaining occasions. This was what the congregation had in mind and it seems probable that more correspondence ensued, for in a letter to the Church dated October 22 the Pastor said “In respect to Tabernacle arrangements being turned over to London, we reply that if they are ready to take up all the obligations of the Society connected with the Tabernacle, including interest payments, we will be very happy indeed to turn over the entire management of the Tabernacle to the congregation.” A week later at an Elders meeting a feeling was expressed that since the congregation was now bearing the financial responsibility, the affairs of the Church should be definitely seen to be in the hands of the Elders and Deacons of the Church, as was the position everywhere else.

It is here that a certain amount of “stalling” on the part of Jesse Hemery would seem to become apparent. He stated that an entire change of policy would be involved and the proposition would be better considered by the new Board of Elders due to take office the following February. Since the Board of Elders had survived relatively unchanged apart from four additional ones since the fusion of 1911 there would seem to have been no reason to expect any change of heart by such new Board. Moreover there was not in fact any change in policy – the Church was only asking for the restoration of rights of control which had been whittled away during the preceding few years, and which for the past four months the Pastor had verified should be theirs with his full approval. There is also the unexplained phenomenon that whereas the Church was under the impression that it was now paying all the Church expenses the Pastor was still writing letters asking when the Church was ready to commence the arrangement. One might be justified in enquiring whether there was not what is nowadays called a “failure of communication” at this point.

The Church itself, however, was getting restive. At a Church meeting held on November 28 1915, the question of the speakers at Sunday services was raised. A motion was put from the body of the Church “in view of the congregation now paying the Tabernacle expenses the Church suggests that the services of the Elders be extended to the filling of Sunday Tabernacle appointments”. Jesse Hemery, as chairman, must perforce put the motion, but before doing so staged a bit of a rearguard action by telling the assembly “to a limited extent this is already in operation, and Brother Russell had recently suggested that Brothers Shearn and Crawford should serve more frequently in this way”. If this was a reference to the Pastor’s letter of August 12 it was at best a bare outline. There was considerable dissent but the calm and admittedly winning demeanour of Jesse gained the failure of the motion, although only by a slender majority. But with half of the congregation now getting definitely apprehensive of the ingress of ecclesiasticism into their Church and the loss of the standards of Church government characteristic of the Bible Student movement since its inception, it was obvious that matters were not going to remain there. There

was clearly the beginning of a feeling that the fusion of the eight independent London Churches into one large impressive one, with all the opportunities it offered for the exercise of personal ambition, had been a mistake, and perhaps they would have been better off as they were. Most Christian denominations have been through the same phase of experience in their history; perhaps the Bible Students were not automatically immune. Some of them must have reflected that they had borne the heat and burden of the day in the early times between 1882 and 1911 when their little assemblies had been founded; Jesse Hemery was a comparative newcomer to London and all the real work had been done before he arrived – he came into a ready-made Tabernacle and a ready-made congregation. Christians are human; these earnest souls must have compared the sincere simplicity of their earlier faith in their little communes, each bound to its neighbours in the bonds of fraternal fellowship, with this tendency to political moves they now saw rising in their midst, and they did not like what they saw.

In the year 1915 the London Tabernacle Board of Elders comprised nineteen men, all of long standing and mature in the Truth. The history of the period between 1911 and 1915 is barren of church records; most of what is known comes from personal recollections and information imparted by some who experienced those days but are now long since gone to be with the Lord. So far as can be gleaned, fifteen of the nineteen were Elders of the various constituent Churches before the 1911 fusion. Of these, four were in favour of the status quo with Hemery; eleven supported the move for reform. Four Elders joining the Board in 1911 or later, from outside London, were with the eleven. Thus the proposals in 1915 had fifteen in favour and four against. Supported as they were by something like 50% of the Church the result could have been a foregone conclusion had it not been for the universal conviction that the avoidance of a disruption was the paramount consideration, and this theme was certainly played to excess by Jesse Hemery, probably from the best of motives. At this stage he was almost certainly convinced that the best interests of the Truth in this country required his personal control over the central Church in London. Perhaps he failed to consider the Old Testament story

of Uzza and the Ark of the Covenant. So he sought by every conceivable right and proper expedient to hinder the majority Elders and the Church behind them from taking any positive action.

They took it, though. The discussions, moves, and counter-moves dragged on through 1915 without any decisive result until by December some of the congregation had had enough. Some of those who had been members of two of the original North London ecclesias, Crouch End and Stoke Newington, re-constituted those ecclesias and in January of 1916 commenced regular meetings. There was no thought at that time of secession. These brethren chose to exercise their constitutional right to organise and control their own meetings in parallel with the Tabernacle Church, and still remain in fellowship with them. But it showed which way the wind was blowing. What North London was doing to-day West and South London might be doing to-morrow. In fact Surbiton in South-west London did follow their example only a few months later. A series of Elders' meetings during the next few months strove in vain to persuade Hemery and those with him to withdraw their objection to normal democratic control of Church affairs. One might wonder why, with such a majority of Elders in favour, – at that time fifteen against four – the matter could not be settled there and then. The answer was determined by two factors – one, the desire of all without exception that nothing be done to disrupt the prestige of the Tabernacle as the principal Church of the Bible Students, and two, the personal esteem in which most of the congregation, who would necessarily have the last word, held Jesse Hemery, leading to a reluctance to endorse anything that was not endorsed by him. Nevertheless it was agreed that something would have to be done to resolve the dilemma. The correspondence of the previous year with Brother Russell was brought back into the limelight, and the consequence was that at an Elders meeting on September 1st 1916 Hubert Thackway moved a resolution that in view of the fact that feeling in the Church for control of its own affairs had increased so much during the twelve months just past, the Elders should go fully and finally into the matter. Unanimous consent being obtained, a further meeting on September 16 agreed, also unanimously,

that a full statement of what was proposed should be sent to Brother Russell, signed on the one side by the assenting Elders, and on the other by those dissenting.

This seemed like progress. The Elders dispersed with agreement to meet four days later to prepare the agreed statement. The hope and expectation was that whatever Brother Russell advised would be accepted by all parties.

On September 17 Jesse Hemery wrote to Brother Russell charging his two co-managers in the Society office, Henry Shearn and William Crawford, with "disloyalty to the Pastor" in that they were engineering a movement to put the control of the Tabernacle in the hands of a "Church Board". If by this he meant the Board of Elders he spoke truth but since this proposal was precisely in line with Brother Russell's own recommendations in Volume Six it might be difficult to say wherein lay the disloyalty. Despite this action, Jesse joined in the preparation of the statement and after four successive revisions it was finally approved and signed by all parties, including Jesse, on October 21.

By this time one of the Elders, Walter Eddington, wearied of the whole affair, had resigned his office and attached himself to Stoke Newington. Of the remaining eighteen, two who were in favour of the proposal, Harold Hooper and Cedric Davey, were apparently not present at the last, and so their signatures did not appear. Hubert Thackway had, rather unexpectedly, changed sides, so that in the outcome there were eleven in favour and five against. (For the record, the "in favour" elders were Cotton, Cormack, Crawford, Cruikshank, Doe, Edgell, Fraser, Gentle, Hart, Radwell, Shearn; those "against" were Cronk, Hemery, Seeck, Swain, Thackway.) The resolution stated that the "in favour" Elders "considered it to be in the best interests of the Church meeting in the London Tabernacle that the arrangements governing its affairs be organised along the lines laid down in Volume Six, which they recognised as the Scriptural method". It went on to endorse the continuation of Brother Russell as Pastor of the Tabernacle – which of course implied the Assistant Pastorship of Jesse Hemery – and the relation of the Tabernacle to the Society, and that the Elders should select the speakers at the preaching services subject to Brother

Russell's endorsement, as Pastor, of individual names. There was probably a feeling of quiet satisfaction that at last agreement had been reached. It was inconceivable that anyone would disagree with the Pastor's verdict.

Theodore Seeck, Elder and Church Secretary, posted the letter on October 23. There was no air mail in those days. Letters went by steamer. It could not have arrived in Brooklyn before November 1st.

Pastor Russell had died on October 31.

* * *

On or about November 13 there set sail from New York, bound for Liverpool, one Paul Johnson, erstwhile right-hand man of Pastor Russell, now coming to England as an emissary of Joseph Rutherford, who at the moment had his hands full in the States endeavouring to effect his own succession to the Presidency of the Society. In the light of subsequent events it is tolerably clear that Rutherford's object in sending him was to "sound out" the attitude of the British brethren as to his succession; he was engaged in a difficult task in the States and he was probably not too sure that he would not meet with the same opposition – perhaps more so – in Britain. In such case, events proved him to have been right.

Johnson landed at Liverpool on November 19 and proceeded to London, where he confronted the three London co-managers with the assertion that he had come as "minister plenipotentiary", whatever that may have meant – nobody ever did find out – to enquire into the state of the churches and put right anything that was wrong. As a means of settling the differences of thought on policy which had pre-occupied the London Church for twelve months past this sounded good, and the brethren prepared themselves to talk and listen. They speedily found out, however, that they were expected to listen but not talk. Johnson claimed that as the Society's representative with sweeping powers he would give the orders and the brethren would obey. His own words, a month later, were "no discussion is permitted. It is for the UK brethren to carry out the suggestions of the Society's representative who has full charge of its affairs in this country". It is not surprising that the

euphoria generated by his coming evaporated rather quickly – except in the case of Jesse Hemery. And when it was revealed that Johnson had come fully armed with full knowledge of the proposal which the London Church had sent to the Pastor for his endorsement, and intended to suppress it completely, light began to dawn.

It turned out later – from Johnson’s own writings – but was not known at the time, that he had come to England having in his possession not only a copy of the proposal signed by the Elders, but also a copy of the 1916 Elders schedule marked by Jesse Hemery to show which of the Elders were sponsoring the move towards control of its own affairs by the Church. And Johnson came with the intention of eliminating those Elders. He says that Jesse had sent two copies of this list to America before he left for Britain. Now if this is true, it does raise a query. The news of the Pastor’s death could not have reached the London office before November 2 – the Pastor died in California while on a preaching tour and the news had first to be received at Brooklyn and be cabled from there to London. If Jesse Hemery sent the schedules to Rutherford immediately upon hearing of the Pastor’s death, they could not have reached Brooklyn before November 9, and Johnson left New York not later than November 13. It looks that there was some urgent discussion at the American end before Johnson left, and now here he was, having by his own admission already prejudged the issue.

His first exercise of his claimed authority was to dismiss Henry Shearn and William Crawford from their positions of co-managers of the Society in Britain, and order them to remove their furniture and effects from the premises forthwith. His next was to declare that the resolution intended for Brother Russell’s approval was now invalid and refused – the Tabernacle arrangements were to remain under the control of Jesse Hemery. This, unwelcome as it was to the majority Elders and the Church, was welcome news indeed to Jesse, who now had a powerful and indeed all sufficient ally.

He next announced that he was off on a tour of the country and it is probable that the London brethren saw him go with a feeling of relief. They had never before had a brother from the

States quite of this nature and most were not quite sure what it was all about and what they ought to do about it. The general feeling that whatever came to them from Brooklyn must be good precluded most from making any hasty judgement. Anyway he was off to Manchester and that was that for the time being.

Manchester, however, thought differently. The national Convention at Manchester was due over the period December 30 to January 1 and the arrangements had long since been made and the programmes printed and circulated, featuring eighteen British speakers from the whole country, Scotland to the South. Johnson demanded that the programme be torn up and he himself given a major share of the speaking appointments. Under strong protest the organisers gave way, probably on the same basis as London.

By January he was back in London in time for the annual election of Church elders and deacons. Normally Jesse Hemery, as Chairman of the congregation, presided over this function. Johnson insisted that he, as the Society's representative, preside, quite illegally since this was an individual Church matter and nothing to do with the Society. Weakly, Hemery gave way. It is surprising that the congregation as such did not protest – but the fact is that Johnson was an eloquent and quick-witted man with a certain winning manner which served to mask in some degree his brusque authoritarianism. And the congregation, completely unused to this kind of behaviour on the part of one coming from America as a pastor and counsellor, were still in considerable doubt in what way they should react.

Now he returned to the attack on Shearn and Crawford, demanding from the pulpit that they be dismissed from their position as Elders, or at least not elected as such at this election. "Brother Crawford is no longer a child of God" he declaimed "but I believe that Brother Shearn is". In the stunned silence that followed, one teen-aged observer wondered inwardly why some of the Elders did not rise and protest at this unwarranted slur on their fellow-elders, but no one did. As the silence continued, William Crawford rose quietly from his seat, carefully gathered his books together from the pew shelf in front

of him, spoke decisively and clearly "That's enough for me", made his way along the pew to the side aisle, walked down the aisle and out of the building. For the first time it became evident that something was seriously wrong.

That something was more plainly demonstrated when Johnson announced that he was called of God to perform a work in London which, he said, was typified by the work of Nehemiah and the enemies of the Jews at the Restoration, that in a symbolic sense he was to judge and slay these enemies who, said he, were those in London who supported the resolution proposing freedom of action for the congregation. Outlining this thesis one day to a group of London brethren he was approached by Duncan Cronk, one of the Elders, who could always be relied on to relieve the tenseness of a difficult situation with a little light humour. "So you are Nehemiah, Brother Johnson?" "That is so." "And Brother Shearn is Tobiah and Brother Crawford is Sanballat and you are going to hang them in the Tabernacle?" "That is so." "Then who am I?" "The Lord has not shown me yet, Brother Cronk, but He will." "And Nehemiah is said to have plucked out the hair of his enemies." "That is so." "Then pluck mine out" and so saying he bent his head forward revealing a pate so neatly trimmed that even Nehemiah would have found difficulty in performing his recorded action. For perhaps the first time since his arrival the other was for a moment at a loss for words.

It is fairly evident that Jesse Hemery was banking upon Shearn and Crawford, the principal advocates of the freedom proposal, being eliminated by Johnson so that upon the latter's return to the States Jesse would be left in supreme control. By late February, however, Johnson announced that he, and not Rutherford, was the true successor to Pastor Russell, and that he himself was to fulfil the role of the "Steward" in the Parable of the Penny. To the unbiased mind at the time the root of the trouble was obvious. Here were three men, Rutherford, Johnson and Hemery, each convinced that he, and he alone, was the best man to rule and direct the brethren, ambitious enough to attempt achievement of the coveted position, and blind to the harm they were causing. There is an old proverb, the origin of which the writer has long since forgotten, which runs "When

Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug-of-war". In this case there were three Greeks, and the tug-of-war was a triangular one. There could only be one winner, and in the upshot that winner had to be the man with the strongest pull.

In the meantime Johnson was travelling the country visiting the larger churches assuring them that he was the rightful head of the Society and they would do well to heed and obey him. In most places he got short shrift; a few did take some notice and when in later years he formed a body called the Laymens Home Missionary Movement these did associate themselves with it as a "British branch". At the time, however, the overwhelming majority wanted nothing more than to see the back of him. From Liverpool he wrote to Jesse Hemery a long letter in which he predicted the coming of an imminent famine, fulfilling an episode in the life of Elisha, (although what connection there was between an eighth century BC Hebrew prophet and a possible English famine in the Twentieth century AD did not immediately appear) and instructing that supplies of food be purchased and stored, especially including "wheat and monkey nuts"! It was now that the truth began to be glimpsed; the man was undergoing a severe mental breakdown. "Am not at all well," he said "my brain is quite weary I am sure that the Lord has given me Sister A" (a Bethel sister accompanying him for secretarial purposes) "to give me much needed relief. If this relief had not been forthcoming I am satisfied I would have had a repetition of my 1910 breakdown, but the Lord will sustain me to finish the work that He has given me to do." He had suffered a mental breakdown in 1910 but it had been thought then that this would be non-recurring. This, and the many eccentricities which he manifested at this time, and which lingered a long time in the memories of brethren who witnessed them, and his dictatorial manner and extravagant claims so uncharacteristic of brethren in the Truth, led to the British brethren chiefly concerned, and Rutherford in America, reaching the same conclusion simultaneously, and in consequence Paul Johnson received a summons from Brooklyn to return at once. Johnson refused to go and declared again that the election of Rutherford as Society President was invalid and that he himself was Pastor Russell's true successor. At the same time he "dismissed" Jesse

Hemery as manager for the Society; Jesse took no notice of that but realising, rather late it must be admitted, the seriousness of the situation, called in Shearn and Crawford, whom he had quite happily seen disfellowshipped and sent into the wilderness only a few weeks previously, to come back and help him get rid of Johnson – which, with perhaps a commendable disregard for old differences, they did. Looking back from the vantage point of many years later, there could be a grim humour in this rather tardy appeal of Hemery – the denunciations of Shearn and Crawford by Johnson were as nothing to that of Hemery when he found that the latter had turned against him. Writing of this many years later, Johnson said that his “experiences with J. Hemery revealed him as one of the most cunning hypocrites with whom he ever dealt”. (In these memoirs he always referred to himself in the third person.) “So completely successful was he as a hypocrite that PSL did not suspect this of him until after Rutherford threw PSL down” This kind of language was, of course, totally unacceptable to all right-thinking British brethren, however exasperating the circumstances.

Perhaps, after all, he was the instrument of the Lord’s salvation as far as the UK brethren were concerned, for it was chiefly in consequence of the issues he stirred up during his short sojourn in this country that the attitude of at least half of them hardened into a resolve that they would neither accept from America nor set up for themselves any leader wielding dictatorial authority; from henceforth the British Bible Students would stand by the principles laid down by their deceased Pastor and remain a decentralised body having no cohesive bond between the churches save that of voluntary association together in the practice and promulgation of a common faith and a common hope.

But despite the tragedy of the occurrence, and the succession of incidents, saddening at one time and humorous at another, a dispassionate view of the happening against the background of the position in England prior to and at the time of his arrival might enable a more realistic appraisal of his actions to be made. In the first place Paul Johnson could very reasonably have expected to succeed Pastor Russell as leader of the world movement. It is likely that many of the USA brethren

did so expect, and he would certainly have been a more popular choice than the austere and dictatorial Rutherford. He came to England knowing that Rutherford, largely by means of legal rather than moral considerations was going to win the race, and knowing Rutherford, as he undoubtedly did, as well as anyone in the States, he knew what would as assuredly happen to the movement to which he had given his life. And he could not bear the knowledge. Did he think, knowing the sturdy and independent spirit of the British brethren, that if he could get them on his side he could challenge Rutherford from this side of the Atlantic, and perhaps win? The line between waiting for the Lord to put things right and trying to put them right for the Lord can on occasion be a very thin one and many a sincere disciple in past history has overstepped that line. Then upon arrival in England, instead of meeting a solid body of brethren eager to do battle for the right under his leadership, as he might perhaps have hoped, he found a community asserting a right to independence which would brook no leaders of the kind he envisaged. Hence he got rid of Shearn and Crawford, the spearheads of the independence movement, only to find that Hemery had ambitions like to his own, so that he now had an opponent in England as well as in America. Is it a possibility that, faced with this mounting opposition, and feeling quite sincerely that, if he failed, the whole Bible Student movement would pass into alien hands and fall into ruin, his mind became temporarily disordered and this could account for the strange and unexpected things he said and did. He was normal enough after his return to the States. He went on to break with Rutherford and eventually organise his own movement which still survives and conducts a vigorous evangelical work not only in English-speaking countries but also in the third world. The few in Britain who espoused his cause at the time are represented to this day as a branch of the American movement still holding to the theological outlook of Pastor Russell and counting themselves as lineal descendants of his work, but looking to Johnson and his successors as their spiritual leaders and accepting their oversight and control. A closer study of his recorded acts and dealings in this country by anyone who was there at the time suggests the picture of a man convinced that the fate of an entire

world community rested on his shoulders, frustrated at opposition to what he sincerely believed to be the only way in which it could be saved, and finally broken in despair at his failure to achieve his aim. Perhaps his real mistake was the very common one of feeling that the well-being of the Lord's work rested on him and him alone. When tempted to adopt that attitude – and many from the best of motives have been thus tempted – it is well to remember the words of good King Jehoshaphat: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord".

* * *

A week before the end of March Paul Johnson left 34 Craven Terrace, early in the morning, quietly, before anyone else was up. The rather undignified – and unnecessary – mode of his departure, often recounted in after years and invariably evoking some hilarity, need not be recounted here. He went, and there was relief at his going. No one knew where he was until news was received from Liverpool that he had sailed for the United States on March 31. He had been in this country for nineteen weeks and in that short time created an unprecedented scene of confusion and misunderstanding amongst the brethren which was by no means allayed by his departure. A number of churches, mostly from the larger cities, such as Glasgow and Manchester, wrote to Brooklyn requesting that he be not allowed to come to Britain again.



HENRY J. SHEARN
1865-1946

6

PARTING OF THE WAYS

BY THE year 1917 the die was cast. There was no settling down after the departure of Johnson. The primary issue which had subsisted since 1915 was still unresolved. The country as a whole was looking to London for a lead and London was not sure which way to go. The Jesse Hemery view of ministerial control by an appointed minister assisted by a few leading elders on the one hand; an increasing call for the Pastor's principle of democratic congregational electoral government espoused by Henry Shearn, William Crawford and others on the other; in the middle that section of the London Church uncertain for the moment which was right. And the rest of the country, insofar as they were cognisant of the position, waited for the outcome.

The tragedy of the matter is that, in a way, both sides were right. Democratic control by the multitude looks fine on paper and sounds logical when advocated from the rostrum, – and it appeals to individual pride and self-esteem. Unfortunately men – even high-souled Christian men – are notoriously imperfect and oft-times lacking in that balanced and dispassionate judgment which alone can guarantee a successful democracy. In a good many spheres wise direction and authoritarian teaching from an accepted leader is the most effective course for an orderly community and progress in knowledge. In the Christian world many prefer to have their thinking done for them by the leader or minister and accept what he says without further question. But the usual result is that they become hide-bound in their beliefs and activities and do not perceive the advancing light on Divine truth or the relation of those things to the changing and developing world around them. Thus they can unwittingly become the prey of an unscrupulous and ambitious leader who aspires to gratify his own impulses to the detriment

of those he leads. So they draw back from the high-sounding appeal of the democrat and point to the dangers inherent in a leaderless community where, eventually at least, the high ideals are submerged and, like Israel in the time of the Judges, "every man does that which is right in his own eyes". The very freedom of thought, of interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures, which they require as a right can – and all too often does – lead to divergences in thought, in understanding, in co-operative service, and so at the end to fragmentation of the fellowship. And which was the best way to go many at this time frankly did not know.

One man who did know was Henry Shearn. He saw, perhaps more clearly than any of the other principal participants in the controversy, the true nature of the threat to the future of the movement. It was not just a London matter; it concerned the entire UK community. It was not just a question of London Church control of its own affairs; it was whether the entire UK community was to continue in the freedom it had enjoyed since its inception, or pass under the direction of an autocrat. But because the London Church was the most influential in the country and peculiarly associated with Brother Russell as Pastor, it became true that what London thought and did to-day, Glasgow would do to-morrow and the rest of the country during the following week. Someone had to give a lead; Henry Shearn was the only man who could do it. A lesser man would have raised the standard of revolt and gone through the country leading an insurrection and forming a new movement. The mood was there and it was growing. But this man, who had given his life and his means to the forwarding of the Bible Students and in earlier years had gone the length and breadth of the country counselling and strengthening the local Churches and taking the message door to door to those who as yet knew it not, was not going to admit defeat until he had exhausted all efforts to hold the community together on a mutually acceptable basis. He, with William Crawford, had been dismissed, or compelled to resign, as joint managers of the London office of the Society on account of their joint opposition to Jesse Hemery's endeavours to assert control, and at this time were finding it necessary to settle into normal business life

again. In the meantime they became associated with the various re-organised Churches in the Metropolis, and in Forest Gate, East London, which had by now severed its connection with the Society and Rutherford its President, and publicly announced its independence. By now also six of the London elders originally espousing what was now being called the “freedom” movement had resigned or failed of election, and mostly linked their destinies with the seceding London churches; this began a process of attrition of what increasingly became known as the “opposition” elders which reached its climax in 1924 when the last two of such were eliminated.

At a London Tabernacle church meeting held on January 21, 1917, a motion was put to the effect that the new President of the Society, Joseph Rutherford, be appointed Pastor of the London Tabernacle in succession to Pastor Russell. There was not much enthusiasm for this – he was hardly known in this country and what was known from what knowledge had filtered through from USA concerning the events surrounding his gaining control had not endeared him to the more thoughtful. A good many abstained from voting; of those who did, the “ayes” considerably outnumbered the “nays” and he was declared duly appointed. A few weeks later, on February 18, he was similarly appointed Chairman of the congregation and of the Board of Elders, with Jesse Hemery as vice-chairman.

It has often been questioned in subsequent years how it was that the London brethren submitted so tamely to the rule of a man who was quite unknown in this country and whom many felt instinctively was by no means likely to be the spiritual leader and “father in God” as had their deceased Pastor. Those who were there at the time know the answer to that question. It grew from the deep-seated and sincere conviction held by all the brethren, whatever their attitude to the question at issue, that the “work of Harvest” in which they were engaged was in truth and in fact a definite move of the Divine Spirit in this present period of the Age – just as Moody and Spurgeon and others viewed their lives’ work. The argument ran – and it was frequently expressed in discussions at the time – “the Lord has so wonderfully blessed the work initiated by Pastor Russell and in which we are still engaged. Is it conceivable that He would

allow any man to take control who would not maintain the same high standards that had been raised in the past. He may not appear to us the desirable man we would expect, but perhaps it is that the Lord knows better". In the climate of the times this was a powerful argument and had it not been for this feeling on the part of so many the outcome may well have been different. Looking back, one reflects that it was better so, in the long run. The movement was getting too big and it needed a winnowing.

There is little doubt that a substantial proportion of the congregation now consisted of people who looked upon the Tabernacle as their church and Jesse Hemery as their minister, but were not deeply involved in the characteristic work of the brethren. Their votes on any matter automatically went the way preferred by Hemery, and this could have been an important factor in the outcome.

Despite this now very evident disagreement over the question of Church control, leading to the re-establishment in their own localities of some of the ecclesias which originally merged to form the Tabernacle congregation, and the consequent loss to the Tabernacle of an appreciable portion of its adherents, there was little if any move on the part of those ecclesias to a definite separation. The feeling was that they had achieved their own freedom and were satisfied to remain in general fellowship with their erstwhile associates. In the endeavour – fruitless as it proved – to stem further breakaways of this nature and to dissuade the faithful from supporting such ventures, a motion was put before the congregation on February 25, 1917, and carried by a majority, in the following terms.

"Resolved, that the only preaching services in the London area supported by this congregation be those held in the London Tabernacle, always excepting those specially arranged for in connection with Class Extension and similar work. Where local needs seem to require a Sunday meeting at a distance from the Tabernacle, the meeting should take the form of a Berean Class Study, the appointment of a chairman to be left to the discretion of the Church Executive Committee."

Here was the gauntlet thrown down with a vengeance. No meeting in London was to be considered a Bible Students'

meeting unless authorised and controlled by the "Executive Committee" of the Tabernacle. Some eyebrows at least were raised at this. The term "Executive" was a new and unknown one, and certainly not authorised by the Church. There was an "Appointments Committee" comprising five of the senior elders, whose function was to appoint month by month changes of chairmen for the fifty or so week-night Bible study classes in London from the elders and deacons. It might have been an honest mistake by the framer of the resolution, the unspoken wish being perhaps a father to the thought; it might on the contrary have been a "try-on", to see how the brethren would take it. If so, they did not, even though they passed the resolution. The term "Executive Committee" disappears from such documents as have survived and does not re-appear until 1922 – but that is another story. The significance of this resolution however, lay in the realisation that failure to conform to the increasingly authoritative demands of the Tabernacle was going to involve disfellowship.

Two relatively minor incidents of this time illustrate the reality of this tendency. In the course of an open congregational discussion on some Church matter one of the elders, Duncan Cronk, referred to "our brethren at Forest Gate". Jesse Hemery, from the rostrum, looked down at him and in an icy tone of voice queried "Our brethren at – where, Brother Cronk?" Forest Gate had been the sister London Church for many years but had now refused to accept the new Society President and declared its independence. Doggedly, and predictably, Dan Cronk repeated "Our BRETHREN at Forest Gate", "I don't know what you mean" observed Jesse coldly, and changed the subject. The other instance was at a memorial Service held on October 28, 1917, in memory of Pastor Russell, addressed by John Gentle in the morning on "Brother Russell's Teachings", George Swain in the afternoon on "Brother Russell's Example", and Jesse Hemery in the evening on "The Harvest Message and Work". Whereas both Gentle and Swain presented helpful and encouraging discourses on their subjects – too long to reproduce here – Hemery, after dealing with his subject in his usual masterly way, closing with a picture of the present condition of the work, had to conclude with a personal

“dig” at the “reformers”. “Brethren, I say to you” he said “what I say to myself; let us review our consecration to the Lord, our view of these things, and the Lord will give us all we need to make our calling and election sure. There’s plenty of work for the willing. I am glad to tell you that the classes are continuing as usual. A few classes have broken away from us; they think they are in bondage in the IBSA. Well, they may have their freedom if they call it thus. Some go very readily and happily into bondage, as when a woman marries a man. Brethren, we feel we’ve never had so much liberty before as when we were bondservants.”

The immediate result of all this at the end of 1917 was the loss of two more of the “reforming” elders, Frank Edgell who went to Stoke Newington, one of the pre-1911 re-established London Churches, and Robert Cormack, who went back to his native Glasgow where he first found the Faith round about 1885, and now joined up with the independent assembly recently broken away from the second largest British Church. He fellowshiped and laboured there for something like another twenty years. Independent meetings at Kensington, Ealing and Surbiton had come into existence, having closed down in 1911 to join the Tabernacle. Cotton, Cruikshank and Fraser had gone back to the Crouch End church early in the year. All of these save Kensington remained in fellowship with the Tabernacle until the final separation of 1919 – some till 1924.

The year was marked by the defection of John Gentle from the “reformers” side to that of the “establishment”. Hubert Thackway had done the same thing a year earlier. Their loss was keenly felt on the “reform” side; as senior elders of long standing their influence counted. By the early months of 1918 there were only five reformers; many of the congregation had given up and left to join with the dissident meetings but still there was no open break. It was a case of hoping against hope that a semblance of unity could be maintained.

But events were moving in other parts of the country. The new Society President had not yet presented himself in person to the British brethren – it is tolerably certain that he was still having difficulty in stabilising his position where he was – and there was still a hope in London that when he did get to the UK

he would be found perhaps more amenable to change than he had been presented. (That was a forlorn hope but no one really knew that at the time.) The war (World War I) was nearing its close; all people were heartily sick of it and things were very quiet. But a general move towards secession from the Society was now taking place, following the example of brethren from the major centres, Forest Gate, London Tabernacle, and Glasgow. Provincial cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, Darlington, now had their independent meetings. Altogether something like sixty such centres, large and small, town or rural, were by now in existence and clamouring for a lead from someone they knew and could trust to point the way to a corporate future in which their local independence could be assured consistent with the provision by a suitable centre of the printed literature for evangelical work, of speakers for public meetings, and “pilgrim” counsellors to visit them and give pastoral aid to their continued growth in the grace and spirit of the Faith – all those helps which had heretofore been provided by the Society founded for the purpose by their departed Pastor, and from which they had now to turn sorrowfully away.

And so the Bible Students Committee of Great Britain came into existence.

By the beginning of 1919 the demand for action from all parts of the country was becoming too vociferous to be ignored any longer. There were now more than a hundred independent “classes”, Churches, in the UK. Some were in localities where the entire existing IBSA community had seceded en bloc from the Society; most consisted of a proportion, sometimes minority and sometimes majority, who separated from the existing meeting and reformed themselves in a new meeting-place. Henry Shearn and William Crawford, and others with them, realised that the time had come to act if this demand and desire for a form of union for concerted action was not to be dissipated. There were still a good many, not only in London but in many of the provincial cities, who were still with the original Society meetings hoping that the division could yet be avoided but steadily losing hope; nevertheless the increasing number who saw no prospect of this and would wait no longer prompted the

step that was now taken.

Following consultation with a number of brethren throughout the country, a conference was held at University Hall, London, on April 5 1919, at which it was decided to set up a central committee to be known as the Bible Students Committee, to initiate and conduct those activities requiring joint communal action such as printing and publishing, providing lecture speakers and pilgrims, etc, which heretofore had been provided by the Society. This Committee was to be subject to annual election by the UK brethren generally, and there would be no titular head or leader. The organisation was to be proceeded with at once, and in four months' time approved, modified or terminated by a General Convention to be held in London. Thus the entire arrangement was in the hands of the brethren generally and so fulfilled the principles for which the dissident brethren were contending. The brothers thus elected to serve, seven in number, were William Crawford (London); Frank Edgell (London); F. G. Guard Sr (Forest Gate); Alex. Guy (Forest Gate); William Seager (Ipswich); Henry Shearn (London) and George Tharratt (Bishops Stortford), all well known and trusted.

A circular letter dated May 1919 from the Committee's temporary address at 42 Selborne Road, Ilford, London, was widely distributed among the brethren reporting these arrangements and notifying the coming Convention in London on August 2-4, at which the whole arrangement would be presented for universal discussion and ratification. This Convention was duly held at East Ham Town Hall, London.

Six hundred brethren from all parts of the country, from Londonderry and Dublin to Dover and Ipswich, from Penzance and Barnstaple to Glasgow and Sunderland, were present. Sixty-five local Churches over this entire area had sent delegates armed with specific instructions and most of the remaining forty or so centres advised their opinions and wishes, so that the net number having thoughts on the matter at issue considerably exceeded the six hundred. The net result was a unanimous decision that the inauguration of the proposed Committee should be ratified and the system placed on a firm footing. In consequence, and by unanimous vote, the existing

Committee was continued in office for another twelve months, at which time a national election would be conducted to decide who should serve for a further term. Henry Shearn was appointed the Committee's first Secretary. (In fact he held that office until his retirement on age grounds in 1935.) F. H. Guard Jr was appointed Assistant Secretary.

Having thus made universally agreed arrangements for what it was hoped would provide for the undisturbed conduct of the Bible Students' traditional and normal activities as they had been in the past, thoughts turned towards the brethren from whom they were now avowedly separated, and a strong feeling was expressed from many in the hall that one last attempt be made to bring about a reconciliation with the Society and effect some form of unity which would still preserve the individual Churches' rights of self-government without having to create this new organisation. George Tharratt, stressing that "it is proper to keep the door for re-union always open" proposed that an approach be made to the Society voicing the general feeling of the Convention. This developed into a motion which was proposed and approved by the brethren in the words "if the proposals for reconciliation submitted by the Society are acceptable to the brethren corresponding with the Society in respect to same, that they submit these to the Bible Students Committee, and if considered by them sufficiently satisfactory, the Committee be empowered to call a Convention at the next Bank Holiday time, so that the whole matter may be considered at a properly convened business meeting, to decide if the reconciliation proposals are satisfactory, and whether the Bible Students Committee shall be disbanded".

The feeling of the Committee that this "last ditch" attempt to heal the breach should be made was expressed in the report of the Convention, in the words "the only object of the Committee is the comforting and supporting of the many brethren in Great Britain now finding themselves unable to acquiesce in much that is being said and done in the name of the Lord and the Harvest work. Seeing that, apart from the extraordinary claims made by the Society of late, there are no outstanding doctrinal differences, the brethren are hopeful that the true basis of union, justice, liberty, peace and love, may be recognised and

unity established”.

In the spirit of this feeling a special “Reconciliation Committee” of eight trustworthy brethren was elected, entrusted with a mandate “to take all steps possible to bring about reconciliation with the Society, in harmony with the expressed desire of the Convention”.

The Convention closed, the delegates returned home to report to their fellows the progress that had been made, and all settled down to await the outcome of this last attempt to resolve the points at issue with the Society. It failed. Correspondence and interviews went on for many months but always the response was the same. The wanderers from the fold would be welcomed back, but they must accept the new concept now being insisted upon by Rutherford, to wit, that the Watch Tower Society with its President was the only channel of Divine truth and direction of evangelical activity. All must accept the wish and word of the Leader. In a statement dated January 26, 1921, furnished to every member of the London Tabernacle congregation, dealing with this attempt at reconciliation and blaming the failure of same upon the alleged intractability of the other side, occurs the words “Evidently, that which the Bible Students Committee desires is not reconciliation so much as a frank disavowal by the Society of its office of channel for the Lord.” This, of course, was a perfectly true statement. This claim lay at the root of the matter. Subsequent events over the next ten years demonstrated the intention of Rutherford to convert the entire movement into an instrument of his own will and any antagonistic factor must be rigorously repressed.

By 1921 therefore the secession was an accomplished fact and the brethren taking part in it settling down to the new order of things. The number of independent churches associated with the movement was now up to 135, aggregating some three thousand brethren, just about one half of those associated with the Society when the differences arose in 1916. The annual London Convention continued together with another in the Midlands and a start was made with the publication of literature of the type formerly favoured but now with a new publisher’s imprint. An office and stockroom was opened at 23 Marylebone Road, in Central London; after a short period this was removed

to 93 Cambridge Gardens, Kensington, in West London, where there was a congregation of seceded Bible Students, and here it remained until the end of 1924 when it moved again to more commodious premises at 204 Broadway Chambers, Letchworth, some distance out of London. This became a well-known centre and here it was located until 1935 when with the retirement of H. J. Shearn it moved to Welling, and in 1956 to Hounslow in the care of Basile Dumont.

Then in 1922 the Judge (Rutherford) paid his long-expected visit to Britain to meet and talk with those of the British brethren who were still loyal to him – up and down the country only about one half of those who had been in the movement at the Pastor's death. He had paid a brief flying visit in 1920 but only to consult with Jesse Hemery as to his plans for the future and – apart from one London meeting – few of the faithful so much as saw him. Now he was coming to announce the new kind of evangelism he intended to introduce. As a preliminary he was to be introduced to the elders of the London Tabernacle, of which in 1922 only three were on the dissentient side, the others having been eliminated during the preceding years on one ground or another, and replaced by “new blood” whose loyalty to the Judge was more or less guaranteed. And so the elders were bidden to be present in full ceremonial dress (which consisted of the traditional English frock coat, an essential for a London elder in those days; but the Judge soon put a stop to that) and they stood in a wide horse-shoe in the Bethel dining-room at 34 Craven Terrace while Jesse Hemery, visibly on edge, conducted a kind of military inspection to ensure that everyone was neat and tidy, saying then “I am now going to fetch the Judge, brethren” and disappeared through the door at the far end of the room. Presently he re-appeared, and behind him a massive bulk, featuring a grim expression of a type not usually associated with brethren in the Lord. “These are the elders, Brother Rutherford” announced Jesse with a slight wave of the hand. A loud and deep grunt was the only response from he of the grim visage; he looked at Jesse as much as to say “And I don't think much of them”. A thought flashed straight through the mind of one elder “this man is no successor to Pastor Russell” and later discussion with his two fellow dissentients

revealed that they were of the same opinion. An awkward pause, broken by Jesse volunteering a little information about the organisation of the Church, to which the great man responded by saying that he would be seeing the elders again, and with a curt nod turned round and walked back the way he had come. To give him his due, he did rather better when he addressed the congregation on the following Sunday, and Jesse did explain afterwards to the elders that the grunt was due to an obscure throat complaint; having by then heard him in full cry on the Sunday, that particular excuse did seem rather thin.

Mercifully, the elders were not called upon to meet him again at this visit. A tour round the principal cities of the UK had been arranged to give him the opportunity of acquainting the British brethren with his vision of their future work. At many places a number did not like the vision very much and since almost immediately the number of classes and churches declaring themselves independent and coming into association with the Bible Students Committee increased from 135 to 160 there is ground for thinking that, quite unintentionally of course, the Judge had proved to be a quite good recruiting agent for the secession movement. Particularly was this the case at Glasgow, where he faced the second largest Church in UK, some 800 strong at the time, augmented by visitors from other Scottish churches so that a thousand people were gathered to hear him. It seems that he appeared on the rostrum flanked by a kind of bodyguard of muscular young men, procured from where nobody knew, and to serve what purpose nobody knew either. Someone should have told him that if he wanted to introduce innovations of this nature Scotland was the last place in the United Kingdom in which to do it. And Glasgow had a long history of association with the Faith and with Brother Russell, and with some of them what they were now seeing and hearing was not going down very well. And someone also should have told him that the Glasgow brethren were more sturdy and less tractable than the ones he had left behind in London. The climax came when he initiated a kind of election of elders – it transpired that he had already been told who of the existing elders were likely to favour him and who oppose. He began to rule down any name he thought fit, and at that really flagrant

usurpation of the Church's own right and privilege there began to be audible dissent. Observing this, he shouted brusquely "Let the lame ducks get out". He could not have anticipated the reaction. Of the thousand people present, almost five hundred stood up and streamed out of the building. The existing fairly small independent meeting in Glasgow received an accession of membership that day which put it in the lead of the independent Churches of Britain. It was said at the time that for the only recorded time in his career the Judge was visibly shocked at the denouement.

It was at about this time that Duncan Cronk, one of the London elders most ardently supporting Rutherford, abandoned that stand and joined the dissentients. Dan Cronk was a man of tender heart and wise counsel when anyone was in trouble, and the general run of brethren loved him for this, and of caustic tongue and keen insight where pride, ambition, insincerity and double-dealing was detected – and he was good at detecting it. Fiercely loyal to the Pastor and the Society, he was slow in accepting the inevitability of the division, but when he did accept it, there was no doubt about it. He told Jesse Hemery one day that the time would come when "Ichabod" ("the glory has departed") would be written over the doors of the London Tabernacle; Jesse was never quite the same to him after that!

No one knows how many letters of concern and entreaty went to the Society's offices at London and Brooklyn – obviously these never saw the light of day after receipt. One such letter is known, from a sister of long standing in Kent. The sentiments therein expressed may be taken as typical and expressive of the feelings of many who, after holding on for a lesser or greater period, at the last had to join the secession. That letter reads:

"In the following remarks I do not oppose the service work but I do stand for religious liberty and toleration. In the June 15 Watch Tower in the article on 'question on witnessing' it seems that individual opinion is not allowed. The claim that the W.T.B. & Tract Society is THE visible organisation of the Lord on earth is to my mind not Scriptural. I grant it may be AN organisation of the Lord but to me the Scriptures teach that 'if

ANY man be in Christ he is a New Creation' and all begotten of God's Holy Spirit are anointed and commissioned to preach the Word, irrespective of any organisation. We have our ordination of God alone. The Church is entitled to govern itself, but if all policy whether in relationship to service work or anything else is to come through the organisation then the Church has no option in the matter and therefore to some extent is in bondage. This we must remember was Papacy's claim, to be THE visible representative of God on earth and we are all familiar with the bitter fight for liberty and freedom in religious thought and action. To me God's organisation consists of all his anointed people whether in or out of the I.B.S.A. An arrangement between a community of the Lord's people for harmonious work is a very different thing to the present claims. My allegiance is to the Lord alone. He is the Lord, the Master and the Head, and his true people are one with him wherever they are to be found. I could not believe that they are all in one earthly community and all outside of that community are not in his organisation. Neither have any power or authority over one another, but "all are brethren'."

Many in those dark days felt like that.

So the drift away from the Society continued. By 1924 there were 181 local centres in fellowship together and the Committee was being kept increasingly busy printing and distributing literature, assisting local brethren with their public meetings with advertising notices and, where necessary, speakers for same. A regular service of "pilgrim" visits was now in operation, in which Henry Shearn, William Crawford, Frank Edgell, Ebenezer Housden, and other well-known brethren were active in touring the country and encouraging the smaller communities in their activities. Some quite appreciable assistance in this process was unwittingly afforded in 1923 by the institution, at Jesse Hemery's recommendation, of a system whereby Tabernacle elders visiting provincial meetings should render a report stating whether the community visited was "healthy" or "unhealthy", viz; were they in general manifesting subservience or opposition to the edicts emanating from America. At an elders meeting on October 12, 1923, where strong dissent was expressed to this rather un-British form of

“spying”, Jesse, sensing the mood, hastened to assure the elders that this was only a “request” and not mandatory, and it did not mean that anyone was going to be disfellowshipped; this was only intended “to alert headquarters to those meetings which needed assistance in understanding the issues involved and encouraging them to loyalty”. All of which sounded fine and large at the time, but its effect was rather spoiled half-an-hour later and a little farther down the agenda when Jesse announced that the Executive (meaning himself, Gentle, Radwell, Thackway, Seeck, Swain and Dey) had decided to delete one of the local London meetings (Plumstead No 54) “on policy” which meant of course that they had been judged “unhealthy” within the meaning of the Act. At this usurpation of powers belonging to the elders sufficient of them supported the three remaining dissentients to reverse the Executive’s decision, and for a short time Plumstead No 54 was reprieved.

But this marked the end of delay tactics. If the will of the Executive could be thwarted the whole system of dictatorial control slowly being built up was threatened. The three surviving opposition elders must be eliminated. Jesse knew that – and they knew it too.

The first essential was to get rid of Duncan Cronk. That would not be easy. He was highly esteemed and popular among the brethren in general and he was an elder of long standing, back to about 1900 in the old Lewisham (South London) Church which had closed in 1911 to merge with the Tabernacle. He had been a valuable ally when he had supported Hemery but now he had changed sides the situation was different. The annual election of elders was due in January 1924 and he had been an elder as long as anyone could remember. While the entire Church had the facility of voting, his re-election was virtually assured. So what?

Came the day of election and the Church assembled for what was always regarded as a serious and momentous occasion. The selection of the right men was considered essential to the well-being of the Church. The procedure was always the same. Names were nominated and seconded the previous week and everyone had their list. Jesse Hemery presided and he called each name in the words “Brother A —.

Those in favour of Brother A — please raise your hands”. The tellers went rapidly along the pews, counting, then proceeded to the front where the totals were quickly added up. A two-thirds majority was necessary. The result was passed up to Jesse who glanced at it and announced “Brother A — has — votes. He is elected” — or “not elected”, as the case might be.

On this occasion the election proceeded as usual and with the customary formula through the A-s and B-s and to the C-s. At the turn of the name Cronk, Jesse paused for a moment, while the congregation waited. He raised his head. “I am going to ask Brother Gentle to take my place whilst this name is voted upon. I cannot conscientiously preside over the voting for a brother who is so lacking in restraint and consideration for the principles of the Truth and I prefer to stand aside whilst this vote is being taken.” Amidst a stunned silence he descended the stairs from the rostrum, John Gentle replaced him and called for the vote.

Consternation was evident. One looked at another in bewilderment. No such thing had ever happened in the Tabernacle before. What had Brother Cronk done? What did Brother Hemery know that the brethren at large did not know? An election was traditionally a time when there were no questions and no discussion. No one spoke for fear that there must be some dark unknown secret which had prompted this unheard-of action. And so the tellers went about their normal duty. A few who saw through the ploy raised their hands defiantly. Others who esteemed their own knowledge of the brother in question superior to anything said from the rostrum added their votes, but when the result was announced there was no majority vote. “Brother Cronk — is not elected.”

That left two. Brother Hemery did make a feeble attempt to unseat one of them. Instead of the usual formula “Brother So-and-so. Those in favour of Brother So-and-so please raise your hands”, he first gave the name “Brother So-and-so.” A long pause; then “those of you who think Brother So-and-so should be an elder will of course raise your hands.” The innuendo was not lost on the congregation. But this time it did not work. Brother So-and-so got a majority vote.

But, of course, the bell was now tolling loudly. The two

remaining dissidents knew that the farce was not going to last much longer. It only remained to go down with the flag flying. And Judge Rutherford was coming to the UK again this year to complete his re-organisation of things. As a foretaste of things to come, at the second elders' meeting of the year, held on February 15, 1924, Jesse Hemery raised the issue of the tunes to which hymns were sung at the Tabernacle services. He had observed, said he, that many of the tunes were not those in the book (*Hymns of Millennial Dawn*) and he wanted to know why. (The new tunes had been going on for a long time but he hadn't noticed it before.) It had always been recognised – among those who had to sing the tunes – that American and British tastes in hymn tunes differed widely, largely due to the different religious heritages of the two peoples. In consequence of many observations to this effect from many members of the congregation, the Praise Committee, whose responsibility it was, had prepared a new tune book, using many better known and appreciated tunes more customary in UK places of worship, retaining the *Millennial Dawn* tunes in cases where by nature or tradition they were more appropriate. In this latter case they had cut out said tunes from the book formerly used on the Tabernacle organ, thereby leaving same sadly mutilated. John Radwell, Convener of the Praise Committee, responded to Jesse Hemery's question by explaining the circumstances, observing that there was general support for the changes. This, of course, was the wrong thing to say; it savoured too much of congregational control at the expense of dictation from the top. Something had to be said at this point and Jesse said it. "Not only has the Praise Committee taken upon itself to change the tunes the Society has chosen for the Society's official hymnbook, but they have also cut up the official Tabernacle hymnbook to make their new one." He seemed more aggrieved at the damage to the Tabernacle hymnbook than that to the Society's authority in the matter of hymn tunes. Nevertheless he delivered himself of the following impressive dictum. "Harmony with the Society necessitates harmony with the tunes the Society has chosen for its hymnbook." The importance of "hymnbook theology", the effect of the doctrinal content of customary hymns on doctrinal belief, is of course well

known in Christian circles, but that doctrinal orthodoxy is also contingent upon the tunes to which the said hymns are sung was definitely a new one to the London elders, and their reaction to this, and perhaps that of the congregation, may have some bearing upon the fact that at the next elders' meeting, May 30, 1924, arising from the minutes of the previous meeting, it was almost unanimously felt that the apparent preponderance of dirge-like tunes which the Praise Committee seemed to have selected recently for the services rather illustrated the force of the arguments previously put forward. It is possible that Jesse felt that he had unwittingly been "taken for a ride" over this matter, but if so he could not see what he could do about it, and so, rather grudgingly, he assented to the insertion of a note to the minutes giving the Praise Committee leave to vary the hymn tunes if those in the official book were considered by them to be unsuitable.

This commendable concession having been made, the elders were informed that they were about to be received in audience by Brother Rutherford, who was waiting in the wings, so to speak, to be introduced into the meeting. His intention was to outline the future work and methods of inculcating Divine truth which he intended the brethren to pursue. After this, said Jesse, he would invite questions from anyone present. The Executive, however, had decided that there was need only for two questions and Brother Seeck had been briefed to ask one and Brother Middleditch the other. The implication was that any other elder who presumed to make use of the proffered opportunity to ask questions would find himself in trouble. In former days there had been a feature in the "Watch Tower" headed "Questions with inspired answers", dealing with questions on Scripture topics answered by reference to the inspired Word of God. Duncan Cronk the irrepressible, had he still been on the Board of Elders, would undoubtedly have interjected a favourite remark of his - "Looks like a case of inspired questions with answers". Unhappily he was not, and the questions proceeded.

Theodore Seeck put the first question. What should be the ideal subject for the Tabernacle Sunday afternoon study? Came the oracular response, it should, of course, be from the "Watch

Tower”, the “Sunday School Lesson”, and, adding for good measure, all the week-night meetings should be devoted to the study and discussion of the leading article in the current “Watch Tower” (said leading article, of course, being written by himself, although he did not mention that at the time). This, of course, was not actually Bible study, but the question had been asked and the oracle had spoken.

Harry Middleditch came up with the second, and here the iron hand in the velvet glove began to show. How should the election of elders be conducted and on what principles? Considering that this subject had been well expounded and laid down by Pastor Russell in Volume 6 twenty years earlier and had been followed faithfully by probably every Bible Student Church in the world annually ever since, one might be forgiven for wondering why such a question should be raised by the leading Church in the land. The Judge thought a little as though this was a serious matter – as indeed it was – and gave his verdict. A committee of three senior elders should prepare a list of all brethren considered by them as suitable for elders and a similar one for deacons. This should be placed before the retiring Board of Elders and all names upon which they were unanimous would be voted in en bloc. Any name on which they were not unanimous would be nominated and voted upon by the Church in the usual way. Any name not on the list would not be eligible for election.

A few years earlier a proposal such as this which took all electoral power away from the Church would have been flatly rejected by the elders and by the Church. It is a measure of the success achieved by the rosy picture painted by the Judge of the marvellous work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and bringing many more into the fold and all realised by merely obeying the mandates of the Judge without question that the brethren were so easily persuaded.

Against the rules, and at the price of a stern look of disapproval from Jesse, one of the dissentient elders did ask a supplementary question. How did this proposal square with the Scriptural method which had been assented to by all Bible Students for forty years past, and as outlined in Volume 6?

The Judge also looked daggers. He had spoken, and who

should question? He explained tersely that times changed and practices had to change accordingly. And anyway Volume 6 was written twenty years ago. He indicated that he had been in the meeting long enough and was duly ushered out by Jesse Hemery. He had at least ensured that after the next election there would be no dissentient elders.

There were not many shots left in the locker. The battle was lost anyway. It had probably not been worth fighting for two or three years past. At the next elders' meeting, June 20, 1924, the Chairman – Jesse Hemery – announced that the Executive had decided that all week-night meetings in the London area were to be held on Thursdays (traditionally each meeting chose its own convenient meeting night) and all of them must study the same "Watch Tower" article. This was unreasoning standardisation with a vengeance, a thousand people all over London being told they must meet on a given night and must discuss what they are told to discuss – not the Bible, but the word of man. Unfortunately one of the two dissentient elders, Walter Mott, was absent from the meeting that night. The other one spoke up in protest, asking what was happening to the Bible Student claim that they based all their beliefs and conclusions on the basic study of the Bible itself; what was happening to the volumes of Scripture Studies which had been the means of leading so many to this basic study of the Bible, the inspiration of the entire movement?

Jesse Hemery replied in a more conciliatory tone than he had employed to the questioner for a long time past. Perhaps, at this late hour, he recalled his own early days in the Truth, way back in 1890, when he was about the same age as his present questioner. Full of enthusiasm for this new understanding of the Scriptures he had then received, visiting any who expressed an interest, expounding to them the message, he did all that was within his power to make it known, in an atmosphere of perfect freedom and good Christian fellowship. If so, the vision must have faded and here he was, a mature and perhaps disillusioned man of sixty, head of a large and well-known church but bound to obey the dictates of a man more powerful than he. It might have been with a sense of weariness that he gave his answer, the answer that he knew he had to give. We must be up-to-date, he

said. The brethren can study the volumes at home if they so desire. And that was all.

But not quite. The subject of “unhealthy” week-night class meetings came up again for discussion. An “unhealthy” class was one the members of which were not proving amenable to the voice which spoke from America. The remedy, if they could not be persuaded to mend their ways, was to strike them off the list. “Unprofitable” was the technical term coined to express the position. Several present spoke rather disparagingly of the bad influence Walter Mott was having on the meeting held in his home at South Norwood. Strangely enough, the same meeting and the same Walter Mott had been highly esteemed for many years as a good community of students but since he had made his objections to current events known not so much was said about that. Walter Mott was a moderately wealthy business man and upon coming into the Faith many years previously had donated large sums to the Society towards its work and given generous gifts to the Tabernacle itself. He was a cheerful, enthusiastic and utterly sincere man and a popular elder. But he dissented, and so he had to go. And the best way to accomplish that was to disfellowship his local meeting. Their feelings were not consulted.

The formal proposal was made. Walter Mott was not present at this particular meeting. No one seemed to think that mattered. Before the vote was taken, Albert Hudson, the only other remaining dissentient, pointed out the unfairness of condemning a man in his absence and unheard. His only crime – if crime it was – that he contended for the congregation’s control of its own affairs as against dictatorship from above, and up to recently that had been the normal position at London Tabernacle. He himself happened to have been the appointed chairman of that particular study class for the month just past and he had found them to be an earnest and instructed group of people well worthy of the name of Bible Students. He opposed the motion.

He sat down, thinking to himself “If Mottie is for the chop, I go to the block with him, and that is the end”.

It was. Arthur Lodge, in measured tones and impeccable English, put the opposite case, and that ensured the verdict.

South Norwood was struck off. The last two dissentients gave up. The 1925 Board of Elders had no dissentients and no opposition.

But the secession movement flourished and increased.



R. Cormack



H. J. Shearn



W. Crawford



F. Edgell



C. Cotton



D. Cronk



H. Hooper



W. Eddington

LONDON TABERNACLE



F. G. Guard



F. H. Guard



A. Guy



J. Sharman



S. French



A. Parker



D. Vaughan

**FOREST GATE AND ALDERSBROOK
SOME OF THE LONDON ELDERS ACTIVELY INVOLVED
IN THE SECESSION**

BIBLE STUDENTS' COMMITTEE.

"All live are those to serve: Christ's brethren here
Are needing aid, in them thou seest Him."

Address For: Them:

42, BELBORNE ROAD,
ILFORD, E86EX.

May, 1919.

DEAR BRETHREN,

Greetings in our dear Redeemer's Name.

Since the death of our dear Brother Russell, peaceful and unlooked-for developments have arisen amongst the Lord's people, and many of the brethren in Great Britain and elsewhere find themselves forced to dissent from much that is now done in the name of the Lord and the Harvest Work. It is unnecessary to detail all the various items to which objection is necessarily taken, but evidence is not lacking to show a departure from the principles of the Truth, and also from the arrangements of our beloved Brother.

Shortly after his "change," there were influences at work in this Country which culminated in the open violation of the "Golden Rule" and of the principles that had been entrusted to him, and held us together as a united body. It was a full knowledge of the needs and wishes of the brethren in London, so that by means of a general conference of brethren the Lord's will with respect to these matters may be further determined and arrangements for the future made accordingly.

The Committee wishes to state that it does not desire to act in opposition to any who are engaged in the promulgation of "present truth." It stands humbly, yet firmly, by the Word of God, believing that the things written therein are sufficient for the guidance and instruction of God's people. It highly values and greatly appreciates the presentation and exposition of that Word as given us of the Lord through our dear Pastor in our various volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures" and "Tabernacle Shadows," etc., and proposes to uphold them in every possible way.

Surely at this time it behoves us all to "watch and pray" as never before, lest the great Enemy of God's people, putting light for darkness and darkness for light, lead us away from a simple and profound trust in Him into the artificial and unscriptural methods of Babylon.

In conclusion, dear brethren, "we commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified," reminding you that, whilst the trials of the Lord's people increase in unexpected ways, on the other hand, evidences accumulate which indicate that the "way" is coming to an end.

Hoping it may mean a glorious consummation for you,

We are, with love in Him,

Your brethren and fellow-servants,

W. CHAWFORD,
F. B. EDGELL,
ALEX. GUY,
E. G. GUARD,
W. C. SEAGRE,
H. J. SHEARN,
G. B. THARRATT.

BIBLE STUDENTS' COMMITTEE.

"All live are those to serve: Christ's brethren here
Are needing aid, in them thou seest Him."

Address For: Them:

42, BELBORNE ROAD,
ILFORD, E86EX.

August, 1919.

DEAR BRETHREN,

Greetings in our dear Redeemer's Name.

As many dear friends were prevented from attending the Convention held in the First Hall, London, E.C.1, on August 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, we have deemed it only proper that a short account of the proceedings be circulated for the information and encouragement of those who were unable to attend. It is hoped that this may be carried out practically as arranged. A right attention to the "Studies" in the "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend. The "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend. The "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend.

The Hall is one of the finest Town Halls in London, and the arrangements for the Convention were of no time less experienced. The "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend. The "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend. The "Tabernacle Shadows" will be of great value to the brethren who are unable to attend.

PART OFFICIAL REPORTS OF CONFERENCE AND CONVENTION
ESTABLISHING THE BIBLE STUDENTS COMMITTEE IN 1919

MORNING APPEARETH

THE INSTITUTION of the Bible Students Committee in 1919 was followed by a ten-year period of activity and growth on the part of the secession movement. Progress was necessarily gradual. It was an old tenet of the Bible Students that no roll of membership be maintained and only the Society's London office knew just what local assemblies existed and where they were. An appreciable number of these had seceded, or been organised, at various times without knowing of the formation of the Committee, and only became associated when the news filtered through to them at some later date. Conscious of this fact, and desiring to reach any who were dissatisfied with current events, a postcard was prepared and circulated by every practicable means to reach such, apprising them of the position and inviting their response. Headed "In the Master's Name" it ran:

"It is not surprising that in some quarters there is surprise and disillusionment. The early joy of the Truth has become dimmed in a maze of activity and service which in many cases hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in one's own heart. Therefore some are perplexed and distressed, and some are losing faith.

"Others have passed through this experience before, but the Good Shepherd, true to His word, has led them beside green pastures and still waters. To-day they rejoice in fellowship which, although small in numbers, and oft-times coming short of its profession, endeavours to manifest the spirit of Christ. There is no central organisation to whose behests all must conform – the various classes determine for themselves what they shall study and how their meetings shall be conducted. There is free literature and ample opportunities for public

witness work of all kinds. Several periodicals minister to the spiritual needs of the brethren, and pilgrim visits, conventions and other mediums of growth in grace are at the service of the friends, "without money and without price". As in the days of old, the Master's work is carried on in faith that He will supply the means.

"If you are disturbed in mind, realising that your Christian life might be richer and fuller than it is; if you feel that you cannot exercise to the full that liberty wherewith Christ makes free; rest assured there are some who are waiting to extend to you the right hand of fellowship."

The reverse side of this card bore the address of the Committee for return, with space for the recipient's name and address, enabling them to be sent further information and details of the nearest regular meeting of the brethren. These cards were in regular use for more than fifteen years thereafter but they had their greatest impact during the years 1920 – 1928. Many of the brethren took quantities and sent them to others of their acquaintance and so an appreciable number were brought into contact with what was going on.

A number of assemblies there were which did not fall in with the arrangements thus made, preferring to maintain a somewhat aloof attitude, at least in the earlier years. Their members had been so deeply wounded by recent experiences that they tended to distrust all forms of organisation and elected to conduct their fellowship in measurable isolation. The feeling was understandable, and in most cases made little difference to their association with the brethren generally, and their participation in convention gatherings and the like.

Demands began to come in from all over the country for pastoral visits to the classes by members of the Committee or other able brethren, to inform, advise and encourage the local meetings, and for printed matter in the form of leaflets and books suitable for evangelical work. All the emphasis was on continuing church life and activity as it had existed before the secession. Funds were coming in rapidly and it was evident that the growing work was not going to be hampered by lack of money. Rightly judging that the first essential was to gauge at first hand the outlook and wishes of brethren everywhere the

first overt action of the Committee was to organise the “Pilgrim Service”, whereby various brothers undertook planned tours covering the meetings and brethren in a given area to minister pastoral counsel and encouragement on the one hand, and on the other to acquire knowledge of what it was desired should be done and what in practice could be done. During the first two or three years this duty was discharged mainly by H. J. Shearn, W. Crawford, F. B. Edgell and E. Housden, the latter for a number of years thereafter giving his full time to this service. In later years the Pilgrim Service expanded considerably.

The brethren were of course already accustomed to meeting together in General Conventions, usually at public holiday times and lasting several days. The initial 1919 Convention at East Ham Town Hall set the pattern and it was plain that a similar annual event was generally demanded. Agreeably to this, a national Convention over the three days of August Bank Holiday week-end in London was instituted – this was still going on more than half a century later – and for the first five years from 1920 was held at the South Place Institute, London, attended by conventioners from all over the country. These gatherings brought brethren together who otherwise would not have known each other, so cementing what traditionally had been known as “the tie that binds”. Other Conventions held by the three principal assemblies in Britain, Forest Gate, Glasgow and Manchester, usually at Easter or Whitsun, made their contribution to the general weal.

All this activity was very fine and satisfying, but the brethren were not out to set up a kind of religious club and mutual admiration society in which all the preaching was to be to the converted. The Bible Student faith was essentially a missionary faith, and they wanted evangelistic literature, plenty of it, freely available as it had been in former days.

And so, in 1920, six months after the formation of the Committee, the printers were brought into the picture.

The call was for tracts, four-page folders, the size of a modern newspaper, containing a mass of Scriptural information, of the kind they had used in former years. Henry Shearn was not so sure. He knew that most of these enthusiasts had been carrying bundles of such tracts from street to street for

many years and did not realise that as time went on that habit would not come so easily. After all, those old-time tracts did weigh thirty-three pounds per thousand and a good "volunteer", as they were then termed, would reckon to put out five hundred an hour in average territory. Tracts now would have to be of more modest proportions both from the point of view of cost and the tract distributors' abilities. And he also had another idea.

That idea was the "Kingdom Card".

The Kingdom Card was a small green card a little smaller than an ordinary postcard. On one side it bore a message calling attention to the significance of current events in relation to Biblical foreviews of the future plans of God. The other side had the address of the Committee and a space for the enquirer to write his name and address. The sender of the card received a selection of literature and details of local meetings. From the production point of view the cards were cheap and for door-to-door distribution easy to carry in quantity.

The scheme was an immediate success. The first cards came off the press early in 1920 and the first printing of 20,000 was immediately exhausted. In later years the annual circulation reached nearly a quarter of a million per annum and there were three depots in suitable centres of the UK for their despatch to users. The response from the "public" considerably exceeded that customary from the old-time tracts and the idea "caught on" everywhere. In later years extra help had to be brought in to the London office to cope with the flood of enquiries.

Of course suitable "back-up" literature had to be provided to supplement the Kingdom Card, which after all was only a means to elicit an interested enquiry. Therefore from 1921 onward there was an annual production and consumption of four-page leaflets dealing with subjects such as "Why God permits Evil", "A Dark Cloud and its Silver Lining", "Which is the True Gospel", "Thy Kingdom Come", "A Better Day Coming", and so on. By the end of the decade a quarter million such tracts had been distributed.

All this brought to the front the question of publishing larger books devoted to expositions of the Faith. Particularly was it desired to have access to an edition of the traditional textbook,

the “Divine Plan of the Ages” without the old Society imprint. The upshot was the production in 1922 of what is probably the most handsome edition of the “Divine Plan” ever published. Full library size, bound in dark blue cloth with gold blocked title, with frontispiece photograph of the author, this became the standard edition among the brethren for twenty years. The published imprint was threefold – Bible Students Committee of London, Pastoral Bible Institute of Brooklyn, and Berean Bible Institute of Melbourne. With these latter organisations, breakaway movements originating at the same time as the Bible Students Committee – and still existing – the British brethren enjoyed friendly relations from the start. The project was carried through by the Committee and the book was printed in England, the other two organisations taking their share of the edition for their own use and sharing the cost accordingly. The printing plates were held by the Committee until the Second World War and only disposed of when it was realised that modern printing methods rendered the heavy copper plates obsolete.

The astute mind of H. J. Shearn soon perceived that the vigour with which this edition of the “Divine Plan” was being circulated would very soon give rise to a demand for something less costly than the full-blown library edition and the result was his masterly abbreviation of the full 350-page book into the compass of 100 pages, still preserving its essential message. This was issued towards the end of 1922 under the title “The Plan of God in Brief”, with an attractive gold and green stiff paper cover. In the first six months over five thousand copies were taken up and distributed. The demand continued through the years; in 1932 a second edition had to be printed and a third in 1938 which lasted until 1948.

Two years later saw the production of two more modest clothbound books directed, not towards evangelical work as was the “Divine Plan”, but to the interests of the brethren themselves. There was foreseen, by the more thoughtful, a coming need for a succinct and clearcut definition of the essential doctrines of Christian theology in the light of the typical Bible Student position. Traditionally, all this was covered by the expositions contained in Volumes 5 and 6 of

“Studies in the Scriptures” but these, although still available, bore the imprint of the system which had been repudiated and which in any case was now moving into a condition of belief, activity and outlook from which the brethren had turned away and could not endorse. Already enquiries as to what could be done to remedy this situation were coming in to the Committee, and the result was a general discussion at the 1924 annual convention and a reference back to all the associated brethren in the UK for opinions; the majority verdict was that the use of the “Studies in the Scriptures” bearing the offending imprint was considered unwise as tending to perpetuate in the public mind a connection with the old Society which was no longer the case, but not much could be done about it unless the Committee could see its way to republish over its own imprint. In consequence of the heavy publishing expenses already incurred, this was not practicable. What was done, however, was to publish in this same year two modest clothbound books, “A Review of the Doctrines” and “Doctrines and Disciplines” which set out comparatively briefly the doctrinal outlook of the brethren; these publications went into use for the enlightenment of new adherents to the fellowship. (Twenty years later a more recent breakaway movement in the USA, the “Dawn Bible Students Association”, did publish the complete set of “Studies in the Scriptures” over their own imprint and this solved the problem for the British brethren.) In 1930 the Committee published a book by Benjamin Barton entitled “God’s Covenants” dealing with the Scriptural doctrines of the Covenants, the Ransom, the Sin-Offering, and Justification; this enjoyed a moderate circulation and was available up to the time of the Second World War.

Within the space of five years, therefore, a mass of useful literature came into being and one of the essential purposes of the central publishing Committee was being well fulfilled – a plentiful supply of useful agents in the general evangelical work which was being carried on.

But the principal event for which 1924 stands out was the birth of the “Bible Study Monthly”.

It was realised from the start that a suitable periodical journal was a “must” for the new fellowship. The journal of the

Pastoral Bible Institute in Brooklyn, the “Herald of Christ’s Kingdom”, had begun to fill the gap for many – the Committee acted as its British agent for this journal and its circulation in the UK increased steadily for some ten years. But in this as in other spheres there was a strong feeling of independence, that the British fellowship needed to be as truly national as possible. Hence in mid-1924 the first number of the new journal appeared, under the editorship of Ebenezer Housden. It was very modest compared with the same journal as it exists to-day, but it was a start. Confining itself at that time in the main to articles of Christian uplift and instruction, one of its uses was the dissemination of notices of conventions, pilgrim trips, and the like, activities of local assemblies, and news of general interest. Its original title was “B.S.C. Monthly”, but in 1927 a suggestion was made that this be changed to “Bible Students Monthly” and at the Whitsun General Convention held in Huddersfield that year this was agreed with acclamation. (A further change to “Bible Study Monthly” was made in 1952 on account of some confusion in the public mind with the old Society, and this is the title under which it is published to-day.)

There were other efforts. In 1925 the Glasgow Church commenced the publication of the “Associated Bible Students Magazine” on a more ambitious scale than the “Monthly”; this was probably its undoing, for although well written and well produced it failed to “make the grade” and disappeared after a few years. Frank Edgell left the Committee in 1923 to devote himself to the production of a little journal called “Fellowship”, which still continues under another editorship – Frank Edgell died in 1965. The “Dawn” brethren in USA, who appeared in 1930, began to publish the “Dawn”, which has a limited circulation in the UK. The Bible Study Monthly remains the principal journal and in fact has increased its circulation to most parts of the world, and inside the UK finds readers, both laymen and ministers, in about all Christian denominations to an extent where the “denominational” readers considerably outnumber the brethren for whose use it was originally instituted.

It may be that this is the point to interject a short sketch of one small community of UK Bible Students which has kept

itself somewhat aloof from the main body. Back in 1916 when Paul Johnson of USA figured prominently in events in this country there were a few who endorsed his actions and formed a nucleus of supporters remaining in touch with him. When, later on, and back in America, he organised the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement these elected to count themselves members in this country. Under the impression fostered by Johnson that they alone represent the true remnant of the original Bible Student movement they have pursued a separate course through the years, holding very tenaciously to the outlook and work characteristic of Brother Russell but in addition looking upon Paul Johnson as his Divinely ordained successor whose direction in matters of faith and conduct must be obeyed implicitly. Since that was the issue upon which the British brethren as a whole seceded in the first place it is not surprising the idea found little support elsewhere. There was not much point in rejecting Rutherford if Johnson and his successors – he died in 1952 – were to be accepted in lieu, and in point of fact virtually everyone in the UK wanted no more to do with him after the events of 1916. The LHMM however is to be commended for its missionary enterprise and, too, the deep sense of utter consecration to the Lord's service manifested by its members. In more recent years they are chiefly represented in the Midlands, and their zeal for the promulgation of the Faith is worthy of all emulation. Their insistence that each assembly and individual must accept the direction and interpretation of Scripture of the movement's leader, as one appointed by the Lord to that office, tends to preclude any organic connection or mutual co-operative service, and this is felt by many to be a matter of regret. Nevertheless they must be regarded as part of the fellowship notwithstanding their reluctance to join in with the main body.

So 1925, six years after the formal secession, saw the process virtually completed and the new fellowship in full operation, with conventions and pilgrim service operating as it had done formerly, local meetings prospering as they always had done, and a plentiful supply of literature wherewith the message of the Kingdom could be proclaimed. By this time the number of associated assemblies had increased to just under 200 – the true

number was almost certainly appreciably more for these are the ones that are known and can be deduced from records and it is a fact that many independent meetings sprang up and never appeared in any records. Close contact was maintained with organised brethren in USA, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. The country – and the world – was slowly recovering from the effects of the First World War and the future, from the Truth activity point of view, looked rosy.

During 1924 William Crawford, a brother of long standing and held in high esteem, first at Glasgow and later in London, began to express his feeling that there was need to lay increased stress, by means of printed page, on the necessity of “sound doctrine”. This, as far as it went, was good; most of the brethren accepted that principle and there were no doctrinal divergencies in the fellowship at that time – some did emerge later – and the necessity for this apparently undue emphasis did not appeal to the majority. Crawford laid a proposal that the Committee endorse and publish his views of the doctrinal basis of the Faith. The Committee were not convinced that said views, or at any rate his method of expressing them, did justify their undertaking so to do. Voting on the motion resulted in two members being in favour and five against. Conscious however of the fundamental principle of the fellowship, that direction does not come from the organising centre but from the fellowship, the proposal was put to the country at large. This was the third time a national referendum had been called for in the five years of the Committee’s existence. On this occasion it took five months to notify what was now a considerably augmented fellowship and to get all the votes in. The result was an overwhelming rejection of the proposal.

William Crawford accepted this decision in good heart and decided that he himself would publish the matters he had in mind, and find his own means of publicity, in all of which the Committee wished him God-speed. In consequence, the first issue of “Old Paths Publications” appeared in 1925 and found a ready circulation among some of the brethren. There was no editorial name attached but of course everybody knew that Crawford was behind the effort. Realising that he could hardly

remain on the Committee without to some extent involving it with the publication, he resigned in 1924 to devote himself to his chosen work. Crawford, a dour Scot, tended to be rather dogmatic on doctrinal matters and sometimes condemnatory of what he regarded as laxity in doctrinal belief and so did not always appeal to the majority – although it might well be suggested that at least one doctrinal watchdog in the fellowship could be useful – but there were many who did appreciate his characteristic ministry and he continued to be a popular speaker at conventions, although liable to exceed the normal time of sixty minutes. He is known to have continued in full spate for two hours at a stretch oblivious to a certain amount of surreptitious consulting of watches and the dwindling of his audience as first one and then another quietly slipped out to catch their train home. Which brings to mind one semi-humorous incident at a Conway Hall convention in 1931 where William was the Sunday morning speaker. Now the catering arrangements at Conway Hall were really inadequate for the numbers attending the Annual Convention and speakers were warned to adhere to the programme timing to avoid dislocating the later sessions . Of course no one really expected William Crawford to be conscious of the lapse of time when on the rostrum. True to form, half-past twelve came when the session should end and he was just getting into his subject. Fifteen more minutes passed, and he had not yet arrived at the “Finally, brethren,” which usually betokened at least another twenty minutes. Brother H—, Chairman of the Convention for that day, was, and is, never one to suffer long speakers gladly, and here he envisaged a frantic rush for meals and inevitable late running for the rest of the day. He made his way to the rear of the platform, came up quietly behind the speaker, who was still in full cry, laid a paper on the rostrum before him inscribed “TIME TO STOP”, and retired as quietly, thinking the speaker would take the point and bring his exhortation to a gentle but expeditious close. Not so the redoubtable William; he took up the paper, looked at it, and announced to his audience “Brother H—thinks its time I stopped” and promptly did so. There must have been quite a few in that company at that moment who felt the same as Brother H—.

The "Old Paths Publications" continued for thirty years until William Crawford's death in 1957. He had a long and honourable career amongst the brethren, one of the first to accept the Faith way back about 1885 in Glasgow, a period as elder in the Glasgow Church until coming to London in 1911 and then a leading part in the formation of the independent fellowship in 1919.

By 1925 therefore the teething troubles were over and the fellowship sailed into calmer waters. By now the rearguard which had remained at the London Tabernacle and at one or two other of the larger centres in a hopeless resistance to the changing order of things there had either given up the fight or been eliminated and all were together in one camp, working together for the future. From this date, additions to the number from that source began to decline sharply; most of those who were going to "come out" had done so and the total number of independent brethren in the country was approaching four thousand. Naturally enough, the widening range of choice of able brethren was reflected in the composition of the Committee – successive annual elections showed a swing away from the initial preponderance of London brethren to bring in more from the provinces. The period 1925–30 was one in which Tom Holmes of Nottingham, Rob Court of Birmingham, William Drinkwater of Nottingham, William Humphrey of Huddersfield, Thomas Smedley of East Kirkby, William Wileman of Doncaster, Walter Morrall of Morecambe, all served for greater or lesser terms in the central administration. It cannot be said that here was a ruling clique which maintained its own permanence and kept all power in its own hands. The votes of the brethren nationwide ensured a periodic infusion of "new blood", to the advantage of the fellowship. Only Henry Shearn remained, from inception until his retirement. The universal respect and affection in which he was held ensured that.

Two traditional activities which it was attempted to revive in this decade proved disappointing. The colporteur work of the pre-1916 period had been so effective that quite naturally the brethren assumed it could be restored as of yore. From 1925 and for about ten years thereafter sporadic attempts were made by a few to get back "on the road" using the new edition of the Divine

Plan as the principal medium. But the public taste was changing. People were not so interested in religion at the doors. The post-war generation was not so receptive as had been the pre-war. Although at any one time over this period up to about ten brethren in various parts of the country were thus engaged it proved to be an unprofitable exercise and as such it gradually died out and was no more.

The other activity was in the field of public lectures. The natural assumption was that the large audiences normal in the pre-war years would come again – but they did not. There were several reasons for this. It was not lack of zeal or effort on the part of the brethren. The 1920 decade was one in which a great many were disillusioned with religion – the recent world war had done that. Times were hard, re-adjustment to normal life was slow and painful. The radio had just been invented and it was a novelty to sit at home and listen to a speaker from the British Broadcasting Company's radio station, and perhaps a little more comfortable than going out to hear a speaker in the local hall. (In 1928 the BBC did invite Henry Shearn to give a fifteen minutes presentation of the Bible Students faith "on the air". He declined, saying he could not say what he wanted to say in fifteen minutes – perhaps this was a mistake; the invitation was never repeated.)

Rather better fortune was experienced in the 1930s but for the present there was little appeal. A typical example was a lecture held in Woolwich Town Hall, South-East London, where in 1910 Pastor Russell had addressed a thousand local people. In 1927 a hundred and twenty were present. Other efforts during the decade showed the same falling off in interest so that review of the position by leading brethren in 1928 expressed the opinion that in this form of witness "results are not good". Slowly the lesson was being learned that as one generation succeeds another outlooks and standards change and with them must change methods of preaching the Gospel which in itself never changes. Public lectures went on for many years after this decade but no longer with the expectation of thousands of attendants. Yet the Lord did say once "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

In a different direction there was real effect. A suggestion

was made in 1922 that an effective avenue of service might be to the blind. At that time there was little organised provision for reading aids for such. Discussions by those interested led to an approach to the Committee for investigation into possibilities. The outcome was the introduction of a Braille lending library of Truth literature. The initial cost was heavy but adequate funds were forthcoming. By 1924 the "Divine Plan of the Ages" had been rendered into Braille together with a number of short dissertations on subjects of interest. The "Divine Plan" comprised six Braille volumes each fourteen by ten inches, three inches thick, and instalments were sent by post to interested readers. At the start fifty-five such volumes, including five complete sets of the "Divine Plan", were produced and put into stock. Brethren everywhere were encouraged to seek out the blind in their own districts and send in names of those desiring to receive this service. Thirty-six such names were enrolled almost immediately and the system went into operation.

Following a further suggestion, a hundred single sheets containing favourite hymns were added to the compendium in the feeling that some might appreciate being able to read words probably already familiar.

1925 saw the addition of Volume 5. "The Atonement", and the book "Tabernacle Shadows" in Braille. The number of readers had increased and were located all over the country from Brighton on the South Coast to Thurso in the north of Scotland. Three years later a number of treatises dealing with various aspects of Scripture especially relating to events betokening the end of the Age and the coming Millennial reign of Christ were added to the growing library and the little party of brethren who were handling this aspect of the work found themselves fully occupied in packing, despatching, recording and receiving the constant interchange of books. In 1930 it was reported that the books in stock were fully in use and this continued until 1934 when Volume 2, "The Time is at Hand", was added together with another three dozen "Millennial" treatises and part of the Scenario of the "Photo-Drama of Creation". 1937 saw the last conversion to Braille in the form of Volume 6. "The New Creation", this work appearing in the

form of seven bulky Braille volumes which were sent to readers one at a time.

By 1940 the original books, read and re-read scores of times, had become so worn with use that they were practically unreadable. Only the latest, Volume 6, was in suitable condition for continuing use. Simultaneously the national public libraries had awakened to this problem and were supplying increasing examples of Braille literature of all descriptions for the blind. It became obvious that no useful purpose was going to be served by renewing the worn-out copies, and so in 1943 the Braille library was closed down and the useless copies destroyed. For twenty years it had served a useful purpose and many had appreciated the message who otherwise might never have heard it.

Another avenue of service which found a ready field of action was the institution of the Benevolent Fund. Right at the inauguration of the new fellowship in 1919 it was felt, and expressed during Convention proceedings, that some thought should be given to the plight of brethren adversely affected by the aftermath of war – which had ended only nine months previously. The consequence was the institution of a fund from which the needs of such could be met (there was no such thing as Social Security in those days – the final end of the very poor was the workhouse). With the burning words of the Apostle James in mind, the administration of the fund was vested in the central Committee with exhortation to see that, again in the words of James, the needy were “warmed and filled”. Financially, the Fund was well supported from the start by well-wishers. The need, and its satisfaction, increased as the country – and the world – moved towards the great financial and economic recession of 1930 and by that time not only money but also clothing, used and new, and necessary home soft furnishings such as linen were being freely donated. A measure of the scale of this work is afforded by the fact that in 1933 there were no less than sixteen distributing centres in England and Scotland staffed by volunteer brethren who received and stored the articles, and despatched them in accordance with intimations sent from central office. Brethren all over the country were desired to notify any case of apparent

need coming under their notice and suitable action was then taken. The need was particularly great in South Wales where a considerable number of brethren in the mining valleys were for a long time without work, without money, without food, and had it not been for their fervent faith, without hope. So late as the middle of the 1930s, when the burden was beginning to lift, the Christian fortitude of those South Wales brethren became almost proverbial, and in the wondrous economy of God, they became an inspiration to others.

The introduction of the Government Social Security system in 1948 eased the burden on this Benevolent Fund but there has always been a need in some quarters to be met and it continued and is still functioning. After the Second World War aid to brethren in Germany became a feature; also the administration of the Fund passed into the hands of a separate committee set up for the purpose.

The second half of the decade witnessed a sharp acceleration of Pilgrim activity. The considerable increase in the number of local assemblies was the principal reason for this combined with the growing realisation that the all-British independent Bible Student movement was a reality and had come to stay. For some years Ebenezer Housden had travelled England and Scotland with an occasional trip to Ireland; in 1928 he was joined by Thomas Smedley and between them they made over three hundred visits to local centres. In 1929 they were joined for a short time by Henry Shearn for a similar programme. In 1930 Housden had to give up but Tom Holmes came in to fill the gap with a somewhat lower total of visits, and later George Ford of Luton rendered similar service, and until the end of the 1930s a full programme of such visits was maintained.

In addition to this ministry by British brethren there were also visits by brethren from overseas. In 1924 Brother Blackburn from USA visited this country at the invitation of the BSC and ministered to thirty local meetings. In 1926 Isaac Hoskins came at the invitation of the Forest Gate Church and served similarly, spending six months in this country. Then in 1929 R. B. Nicholson of the Berean Bible Institute of Australia followed at BSC invitation for the same purpose. It was agreed on all sides that the brethren were being well served by a

succession of visiting brethren as they had never been in the pre-secession years. Throughout the 1930s almost every year saw one or more from USA or the Continent on tour in this country.

1926-30 witnessed a decline in the number of General Conventions. The economic condition of the country was worsening, unemployment was rising, the economic collapse of 1930 was not far off, and the cost of travel and accommodation for the three or four days' convention centred in one of the big cities was becoming a serious consideration. A general referendum in 1925 indicated a strong preference for the organisation of a greater number of local "Home-gatherings" where the attendance could be expected to be in the 100/150 range in lieu of the big city General Conventions with attendances of 600. Birmingham and Huddersfield did hold 4-day and 3-day Conventions but in the main the alternative proposal held the field.

The "Home-gathering" derived its name from the fact that it was a one-day gathering of brethren within a defined area, perhaps six or seven adjacent local meetings, rather than one drawing its attendants from the entire country. It had the merit of low travelling cost and elimination of overnight accommodation expenses and could be held on any convenient week-end instead of the statutory Bank Holiday week-end. During times of economic depression when money was scarce it had its merits and attractions. Such gatherings had been a feature of the communal fellowship since the rise of the new order of things, in 1919, but concurrent with the beginning of the economic crisis in 1927 the number took a sharp upward rise. Thus 1927 saw at least fifteen such gatherings, in places as far apart as Worthing, Dartford, Cardiff, Bath, Bristol, in the South, to Wombwell and Mansfield in the North. 1928 had twenty with others unrecorded, and 1929 nearer thirty. The peak was reached in 1936 with more than forty such events, the attendances ranging between 70 and 250. There was never a year in later times without its tally of Home-gatherings each of which was, to the local assembly which organised it and were hosts to the visitors, the high-light of the year.

A typical report appearing in the "Monthly" for January

1936 illustrates the spirit of such gatherings. The report was submitted by an "old-time" believer, Brother Carter of Tunbridge Wells, a little man with a big heart and boundless enthusiasm. "We of the little class at Tunbridge Wells had a most happy gathering on October 17. having dear brothers and sisters from many districts, and their bright and loving faces were a real inspiration. They know best who were present, but we had in mind dear brethren from all over the country, and such helpful messages from the brethren at Warrington and Birmingham and many from the classes round about London. Dear Bro. Ward gave a very helpful address in the afternoon and dear Bro. Nicholson in the evening, with about 90 friends listening to the message."

He did not include the humorous "gaffe" he perpetrated in his address of welcome to the visitors. The hymn "Like a river glorious, Is God's perfect peace". (No. 212 in the "Bible Students Hymnal") had been sung, in which the first part of vs 3 runs "Every joy or trial, Falleth from above, Traced upon our DIAL, By the sun of love". The reference, of course, is to the sun-dial, upon which the sun makes its mark. Brother Carter, however, in his innocent simplicity, knew only of the English slang term "dial" for "face", and so he came out with "When I look at all your happy faces, I think I have never seen such a collection of shining dials in all my life". The ripple of amusement which went round the hall only served to accentuate the spirit of good fellowship of the occasion.

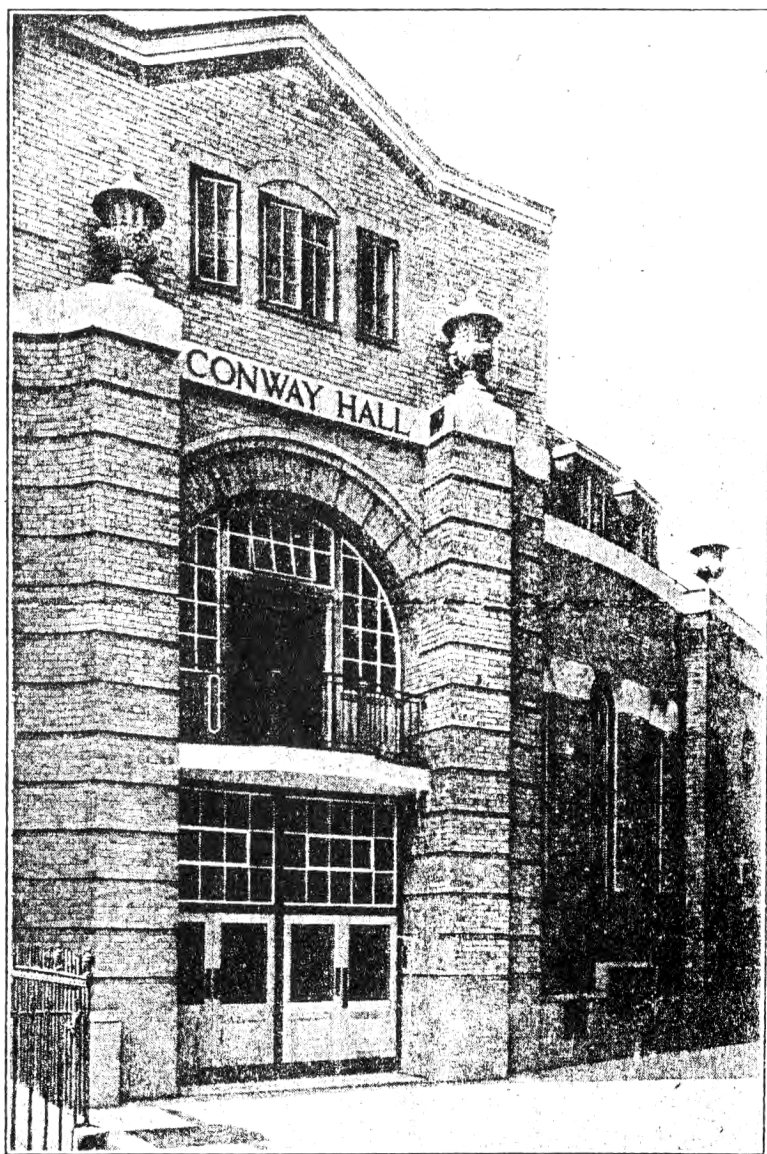
At this time there were something like 240 regular assemblies in the country, ranging from the big city churches like Glasgow and Forest Gate with about 400 members each, through places like Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, where membership was in the order of 100 to 150, down to the country town or village groups of ten or twenty. These were, of course, the active members; most groups of any size had a more or less regular fringe of interested people who normally attended the Sunday services without taking any appreciable part in the evangelical activities, and these, especially in the cities, would increase the attendance appreciably. A conservative estimate of the really active membership based on such records as remain would put it at about four thousand in 1930.

Hereto the annual London Convention had been arranged by the Committee, this tradition stemming from the 1919 East Ham Town Hall Convention which started the whole thing. Now there were plenty of brethren in the London area capable of handling such a Convention by themselves. And so the 1931 Convention was mooted.

Conway Hall, a brand new building in the centre of London, was ideal for the purpose. It had been built for the London Ethical Society to replace their former less commodious home, the South Place Institute in Finsbury Circus, which had been the venue for the Bible Students Conventions in earlier years. Just completed and about to be formally opened for use, this Convention was the first function to be held within its walls. In after years it became a household word among the UK brethren – annual conventions were held here practically annually, except for the wartime years, with an occasional change to another venue before the war, until 1970. The season was Easter, and the Convention started on Good Friday and continued without intermission until Easter Monday. Its seating capacity of 600 was completely filled during most of the time and since a proportion were able to attend only for two days or perhaps three, it is probable that nearly a thousand brethren were there at one time or another. Isaac Hoskins of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Brooklyn, had been invited by the Forest Gate Church to visit this country and he became the guest speaker, supported by a panel of British speakers from all parts of the UK from Glasgow in the north to London in the south.

The Convention ended, and the conventioners returned to their homes radiant in the spiritual uplift they had received and buoyed up by blissful expectations for the future. Not many knew that these days of progress and building and increasing numbers were destined to give place to a time of pausing in building, and the consolidation of that which had been achieved. The years were piling up; some of these brethren who had known the activities of the Harvest and gone through the difficult times of the secession were now beginning to feel the weight of years and realise that for them the tempo of life must henceforth be in a lower key. A younger generation was coming

to the front, a generation that had never known the days of the Harvest preaching or the dark times of the secession, and because they had never known these things, and because they were the younger generation, must inevitably view the Faith – and the future – from their own angle. That was going to make a difference. That was a hard thing for many of the older ones to accept; it always is, in any generation. Something of the old zest was going to be lost, and something of the old outlook. But the work of the Truth went on.



CONWAY HALL, LONDON



T. Holmes



T. Smedley



E. Housden



E. W. Wenborn



J. C. Radwell



G. A. Ford

IN THE PILGRIM SERVICE 1920-1940



**SOME OF THE CONVENTIONERS
CONWAY HALL 1931**



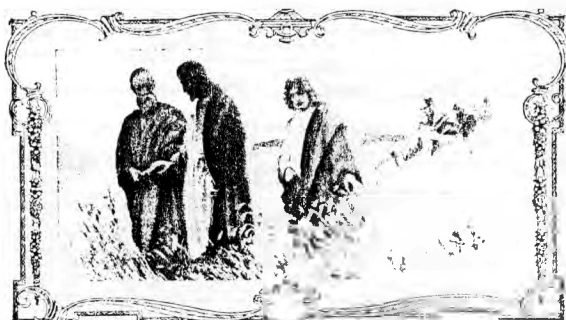
SPEAKERS' ROSTRUM, CONWAY HALL



* * * F. Lardent J. Murray
 * A. Hudson, J. Radwell, E. Kelham * * * * *
 * E. Wenborn C. Luttichau D. Cronk I. Hoskins D. McEwen A. Barnett *
 (Asterisks denote non-speakers)

Speakers not shown: D. Vaughan, W. Gresham, W. Crawford, C. Davey

SPEAKERS' PANEL - CONWAY HALL 1931



L O N D O N
C O N V E N T I O N
O F
B I B L E S T U D E N T S

arranged by London Ecclesias

EASTER, 1931 - APRIL 3, 4, 5, 6

A T
C O N W A Y H A L L
R E D L I O N S Q U A R E,
H O L B O R N , W . C . 1 .

T E L E P H O N E : C H A N C E R Y 8052.



"Did not our heart burn within us, while He
talked with us by the way, and while He opened
to us the Scriptures?"

PROGRAMME COVER PAGE
CONWAY HALL CONVENTION 1931



Where are the Dead?

Our Friends, Our Neighbours; The Holy, The Unholy; The Civilized, The Vile?

The proper answer to this question stands related to our own destiny, colors and influences our theology and the entire trend of our lives! The correct answer gives strength, confidence, courage, and assists towards the spirit of a sound mind!

MEN and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. For David is not ascended into the heavens." (Acts ii, 30, 34). "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man." (John iii, 13).

For a man to declare himself uninterested in this subject would be to proclaim himself idiotic—thoughtless. If the politics, etc., which concern us but for a few years, are deemed worthy of thought, study, how much more concern should we have in respect to the eternal future of ourselves and neighbours and mankind in general?

Of course, no important question has had the most profound study, ever since the reign of Sin and Death, than six thousand years ago. By this time the subject could be forgotten. The entire world should be so thoroughly informed respecting this question, that there would be nothing new to say and nobody curious to hear. But the large audiences of intelligent, thoughtful people which come to hear, and which listen with breathless interest to what we have to say, imply that after all the only subject has had, but few are thoroughly satisfied with their conclusions.

Theoretically Protestant doctrines stand with the Bible and with Catholics and declare that heaven is a place of perfection; that there can be no change to any who enter there. Hence that all trial, all refinement, all change of character must be accomplished in advance of so entrance into the abode of the saints. In a word, we agree that only the saints will ever enter there, the "pure in heart," the "overcomers," the "little flock," who now walk in the footsteps of Jesus. What about the remainder of mankind? Ah! there is the difficulty. Our larger hearts will not consent that all except the saints must spend an eternity of torture, though this is the logic of our creeds. Our hearts protest, saying that three-fourths of humanity to day are heathen and that fully that proportion of humanity altogether have never heard of God and the terms of salvation.

THE BEST OF PEOPLE PERPLEXED.

Our creeds perplex us; for, as our hearts will not permit us to think of these poor creatures going to an eternity of misery, neither will our heads permit us to say that they are fit for heaven. Indeed, it would be at variance not only with the Scripture, but also with reason itself, to suppose heaven with three-fourths of its inhabitants uninterested in every sense of the word. Our forefathers tore and kept the remainder of the arrangement. If we must object to Purgatory as being unscriptural, must we not equally object to the eternal torment of all the families of the earth as being unscriptural, especially when the Bible declares that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through Christ—blessed with a knowledge of the Truth and opportunity to come into heart harmony

with God and attain everlasting life through Christ. I believe that it is necessary to press this point of the unreasonableness of the eternal torment doctrine. Nevertheless I will remind you of what our prominent Protestant theories are on the subject.

(1) The Calvinistic thought is that Divine Wisdom and Power planned for mankind in advance, knew of the fall of man in advance, and prepared thereby by the creating of a great place called hell and the numbering of it with heaped devils for the torment of the sinners—all except the "little flock," the "elect." Love and justice were left out of this calculation; (2) The other prominent Protestant theories, the "Arminian," held to-day probably by the majority, insists that both Love and Justice created the world and arranged the torment, and that wisdom and power were not consulted; hence that God has gotten into difficulty, while endeavouring to do justly and lovingly to his creature; because lacking in power to render the needed aid. The entire difficulty, dear friends, is that, in our reasoning on the subject, we have merely asked the opinions of men and have not sought the Word of the Lord.

I shall surprise you, I feel sure, when I bring to your attention now the clear, plain, reasonable, just, loving and ever governing of our Heavenly Father. It has been so long overlooked, so long buried under the rubbish of human tradition of the "dark ages" that to-day "Truth is stranger than fiction." Well did our Lord through the prophet declare:

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans higher than your plans." (Isa. lv, 9).

And what else should we expect than this that God would be better than ourselves? Our Lord said, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." (Matt. v, 44). "If there enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." (Rom. xii, 20). In view of this, how strange to think that God would torture his enemies and that eternally; and not only so, but torture also those who are not especially his enemies, the ignorant, the heathen, all who do not become saints under present adverse conditions! From only the one standpoint can we get order out of confusion and regain the proper respect for our Creator and his dealings with our race. That is the standpoint of the Truth, as revealed to us in the Bible.

WHAT SAY THE SCRIPTURES?

The foregoing theories, be it noticed, are based upon the assumption that death does not mean death—that to die is to become more alive than before death. In Eden it was God who declared to our first parents, "Ye shall surely die." It was Satan who deceived, "Ye shall not surely die." Notice that the heathen, as well as the Christians, have accepted Satan's lie and correspondingly rejected God's Truth. In they not all agree with the verily not all claim that the dead are alive—much more alive than before they died? This, dear friends, has been our common point of mistake. We have followed the wrong teacher; the one of whom our Lord said, "Ye abide not in the Truth," and that he is the father of lies (John viii, 44).

These false doctrines have prevailed amongst the heathen for many, many centuries, but they gained no

TYPICAL 4-PAGE TRACT 1920-35 PERIOD

PEACE ON EARTH

WHEN?

With the world in the throes of an economic crisis, war and rumours of war on every hand, this would appear a singularly inappropriate time to speak of peace on earth. Yet if there is any possibility of a day in which war and the fear of war, poverty, insecurity and general unhappiness will become a thing of the past, the influences and forces which will make that day possible deserve serious attention.

There is no lack of stimulus of thought ready with a panacea for the world's distresses. Political organisations of every hue, exponents of social and economic reform, apostles of every theory under heaven all add their voices to the general clamour.

According to the measure of support they are able to command, each claims to be suffering world. Each claims to be the agent of universal security and endeavours, has failed. If there is any possibility of a day in which the world as we know it is self-preservation. Although the world is not in the ascendant, events. Yet Christ challenged clearly and definitely announcing that by self-sacrifice would the victor of that belief Christian the centuries. Now that the world's records of the ages cannot declare unequivocally that the universal practice of the teaching of that teaching—yet be the fruits of victory will be the

The Bible is the only book in which peace on earth will one day be often erroneously believed—one averted by renouncing the plea of self-interest. It is with equanimity the spectacle of best they can to improve their message is one of supreme concern not only solves the world's problem, but also the individual life so far from being indifferent, is threads of a stupendous Plan of

with equanimity the spectacle of best they can to improve their message is one of supreme concern not only solves the world's problem, but also the individual life so far from being indifferent, is threads of a stupendous Plan of

B.S. New Series, No. 2.

WORLD ORDER—OR CHAOS.

WHICH?

THOUGHTFUL minds, of old and young alike, are at this time enquiring, "To what is all the present confusion leading? Where can we look for safety and security, for justice and equity?" Some have been asking these questions for a long time, and the frequent reply has been,—"There always have been wars and troubles, and there always will be. To-day is as yesterday, and to-morrow will be the same." But is this true? If to-day is as yesterday, and if to-morrow is to be the same, what hope is there of ever attaining to anything better? Indeed, what guarantee have we that future conditions will not be very much worse?

The time has passed for ridiculing those who prophesy rocks ahead. It is common knowledge that we have not only reached the rocks, but that the ships of state are in grave danger of foundering thereon, whilst the storm but increases. There is no need to enlarge upon the difficulties,—bankruptcy of nations, unemployment and poverty in the midst of abundance, international hatred and jealousy, internal disorders, a piling up of weapons of war and destruction on all sides; and politicians declaring that the next big conflagration will be the last, and that civilization will perish in the ruins.

Are there satisfactory answers to the above questions? We say with confidence that there are, and that it is our duty to warn, and our desire to comfort.

It is natural that with the overwhelming difficulties of the present, there should be a tendency to let the burden of affairs rest upon any giant of ability who will shoulder it. The voice of democracy has become so divided, that only a strong man with implicit power to speak the word and enforce it, can take the reins of government for any length of time and bring about apparent peace and unity. But how are we to know that because the word of a dictator is obeyed, his word is therefore right? In one country the last word is "Communism," in another it is "National Socialism," bitter enemies of each other, and therefore though apparently peaceful at home, only contributing to the already overburdened international difficulties. Clearly then, the only solution, if it be along the lines of a dictator, is that he control not just one country, but all.

Where is the one that can be trusted to thus control all countries and bring order and security to this earth? Let it be declared that Christ is such a ruler, and His law the only one that will secure and give justice and mercy to all. Jesus of Nazareth came into the world 1900 years ago, and He not only foretold present day con-

TYPICAL 4-PAGE TRACTS 1935-40 PERIOD

8

MERIDIAN DAY

THE DECADE commencing with 1930 was uneventful compared with that preceding. The trauma of the separation was in the past; the flurry of activity involved in building up the organisation and getting used to the new order of things was over; conventions and pilgrim service, and, to a lesser extent, "public witness", were proceeding normally, as they had done in the past, and the prospect seemed "set fair" for the future. Nevertheless there was a difference. It was not because the public meetings were less in number than of yore, that when they were held the attendances were numbered in hundreds rather than thousands, or in tens rather than in hundreds. The ardour for proclaiming what was usually called the "gospel of the kingdom" was as strong as ever and not dampened by the lesser response. It was not that there was anything wrong with the fellowship or the meetings. There were now more than 240 separate assemblies in the United Kingdom, associated together, aggregating between them about four thousand brethren and a considerable number of sympathisers attending Sunday meetings. There were plenty of holiday and week-end conventions at which the brethren could get together; the pilgrim service effected a much greater number of class visits than had ever been known in the pre-1916 days. There seemed everything to encourage and little if any cause for despondency.

The difference resided not in these things but in a growing realisation that the traditional expectation of a speedy ending of the Age and inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom had been too optimistic. The outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, justifying the forty years' prior expectation of the event, had persuaded virtually all the faithful that the remainder of the predicted

events would follow without delay. Then all would be over and the new Age established. No one dreamed at that time how long the old world would take to die. To-day, more than seventy years later, it can be seen more clearly how the issues involved required a much longer time than was then visualised. Yet that seventy years has seen most of the expected events transpire and pass into history, and the "world that now is" into its death-throes. There was nothing wrong with the expectation except the timing, but those earnest souls of 1930 could not be expected to know that, and there was manifest an element of uncertainty as to what the future might hold which rather tended to blunt the edge of the witness and limit the force of the proclamation.

So the nineteen-thirties were quieter. It was generally conceded that the time, money and effort absorbed by the promotion of public meetings was not being justified by results and this aspect of activity was gradually lessened. Glasgow arranged a series of five successive meetings in 1933 and got an average attendance of 70. Warrington in the same year could get only 35. Abertillery in South Wales, in a series of seven, had 100 in one meeting but 60 or less at the others. Gateshead in 1939 distributed five thousand leaflets from door to door, advertised in the local Press and had slides shown in all the local cinemas. Fifty turned up. The one bright star – not very bright at that – in this decade was when Norman Woodworth of the USA "Dawn" came to England in 1938 and addressed a chain of public meetings in nine British cities from London to Glasgow, followed up with eleven more addressed by various British brethren; the highest attendance was 360 and the lowest 80. A far cry indeed from those days when the Royal Albert Hall in London, and the St Andrews Hall in Glasgow, and the Manchester Hippodrome in Manchester, used to be crowded with five or six thousand people. The message that had found so ready a lodgment in the hearts of the 1910 generation did not have the same appeal in 1930 and so the brethren turned their attention to other methods of evangelism.

The obvious alternative was to intensify the general distribution of leaflets, door to door or by other means. This always had an attraction for there were so many ways of doing

this, some bordering on the bizarre. Horace Norris of Abertillery, for example – if there had been an award for the champion tract distributor of the United Kingdom Horace would almost certainly have won it – developed the practice of enclosing tracts in glass bottles and throwing them into the River Usk, from whence they passed into the Bristol Channel and so into the open sea. Enquiries from people who had found and opened the bottles frequently came in from the North Wales coast to the Thames Estuary. “Tracting parties” of the younger people from large assemblies set out on their bicycles at weekends to deluge country towns with the message of the Kingdom. Even if the results were meagre, the benefits to the distributors were considerable, in renewed enthusiasm and determination to continue in the way. The scale of the work was nothing like former times when the number of tracts distributed annually ran into millions. Something like several hundred thousand per annum was now the norm; it was becoming evident that advancing age was limiting the efforts of the “old stalwarts” and their younger successors were noticeably fewer in number. But it was still true – as it probably was and is of every Christian community – that quite a few heard for the first time of the Divine Plan in this way and, accepting it, came into full fellowship with the brethren.

Notwithstanding these factors, most years saw the issue of several new titles, supplied free of charge to the users. Conscious of the need for judicious use on this account – as were most of the assemblies and brethren using them – the friends at Barrow-in-Furness advised the “Monthly” of their methods; their words are repeated here as they appeared in the June 1937 issue in connection with two new leaflets “Peace on Earth – When?” and “World Order – or Chaos?”, both of which seemed to have elicited more than usual interest among the public. Said the Barrow-in-Furness assembly “With regard to the “Peace on Earth” our members are witnessing by this means in the North-West and have adopted – not a promiscuous, wasteful method – but a select and methodical arrangement, as follows: (a) all clergymen, lay ministers, local preachers, some by post if necessary in remote areas (b) all men and women whom we know are religiously inclined, and attend a place of worship (c)

intelligent people who we know are interested in the subject of peace from a political viewpoint (d) canvassing from door to door with a personal enquiry as to whether the householder is interested in the subject, and will the leaflet be read? We have felt that this is likely to get them into right channels with a higher possible percentage of potential readers, and the few words of conversation arising have in some cases been encouraging”.

It was the system of “Kingdom Cards”, introduced in 1922, which was the highlight of this decade. Year by year the number distributed increased and the resultant enquiries followed suit. The three stock depots at strategic points in the country were kept busy meeting the demand and brethren everywhere were disposing of them in every manner their ingenuity could suggest, and dealing with the resultant enquiries emanating from their locality. From the early 1920s, when the annual circulation ranged around thirty to fifty thousand, the mid-1930s clocked up annual figures approaching a quarter of a million. A significant feature of the outbreak of war in 1939 is the fact that, as recorded in the minutes of a Bible Students Committee meeting held on October 22, 1939, the three weeks following the outbreak of war in September of that year saw the normal rate of enquiries exactly doubled. As with the earlier occasion in 1914, the coming of war caused a good many people to remember that the Bible Students had been saying something about this for a long time.

As an example of the general feeling there is quoted here a report from the Guildford group published in the June 1937 “Monthly”. “We have been delighted in the way the Father has blessed our efforts in this corner of the vineyard, through disseminating Kingdom Cards, which portray the unrest taking place, and evidences of God’s Kingdom shortly to be established amongst men; inviting those hungering for a clearer knowledge of the tidings of great joy. The response has been very encouraging. How enthusiastic we ought to be for the development of his plans and purposes. We have experienced real joy visiting those who were so interested in the “Kingdom” as to send for further information.” A year later Guildford was still as enthusiastic, as witness the (abbreviated) extract from

their exhortation to the brethren at large in the July 1938 issue: "Our Lord commenced his ministry by Luke 4.18, proclaiming the good tidings of the Kingdom The nearness of the Kingdom calls for great activity in the service of the Master. What an opportunity.' Are we going to ignore the message? Kingdom cards are free to all classes and to individuals willing to use them judiciously Let us be filled with the spirit of the Master Have you all made use of the Kingdom cards and covered the whole territory? If not, send to the London office for a supply, and you will receive a blessing that will fill your hearts with joy and gladness. Let us demonstrate to our Father that the desire for service is in our hearts."

Sadly, the war killed the Kingdom Card scheme. War exigencies and shortage of paper produced the Paper Control Order, and Government permits had to be secured for paper and card needed for printing purposes. The "powers that be" decreed that the Kingdom Card was "non-essential" and no paper could be granted. The printing of tracts was rendered difficult for the same reason and little was done in this direction while the war lasted. And when it was over changed conditions militated against the resurrection of the Kingdom Card; it remained in the minds of many a cherished memory.

The period 1930-40 saw some revival of interest in the colporteur work. Little had been done in this direction during the preceding decade but with supplies of various "Truth" publications available under the imprint of the Committee there was no year over this period without at least half-a-dozen colporteurs calling on householders with the "Divine Plan" and some auxiliary publications. Difficulties there were; it was inevitable that the callers should be identified with members of another by now well-known organisation with a much more aggressive message. It became increasingly evident that this method of making known the message of the Kingdom was not going to be very profitable; the war years rendered it rather impracticable and the last colporteur known to the records gave up in 1941.

So the tendency during this phase of the fellowship tended rather to greater emphasis upon its internal life, the Con-

ventions, the Pilgrim Service and class meetings. Conventions continued unabated; the August national London Convention was the high-light of the year, run a close second by Nottingham at Whitsun up to 1936, followed by the next two years at Dewsbury, then finally Leicester. Easter each year was the traditional time for Warrington, and the annual Glasgow Convention completed the series. Towards the end of the period the attendances began to fall off a little, a reflection of advancing age of many of the participants – after all, some of them had been in the way for thirty or more years and that fact was beginning to show – but the fervour of the fellowship remained and the spirit was the same. So it was with the lesser events, the more local week-end “Home-gatherings”, which by 1936 were running at an all-time “high”, no less than forty being recorded for that year, ranging all over the country from Glasgow and Sunderland in the north to Yeovil and Ipswich in the south, with attendances of between 70 and 250 at each.

A well-known figure in the fellowship from the beginning, and coming into prominence during the 1930s, was Dr. Adam Rutherford. Coming from a family associated with the Truth almost from its beginning in the UK, and himself a member of the Royal Geographical Society, various other learned bodies, and one of the country’s leading mathematicians, Adam combined with his passionate allegiance to the faith a deep interest in the acknowledged scientific and claimed religious features associated with the Great Pyramid in Egypt. He was, of course, only one of many eminent men in the last two centuries – and of a few of past ages into antiquity – who have professed this interest, but his writings on the subject, eventually condensed into his four-volume work “Pyramidology” probably exceeded those of any of his predecessors. Working closely in conjunction with the Egyptian authorities, to whom he was well known, he carried out a great amount of research at the Pyramid itself over many years. As the founder and first President of the Institute of Pyramidology, he edited the journal he founded, “Pyramidology”, until his death in 1950, ending a career spent in travelling the world lecturing on his chosen subject and disposing of many copies of the “Divine Plan of the Ages” in the process. Whatever the merits or demerits of his

special subject, the fact remains that from the point of view of most interest to the brethren, he probably circulated more copies of that book during his thirty years or so of active life than anyone else, and on that account alone deserves remembrance. A cheerful and irrepressible man of unbounded enthusiasm, he was loyal to the faith he espoused to the end.

Twenty years earlier John and Morton Edgar of Glasgow had evinced considerable interest in the same subject; for many years thereafter Morton at least spent a great deal of time in Egypt on the same kind of research. The result of their endeavours was the appearance of a two-volume work, "Great Pyramid Passages", which enjoyed a wide circulation not only among the brethren but in the wider world – as indeed did the later work of Adam Rutherford.

1936 also saw the birth of another Journal, started and published by the Forest Gate Church, named accordingly the "Forest Gate Bible Monthly". Rather more modest in size and style than the "Bible Study Monthly" it nevertheless attained a wide circulation among the UK brethren and quite a number also went abroad. Declining numbers within that Church led to its publication being terminated in 1985 with expressions of regret.

A constant service of "Pilgrim" visits went on through the first half of the decade, serving, in the main, the smaller communities and scattered knots of a few people in a given district – the larger centres being well served by their own elders and did not feel the need of this service now that the fellowship was well established and each centre pursuing its own course in its own fashion. Between three and four hundred visits each year were made by Henry Shearn, Ebenezer Housden, Tom Holmes, Thomas Smedley, and George Ford, travelling between them an aggregate of nine to fifteen thousand miles in each year. Most years several of these were able to give full time to this service. In addition to the efforts of these brethren there were extended tours throughout the country undertaken by visiting brethren from abroad, invited for the purpose by the Committee, and sometimes by one or other of the larger Churches, the itinerary being arranged to fit the requests from local centres for a visit. Thus Isaac Hoskins of USA came – his

fourth visit to this country – in 1931, and again in 1934. Carl Luttichau of Denmark, an old friend of the British brethren, in 1933, 1934 and 1937. Paul Thomson of USA – grandson of the celebrated 19th Century Palestine missionary, author of “The Land and the Book” – an old-time visitor to the UK, in 1938, and Norman Woodworth of the Dawn Bible Students Association of USA, whose acquaintance the British brethren made on his first visit in 1937 and renewed on his second in 1938. And still another old friend, George Van Halewijn of Holland spent some time in this country in 1933. These brethren addressed the national Conventions and visited as many local centres as had requested a visit and as time permitted. Some of them spent as much as six months on tour, at a different group meeting each day or so, and some less, according to the time at their disposal.

A fairly drastic change in Committee personnel took place in 1935. Four of the longest serving members, Henry Shearn, Benjamin Thatcher, William Drinkwater and Thomas Smedley, felt that it was time to retire and make way for younger men. They had borne the “heat and burden of the day” through the building of the fellowship and its guidance into smoother waters; age was taking its toll and in consequence they did not allow their names to go forward for election. The result was virtually a new Committee – only Tom Holmes remained from the old one. When the Scrutineers announced the results, it was found that the brethren elected for the ensuing year were, as hoped by the retiring ones, in the main of younger years and perhaps giving promise of good service in the years to come – George Absalom of Beeston, Stephen Couling of Rugby, Andrew Cruikshank of Croxley Green, Tom Holmes of Nottingham, who retained his former office of Chairman, Albert Hudson of Welling, who became Secretary in succession to Henry Shearn, William Morrall of Morecambe, and Cedric Smith of London. So the new Committee took up its task of serving the British brethren with all the enthusiasm of the completely inexperienced.

Of course there were critics who thought that these young hotheads would ruin everything, just as there were others who thought there was perhaps a case for some younger blood on the

Committee. But the brethren as a whole had spoken by the vote, choosing these seven out of fifteen names, and no one could argue about that. And the fellowship survived. The principal regret, up and down the country, was the departure of Henry Shearn, who had been the guiding star for nineteen years. More than any man he was responsible for the nation-wide fellowship as it now existed. The more thoughtful realised that he had been an indefatigable worker since 1903 and deserved a rest. And the work went on.

The first problem the new Committee had to deal with was an increasingly insistent demand for a suitable hymnbook. The traditional hymnbook of the Bible Students was, of course, "Hymns of Millennial Dawn" published by the old Society. At a very early stage there emerged a feeling that the continued use of this book was no longer appropriate, moreover there was the question of obtaining continuing supplies as time went on. The first overt move was made by the Forest Gate Church in London, which in 1925 published a new hymnal entitled "Christian Hymns", containing a large number of the Millennial Dawn hymns and a few selected additions, 330 hymns in all. The edition was not a large one and the circulation did not extend very far outside the Forest Gate Church itself, but it was at least a move in the right direction. Not much else was done until the 1930s, by which time it was commonly recognised that the only agent having the financial resources for such a project on a national scale was the central Committee. Calls from assemblies up and down the country began to come in and in 1937 the Committee decided to take action. In accordance with custom the matter was referred to the country at large and suggestions for the contents of the proposed hymnal invited. The result was a flood of preferred hymns from all over the country and a considerable time was required to analyse these and formulate a hymnary which would meet the desires of all concerned and still be financially practicable. The outcome was a collection of 462 hymns of which 370 came from the original "Millennial Dawn" book and "Christian Hymns", and the remaining 92 a choice selection of other well-known hymns. At the relevant Committee meeting when alternative titles for the new book were suggested and discussed, universal acclamation

was given to one member's observation "there is only one possible title we can give it: 'Bible Students Hymnal'".

The Bible Students Hymnal, words only edition, well bound in blue cloth boards and gold lettering, finally saw the light in 1939 and was immediately greeted as fulfilling a longfelt want. Virtually every assembly in the country adopted it and the edition began rapidly to be depleted. A few copies went abroad but it was not adopted by, nor was it really intended for, brethren of other lands. It was primarily a British production for British brethren.

Almost immediately calls came in for an edition with suitable tunes. The Committee had foreseen this possibility and ideas were already in shape for a suitable production. Following precedent, the July 1939 issue of the Monthly announced that plans were being made, quoting probable cost, and asking for advance intimation of copies likely to be required. A list was rapidly built up and in their optimism an appreciable number sent money for their copies. As with other printed requirements, the war commencing almost immediately thereafter prohibited the use of necessary paper and the tune book project had to be abandoned for the duration.

After the war the project again saw the light. The initiative was taken by what had by then become known as the "Midland Group", a federation of half-a-dozen assemblies in the south Midlands centred at Rugby. With the aid of a generous donation obtained from an interested brother in the United States the book was prepared and published in 1955. Due to the size and format chosen for the book it was found when type-setting that there were a number of unavoidable gaps in the pages; to remedy this defect at the last minute another twenty-seven hymns were selected and added to the book, thus making the total 489.

This of course created an anomaly when both books were in use at the same meeting. The original words only book had run out of print and the need for a reprint existed. The outcome was the creation of the Bible Students Hymnal Trust, comprising a representative each of the publishers of the original book with elders representing London, Midlands and North. The result of their labours was the appearance in 1958 of the second edition of

the words only book, similar in size and style to the first but containing the additional hymns. From that time onward the UK brethren have enjoyed the use of a very comprehensive selection of hymns expressing both the essentials of their faith and many other gems of Christian hymnology.

This decade also saw the emergence of a hitherto relatively unknown phenomenon, differences in doctrinal belief. The certitude of the traditional faith, that the Divine Plan purposes the eventual elimination of every aspect of evil and its derivatives, and that the era in which this desirable condition of things is to be brought about is at the doors, tended to overshadow the detailed discussion of variant theology. The almost universal devotion to evangelical outreach, preaching the "Gospel of the Kingdom" to the unconverted, had occupied the minds of the brethren to the exclusion of other themes. In consequence the outline of the philosophy of the Atonement, which now became the point at issue, given in the "Studies in the Scriptures", supported as it was by Scripture, was accepted and held by virtually everyone in the fellowship. But with the slowing down of "public witness", of the outward activities of the faith, there was more time for introspective discussion of Scripture doctrine and this came to a head in one of the largest City Churches, that at Forest Gate, with the feeling on the part of some that the traditional Bible Student views on the Scripture doctrines of the Covenants and the Sin-Offering were too radical a departure from orthodox Christian theology and should be questioned. To some in the general national fellowship, looking on, the difference seemed as largely academic, a matter of words and terms and angles of view, but others in the church concerned saw in this the beginning of a partial return to orthodox theology which, having remained unchanged since the Middle Ages, was considered sadly deficient. And there was always the fear, so often justified in practice, that the acceptance of one misapprehension of the Divine Plan would lead to another, and so "confusion become worse confounded".

The matter was resolved by a course of action recommended by the Pastor many years previously for such situations; that the church should form separate communities where each would

follow their own convictions and continue their work with those of like mind. A "New Covenant" meeting came into existence at Romford and another to serve the interests of those wishing to adhere to the existing form of faith in its entirety at Wanstead, known generally as the Aldersbrook Church, and the remainder continued at Forest Gate.

It was, of course, for the best. Each Church continued its characteristic work and flourished reasonably well, all remaining within the general fellowship. The variant views, at that time anyway, made little impact upon others, except at Glasgow, where much the same influences became evident with much the same sequel. The resultant two Glasgow Churches did preserve their essential unity by joining together in a monthly united meeting and on such occasions as a visiting brother from overseas was present in the city and in this respect did set a laudable example.

And so the decade came to an end with the fellowship continuing, quieter than it had been in the rather traumatic days of the 1920s, but convinced still in the integrity of its traditional understanding that it was living in the closing days of the Age and the days of the unseen Presence of the Lord at the initial stage of his Second Advent – although this latter was beginning to be questioned by a few here and there. Some meetings of long standing were beginning to close down through diminishing numbers but every now and then a new one would appear and the life of the fellowship seemed destined to continue without serious interruption.

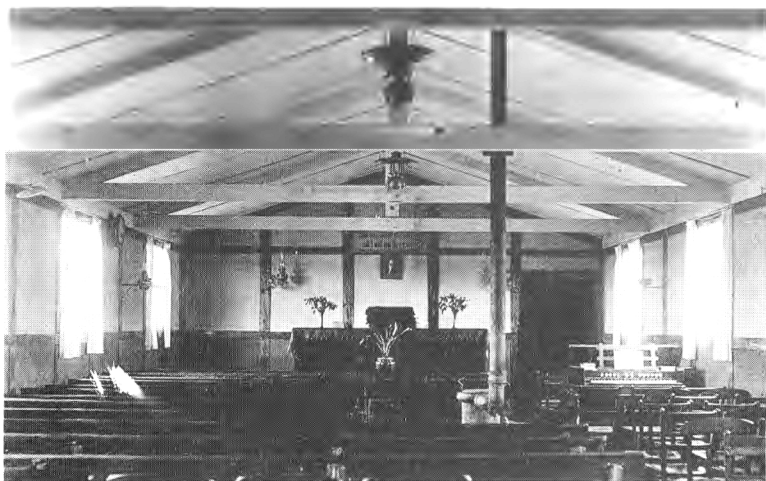
And then came the Second World War.



Speakers' Panel



Some of the Conventioners
HUDDERSFIELD CONVENTION 1927



TYPICAL BIBLE STUDENTS MEETING ROOM - EAST KIRKBY



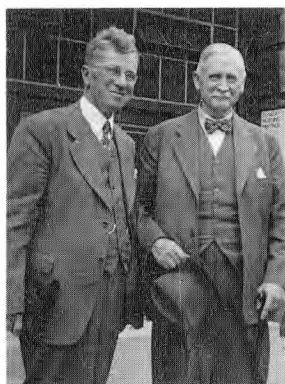
LOCAL HOME-GATHERING - EARLY 1930s



SPEAKERS' PANEL - DEWSBURY CONVENTION 1938



CONWAY HALL CONVENTIONS THROUGH THE YEARS



Paul E. Thomson (USA)
Carl Luttichau (Denmark)



**John T. Read
(USA)**

**THREE WELL-KNOWN OVERSEAS FRIENDS WHO SO OFTEN
MINISTERED IN UK**

WILL THERE BE WARS FOR EVER ?

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more."

"All very well," says the cynic, "but the same Book also says 'Prepare war . . . beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears.' There always have been wars, and there always will be wars," and he dismisses the subject with a wave of the hand.

Casual treatment of that nature does not

WHEN THE MORNING COMETH

HUMANITY has long hoped for and believed in a new day, in which sorrow, pain, and death would cease, and in which peace, righteousness, and life would prevail. In brief, a dispensation in which the power of evil would be crushed and mankind be delivered from the reign of sin and death, which has so long oppressed. The literature of the world

EVOLUTION— AND THE SCRIPTURES

A synopsis of twentieth century opinion upon a controversy of eighty years' standing

"Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thine hands" (Psa. 8, 5-6).

"THY KINGDOM COME."

IMMINENT FULFILMENT OF
AN AGE-OLD PRAYER

Few people realise with what intensity the words "Thy Kingdom Come" have been breathed by Christians who

THE WORLD'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

Time of Divine Intervention at hand

WHAT a world this is! Certainly it is very different from what it was. Indeed, if our grandparents, and with some of us even, if our parents were to be brought from the tomb, they would probably at first think they had awakened on a different planet altogether. What wonderful changes have taken place! Our grandparents could look back to the time when there were no railway trains, no telegraphs, nor the numberless inventions for comfort and labour-saving devices which we have, let alone the many new wonders of recent years, in airships, aeroplanes, motors, wireless, X-rays, etc. Little over 100 years ago the quickest way to travel was on horseback; now it is quite usual to go 60 miles an hour by train, and by aeroplane it is now possible to travel at about 400 miles an hour.

It is not necessary to say more; these things are what we see and read of day by day. The point to notice is that for thousands of years the world went on without all these inventions and conveniences. It would appear that much knowledge possessed by the ancients of 4,000 years ago was gradually lost. For instance, there was a wonderful civilisation in Egypt. The Egyptians were wonderful architects in carvings, in colours, and experts in scientific

THE BIBLE A SURE GUIDE

*A Book that speaks with authority
in this day of uncertainty*

It is not always realised that the past seventy years mean more to the world in the case of education, wealth, labour-saving inventions and conveniences, and safeguards for human life than did all the thousands of years which preceded them—many times over. The world has probably created a thousand times as much knowledge in the past seventy-five years as during all the history of the race preceding. Yet these changes have come so gradually that few have noticed them.

Seventy-five years ago electricity was a new thing. Its vast potentialities and possibilities were not conceived in the minds of men. World communication by telegraph, telephone, or radio was unknown. It is commonly realised now that these things are as nothing compared with the discoveries upon the brink of which mankind stand at the present time.

But in proportion as the forces of Nature have been brought into the service of men, the discontent of humanity has increased; and unbelievers, not only in respect to the Bible as the Divine Revelation, but in many instances to the very existence of an intelligent Creator. The age which has the strongest evidence for belief has become an age of unbelief. Nevertheless, there is in the Bible itself abundant

SELECTION OF 12-PAGE PAMPHLETS 1940-50 PERIOD

9

CHANGING VALUES

THE WORLD of 1945 was not the world of 1939. The end of hostilities left changes which could never be reversed. The experiences of those six years affected everyone, and only when all was over and some semblance of normal daily life restored was it possible to pause and take stock of the position. People had been uprooted and were now remote from their pre-war localities; meetings had been suspended and in some cases were never resumed. The characteristic work of the movement had been impeded by restrictions on publishing, on public meetings, on movement, in common with other Christian groups; the prevailing mood was in the form of one overriding question: What now?

Nevertheless, and despite these hindrances, although there was recession in some fields, a great deal was accomplished in others. The Conventions suffered most; it was obvious during the war years that large gatherings in city halls under the threat of air raids were out of the question. The national August London Convention at Conway Hall was suspended for the duration and so were many of the usual provincial Conventions. A notable exception was Warrington, where the Easter Convention was maintained throughout; this served the needs of brethren in the Midlands and North-West. Dewsbury managed one in 1941, Manchester in 1942 and Birmingham in 1944 and there were a few minor ones at other times. The smaller local Home-Gatherings, not demanding the use of large halls or the congregation of relatively large numbers, were able to continue as occasion offered, although not so many as previously. Something like eight or ten in each of the war years are recorded, with attendances of ninety to a hundred and fifty. With wartime difficulties of travel these were about the only

means of contact between brethren normally residing in country districts or small towns. The faithful came together on these occasions and hoped for better times.

The Pilgrim visits to local centres and isolated individuals had virtually to stop. Wartime was no time for itinerant ministers of religion to be travelling the country; there was too much to do at home. It goes without saying that there were no visits from American friends. 1938 had seen extended tours in this country by Paul Thomson and Norman Woodworth, something like six months each; there was no more until 1947 when John T. Read spent six months in the UK.

These activities were the chief casualties of the war. In the field of publishing – perhaps the most important aspect – there was, despite the operation of the Paper Control Order, which severely restricted the amount of paper allowed for any given publication, a continuous although considerably reduced output of literature quickly snapped up by brethren anxious to “work while it is called day”. Tract distribution went down to ten per cent of what it had been in immediately preceding years. As though to make up for this, however, there was quite an appreciable production of booklets. An outline of the Divine Plan entitled “The Golden Future”, first published in 1939, saw its first edition of 25,000 exhausted in two years and a second of 10,000 during the rest of the war, with a third edition later. Another well taken up booklet dealing with the subject of the Second Advent, “The Promise of his Presence” had its first edition in 1939 and its second in 1943. Other booklets which saw the light during the war years were “The Beauty of Holiness”, “Parables of the Kingdom”, “Jacob’s Trouble” (dealing with the final experiences of Israel in the Holy Land at the end of the Age as outlined in the visions of Ezekiel, always in popular demand and still available in later editions) and a few minor ones. But the total quantity of such publications issued during the war was pitifully small.

The impracticability of the customary public lectures during wartime was much upon the mind of one well-known and popular brother who had been associated with the public showings of the “Photo-Drama of Creation” in 1914. Bob Darby conceived the idea that its success during the first war

might possibly be repeated in the second, and he approached the committee with the suggestion. There was considerable scepticism; it was not known if the films still existed and could be located, and even if they were and could be obtained whether public exhibition under wartime conditions would be feasible. Bob Darby's customary enthusiasm, however, was irresistible and it was agreed that the BSC would attempt to acquire the films via its American contacts provided that Bob and the few associated with him would undertake responsibility for their use and exhibition in the United Kingdom.

Initial progress seemed promising. The films were located and copies of several typical ones made and sent to the BSC for a start. Bob Darby and his men went into action. The idea was to limit exhibition of the films, together with an accompanying short discourse on the Divine Plan in relation thereto, to small public meetings to which the interested were invited, in small halls where the current objection to large gatherings of people was not so relevant. The October 1940 issue of the "Monthly" carried a displayed notice of the proposal in tones calling to remembrance the days of the Photo-Drama thirty years earlier and this immediately awakened the interest of those who had participated in the activities of those days. The general title chosen for the effort was "The Divine Drama of the Ages"; this in itself was sufficient to rouse the interest of the brethren. Said the announcement, in part:

"The Photo-Drama of Creation is remembered by many as a wonderful stimulus to faith and activity. Brethren who saw these pictures often wish they might see them again; others, who never saw them, at times express regret that the Photo-Drama is a thing of the past. As a means of witnessing to others with our message the Photo-Drama was unrivalled Now in the fulness of time the Drama films will (D.V.) again be seen in England. Prayer has been ascending and there has been a waiting for our Master's leading. As a first step toward a new "film witness" the friends will be able to see, on the screen, some of the pictures which thrilled them in years now past It is planned to make the first films available to any class or group of friends so desiring. If you can provide a small hall or large meeting-room in your area, write to the office with your request,

and arrangements will be made. There will be no charge, and the brethren who have this work at heart will provide all apparatus and operators.”

All went well at the start. The January 1941 “Monthly” gave details of the arrangements. “The object of this effort” it said “is to encourage brethren to arrange Biblical film meetings to which personal friends, neighbours and others may be invited and see for themselves something of the Bible message as we understand it It is desirable, though not essential, that a brother be appointed to give a short talk after the film explaining some of the matters dealt with, although some may prefer to afford the audience an opportunity for questions instead”

The first two films thus made available were two well-remembered ones, “The Raising of the Shunamite’s Son” and “A Royal Prince”, this latter comprising the story of the early life of Jesus from birth to manhood. The project seemed to promise success. The decision to confine the exhibitions to small rooms and limited numbers proved the right one. Gone were the days when these same films had been shown to thousands in places like the London Opera House and many came to the Faith in consequence. Said the “Monthly” for September 1941 “Friends in many parts of the country have now had the opportunity of seeing the first two films in this series. Large groups and small, in halls and homes, have been taken back in memory some twenty-five years or more when first they saw God’s great Plan of the Ages declared in picture form Scotland and Kent, towns in the Midlands and Wales – in short, in every part of the land, has been visited in turn, but yet there is opportunity for those who have not had a visit to make request”

It would seem that much of the old-time fervour was aroused by these exhibitions. The Easter 1941 Convention at Dewsbury allotted space on its programme to the first two films. Manchester, traditionally always quick to exploit the possibilities of new ideas, made a special and sustained effort and towards the end of the year reported to the country at large via the pages of the “Monthly”. “The friends at Manchester have been impressed by the fact that films in colour have their appeal

to the public and have proven a successful medium in presenting Bible themes to interested children and adults By leaflet and by newspaper space, attention had been drawn to the message, and the complete effort had shown signal signs of response hardly anticipated. With some diffidence some of the friends had hoped that this modern application of popular appeal might be found to draw the public, and now faith had eventuated into practical reality The Shunamite's little son had been instrumental in bringing together those whose hearts joyously sought in the past to serve the Lord, and once again refreshed, brethren united in praise to the Lord in happy service."

At a similar effort organised by the brethren at Darlington, where the visual display was accompanied by a short explanatory discourse, one declared that she had learned more about the Bible that afternoon than in all her life before, and another that he had learned more than in forty years' of church going. Incidents like these only served to increase the confidence of the brethren that a new and fruitful avenue of witness was opening up perhaps to supplant the now obviously outdated "public lecture".

Sadly, this was not to be. The increasing intensity of the war began to render even the limited scale of the exhibitions increasingly difficult and finally impracticable. The films themselves, copied from ancient and more or less worn out originals, were by no means up to modern standards, and when they had been shown once in any one locality there was no real merit in showing them again. By the middle of 1942 their usefulness was coming to an end and any idea of continuing the effort lapsed. It had proved an inspiration to the brethren while it lasted and a number of people were brought into contact with a faith and hope they had not previously known existed, and that was all.

After the war everybody went back to the traditional public lecture. Public halls were becoming available for hire, there were plenty of speakers and plenty of supporting literature. For the next ten years or so there was a veritable plethora of such functions all over the country, organised in the main by individual groups in their own localities or by a fusion of such

working together. The most noticeable of these latter was the “North-West Council of Activity”, of which Fred Musk was the guiding spirit, comprising a system of joint action by the brethren in Cheshire and Lancashire, centred at Manchester, whereby public meetings were almost constantly in progress in one town or another. Organised in 1946, this “Council of Activity” was in operation for some twelve or fourteen years thereafter until the enthusiasts behind the project had to admit that results were not worth the effort. There was no fighting against the competition of radio and one hundred and one other attractions which simply did not exist in the earlier days when one had only to put up a notice “Bible lecture in this hall” to have a crowded audience waiting to listen.

The Midlands brethren, banded together under the title, “the Midland Group” carried on a similar work on a lesser scale; in the Newcastle to York area the “North-East Council of Activity” set out in similar fashion but retired much earlier. South Wales did somewhat better, proportionately, but again it did not last. London went in for fewer but larger meetings but apart from a spectacular one at Conway Hall in 1947 when one in four of a crowded audience were so interested in what Fred H. Guard had to say that they left cards asking for further information, not much happened that endured. It was slowly borne in that the day of public meetings in Britain was past, and after 1956 they were generally few and far between.

1941 witnessed a rather unique occurrence in the history of the fellowship. A number of “old-time” brethren who had remained with the original Society when in 1919 the secession movement was organised now seceded in a body, for reasons satisfactory to themselves, and became integrated. They were welcomed as brethren having the same faith and hope, a welcome which to some was somewhat dimmed by the discovery that during the twenty years’ separation they had abandoned the characteristic Bible Student view of the Advent, that it commences with the entry of our Lord into the time and space framework of our world, imperceptible to human senses but sensed by his own “watching ones” in consequence of their right understanding of the “signs of the times”, followed by the change of the Church to heavenly conditions, the breakdown of

this present world order, and finally his manifestation to all the world with his Church and assumption of control and inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom. This was the vision which had inspired the early Bible Students and made possible the achievements of what was always called the "Harvest of the Age". The newcomers had adopted the normal concept of church theology, that the Advent is to be an instantaneous occurrence, manifested at once to all men, the "Church" being "caught up" into the air to meet him, all this being in the future although imminent.

This view was by no means new. The Advent has been viewed in these terms since the days of the Reformation. Based upon a frankly literal reading of the Scriptures, it suited the mentality of the Fifteenth century and still suits many Christians to-day, but at this time not many of the brethren expected it to be seriously argued as an advance upon what had been held since the inception of the movement as a clearer and more up-to-date understanding of the Divine Plan. But it was not altogether unknown amongst the brethren at this time. For some years past, individuals aggregating a small minority had been thinking and talking along such lines, chiefly within the confines of the Church at Forest Gate, where it eventually became the majority view, so that in 1939 that Church announced it as their generally accepted position. One of the two main Glasgow Churches, known as the "All-sufficient Word Fellowship", followed suit; apart from this there was little support for the thesis. The irruption of this new sizeable contingent, holding the same view, tended to make it more widely known over the country and it began to gain adherents.

Whilst the comparatively small number involved in this secession, emanating chiefly from the Manchester and London areas, cannot be compared with the original separation of 1919-24, when more than three thousand parted company with their former associates to form the present fellowship, there was certainly some repetition of the spirit animating the earlier ones, manifested in a sense of freedom from domination and a revival of enthusiasm for the work of the Truth. (Some of the "old stalwarts" were known to remark that they might have

done it twenty years earlier when the original separation was in progress instead of lending their support to a system which now they were driven to repudiate, but this was really more in the nature of friendly banter than of adverse criticism. Twenty years or no twenty years, ties of friendship and fellowship which had been broken were now restored.)

That sense of freedom and renewed fervour found its outlet in a fairly small gathering held at Queens Square, London, November 22- 23, 1941, to which the brethren generally were invited, and the outcome of this was a kind of manifesto addressed to the brethren generally which was published in full in the "Bible Study Monthly" for January 1942. Its terms were reminiscent of the very similar statement issued in 1919 when the entire country was involved in a similar but much more extensive re-alignment of loyalties. "It was evident" said the report prepared by the organisers "that those gathered at this convention realised the time was ripe when all the Lord's consecrated, having the same hopes and faith, should seek to gather together more and work together in whatever the Lord may have for his people to do" A statement was prepared addressed to brethren generally and this ran in part "The brethren gathered at this convention in London on Saturday and Sunday, November 22/23, 1941, being of those who find themselves separated from their first association send love and greetings to all their brethren in Christ. This assembly believes that the Body of Christ cannot be divided We, therefore, your brethren in London on this occasion, deploring all schism and loss of fellowship in spirit and in work, invite your prayerful attention to this matter and we, therefore, invite suggestions from all those of like precious faith who desire to know and do his Will". This, of course, addressed to those who for twenty years past had been doing just that, could be construed as preaching to the converted; but the exhortation was received in the spirit in which it was presented and the newcomers must have felt that they were completely integrated.

A periodic journal, "Maranatha" ("The Lord Cometh"), was commenced in 1952, devoted exclusively to matters connected with this understanding of the Advent, and con-

tinued for thirty-six years, during this time acquiring an increasing circle of interested readers and forming a link between brethren who looked upon the Advent as a future event and so were avowedly “looking for his appearing”. As an extension of the particular thesis there was commenced in 1950 an annual one-week “Maranatha” conference at which the speakers were expected to specialise on the same general theme. Held during the first few years at the Rosehill Conference Centre at Reading, it transferred later to the more commodious High Leigh Conference Centre at Hoddesdon, Herts, being discontinued in 1980 due to diminishing attendance. The fact that this annual conference represented a view variant to what had always been regarded as one of the fundamental features of the faith did not prevent brethren of both schools of thought from attending the conference and in fact it turned out to be about the most popular and pleasant “get together” of the later years.

During the latter stages of the war a situation was developing which resulted in a fundamental change in the central organisation. The elective basis of the central committee meant that its seven members were drawn from every part of the country and the frequent committee meetings – usually monthly – required that they had to travel long distances every four or five weeks at week-ends. Since they, as a rule, were engaged in employment or business, the only practicable day for such meetings was Sunday. Prior to the war this presented no travel difficulties. The railways offered an excellent service of Sunday excursions between towns at reasonable rates and it was possible for committee members to leave their homes at five or six o'clock in the morning and be at the rendezvous by eleven. Return trains were available at about six and those with the longest journeys would be home by midnight. (Car travel, was, of course, rather unusual in those days and the usual method of travel was by train.) It meant personal sacrifice and devotion to the Cause to mortgage one Sunday in four to this proceeding but all who accepted nomination for election were happy thus to assume the obligation. Up to the time of the Second World War the system worked perfectly well. But the war changed it. Cheap travel facilities were withdrawn, train services reduced with

consequent overcrowding, sundry obligations at home or in the home district rendered the monthly trek increasingly difficult, and the work of the committee began to devolve more and more upon the shoulders of such members as lived in the London area and could get together more easily. It began to be obvious that some kind of a change would have to be made.

Matters came to a head at the July election in 1940. Of the seventeen names nominated by assemblies all over the country only seven felt able to stand for election. Faced with this position, which had never happened before, the Election Scrutineers declared these seven elected, but gave the voting brethren an opportunity to dissent or offer alternative suggestions. None did so, and the seven took office.

A special leaflet had been printed and sent to the secretaries of all meetings and to all known brethren in the country in the following terms:

"A situation without precedent has arisen in connection with this year's election. For the first time since the Committee's inception in 1919, seven brethren only, of the seventeen names nominated by the classes, are prepared to stand for election. Under these circumstances there is no choice to put to the friends for voting, and according to the Constitution of the Committee, these seven brethren properly take up the duties involved.

"It is felt, however, that the peculiar circumstances of the case render it appropriate that the friends generally be given an opportunity of expressing their approval of the situation or expressing their alternative preference. Since the entire control of the Committee and its activities is vested in the brethren of this country, we feel that the present situation may be a means of their realising afresh the responsibilities involved, and that the friends will willingly take their part in the direction of those activities amongst us which are of joint concern.

"In the case of those nominated to stand for election, it is realised that the complexities of the present political situation, longer hours of work, and so on, make it more than ever difficult to give time to the duties which devolve upon Committee members In these circumstances, therefore, we do ask all brethren everywhere to either indicate their agreement that:

(a) The seven brethren at present in office should continue so until the next election in July 1941, or alternatively

(b) Offer a suggestion as to what other course should be adopted.

“It is the duty of the Election Scrutineers to see that the wishes of the brethren are carried out, and should there be a definite desire for some change in the present arrangements, occasion will be taken to obtain the voice of the brethren throughout the country Please send your reply by September 30, 1940, to the Election Scrutineer, Bro. G. Absalom”

Came election time in 1941 with the war continuing and this time only seven names were nominated and five of these already serving. When in 1942 the same thing happened it began to look as though the brethren generally felt that the needs in wartime were best served by a permanent committee, and this, on a dispassionate view of the situation, made good sense. With Government controls and all kinds of restrictions affecting the work of the brethren, a considerable amount of contact with various official bodies had become obligatory and this in turn required experience and a measure of continuity which could not be attained with an annually changing personnel. The position was accepted and the, by now, more or less permanent committee soldiered on.

But not without thought and discussion. Did this recurring frustration of the normal elective process indicate a leading to some modification of the traditional organisation? No one knew how much longer the war was going to last nor yet what kind of social order would follow its termination. The outcome of this thought and discussion, after taking into consideration such suggestions as did come in from interested brethren, was the institution of a national referendum asking for guidance and decision on these alternatives. The ballot paper, dated 1st August, 1942, after referring to the matters at issue, said, in part:

“ The Committee has had the subject under discussion during the year just past, feeling that the position is not altogether satisfactory, and would now like to proffer a further opportunity for interested friends to exercise a vote There

are two immediate practical alternatives; one, that the existing Committee remains in office for another twelve months, to be subject to re-election at the expiry of that time, and the other, that a new election be held at once.

"There is a third alternative which may appeal to some, that the Committee shall be re-organised upon a basis especially devised to meet the needs of to-day. Those who feel that an entirely new charter ought to be drawn up to replace the 1919 Constitution may vote for the third alternative, with the understanding that in this case the existing committee remains in office while the new charter is prepared and voted upon. In the event of the third alternative heading the poll, the friends will be called upon to submit their proposals for the new charter."

The result of this ballot, announced in the November 1942 "Monthly", ran:

"Result of postal ballot.

"The Election Scrutineer, Bro. G. Absalom, has made his report, which shows a heavy majority in favour of Alternative 1, viz., that the present committee remain in office until July 1943. This alternative was carried by a majority of 77.6%

"The second alternative, that a committee election be held immediately, polled only 3.4% of votes, and the third alternative, that a new charter defining the committee's activities be prepared and voted upon, commanded 19.9% votes

"The number of brethren who voted is greater than has been the case at any time since 1937."

With this 80% mandate to preserve the status quo there was no option to do other than carry on, and this was the accepted position until the end of the war. Only in 1945, when the end was in sight, did the matter surface again. There had been considerable discussion and the bandying to and fro of the apparently most fitting arrangement for the necessary services during those past two years and now that the time had come to make a decision it was evident that general thought was in the direction of a permanent centre for the production and distribution of literature and the publication of the monthly magazine, leaving the individual churches to go their own way with their own resources. Some of the old activities needing the

aid of a central body, such as public witness afforts, conventions and the like, were well within the abilities of the local city and other churches, and a certain spirit of independence was rife in the community which tended to foster local rather than community effort. It was also recognised, and expressed, that much of the work for which the committee had been organised at the first now needed knowledge and experience of Government regulations which had not been the case previously, and would be operating for a good many years yet, and in the publishing field a knowledge yielded by experience of printing and publishing matters. It was evident that sentiments were tending towards the third alternative of the last poll taken in 1942 and that any new charter would be in the direction of a permanent body responsible for these matters.

Following consultation with various interested brethren, a proposition on these lines was put before the brethren toward the end of 1945 the effect of which was to separate the administration of the Benevolent Fund from the main work of the committee, George Ford to undertake this work. The remainder of the committee's functions, which now only need cover the printing and publishing field, to be concentrated on a permanent basis in South-East London where a community existed able to keep the work going. Several members of the committee who had held on during the war years were desirous of retiring once satisfactory arrangements could be made.

Put to the national poll, the issue was not in doubt. The two Scrutineers, G. Absalom and A. G. Reid, of the Nottingham church, reported 90% in favour and 10% against. The revision of arrangements evidently had general approval and in fact the life of the movement continued without perceptible change.

So the brethren set out in 1946 in reasonably good heart. The organisation for the production of literature and for keeping everyone in touch with everyone else was still there and functioning, and the country as a whole continued to use it. There was still the call for printed matter, leaflets and booklets wherewith the message of the Kingdom might immediately be proclaimed as in the days of yore. During the next eight years nearly a million four or six-page leaflets were printed, mainly by the centre and in part by various city groups such as Forest

Gate, Glasgow, Aldersbrook, Manchester, the Midlands, Darlington, and so on. In 1948 the London centre commenced the issue of a large four-page illustrated newspaper-size publication entitled "Millennial Message" containing various aspects of the general theme presented as "news items" and this was promptly taken up in many quarters and distributed all over the country. In the four years it continued – cost dictated its eventual demise – a quarter of a million copies were put out. Over the ten years 1946 – 1956 ten new booklets were published dealing with various aspects of the Divine Plan, of which the most popular were "God's Fulfilling Purpose" and "A Glimpse of God's Plans"; these, together with the old standard favourites "The Plan of God in Brief" and "The Golden Future" were going out at the rate of seven to ten thousand a year during this period. In addition a new edition of the old booklet "The Promise of His Presence" was produced to reaffirm the basis of the traditional Advent belief. The "Plan of God in Brief" was translated into Swedish by the brethren there in 1948, and into Hebrew in 1953 by some friendly American brethren, and widely used in their relevant spheres. (A copy of the Hebrew version was sent to every Rabbi in the UK for their interest, without pressing or expecting conversion.)

In addition to all this activity the work of the USA Dawn Bible Students Association began to make its impact in UK. The Dawn, a later secession, was born in 1930 and its introduction to the UK was brought about by the committee invitation in 1937 for Norman Woodworth, its then head, to visit this country for an extended tour and to get acquainted. From that time on close relations were maintained. In 1946 the Dawn thought it proper to establish a definite branch depot in this country to store and distribute their characteristic literature among the brethren and this, from that time onward, has been available to the British brethren to the extent they desire.

Keen as the brethren were to get back to the work of evangelism, there was another matter of some importance – the restoration of contact with brethren on the European continent from whom the UK brethren had been separated by war. Virtually no news of their welfare had been received since the

war commenced and there was concern as to their position. Just one letter got through to America in 1942 from an old friend, Carl Luttichau of Denmark, in which he assured all of his welfare, "considering". "I myself, and the friends I have the privilege to serve, are faring very well" he said. "We have freedom to gather round the Bible and even to meet at little Sunday conventions We have full freedom to send out our little paper in this country. At Christmas time I had the privilege of visiting friends in Stockholm, Sweden I am still able to travel round the country and meet with little groups."

Contact was speedily made with Denmark and the Scandinavian countries, with Holland, Belgium and Germany. Some had survived, some had not. A well-known visitor to this country, George Van Halewijn of Rotterdam, was among the survivors and together with Carl Luttichau was later to make further visits to the UK. What was now of more importance, however, was the plight of the German brethren. Together with all their compatriots they were suffering, acutely, the aftermath. With a view to seeing what could be done, Harry Nadal of the Aldersbrook church, London, undertook two visits to Germany in 1948. He had already been active for a considerable time organising the sending of food and clothing and now he was to see for himself how matters stood. Crossing first to Holland he made immediate contact with Jacques Alblas and George Van Halewijn, well known from previous years, and then to Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover and other places, renewing acquaintance with the brethren at each place, and ascertaining needs still unfulfilled. A heartening aspect was the ready co-operation of the British Military Control in Germany; the outcome of the trip was very fruitful and enabled the more effective organisation of relief.

In 1951 George Jennings and Will Fox undertook a further trip to observe progress and current needs, meeting with warm hospitality wherever they went. In this same year the work still being handled by Harry Nadal was extended to South America, where much distress existed among the brethren there.

By 1957 the need was disappearing; Germany was getting on her feet again. In that year Harry Nadal and Tom Allen made

another visit which this time was more in the nature of a 'pilgrim trip', visiting many of the groups which had been re-established and speaking at a central convention which had been organised at Kirchleugern. Some twenty-four groups in towns all over Germany were visited; thus contact with the German brethren continued into succeeding years.

Visits of USA brethren continued. 1947 saw John T. Read tour the country, making 99 visits to local meetings and 1948 saw him here again, this time only 47 but also a visit to Denmark to serve the brethren there. Our old friend Carl Luttichau came from that country and restored contact broken by the war – sadly, this was his last visit; he passed away in 1955. 1950 was marked by a short trip by Brother Tripler of Germany and a longer one by Russell Pollock of USA, representing the Dawn. Each year to 1960 after that had its visitor, traversing the country and ministering at the meetings, Norman Woodworth in 1951, George Van Halewijn of Holland in 1952, Percy Read, John T. Read, Paul Thomson, Will Siekman, and others. The trips tended to get shorter as the number of meetings available to receive them diminished; the spirit remained the same.

So it was with the conventions. Attendances were decreasing, not because of failing interest but because of the "passing on" of the "old stalwarts". Each year saw the three traditional main gatherings, Easter at Warrington, Midlands at Whitsun, August at Conway Hall, London. In the North, Glasgow, usually at Easter. Lesser ones were held at other weekends at centres such as Manchester and Cardiff. A new venue for an annual Whitsun gathering opened up in 1950 at Portrush, Northern Ireland, where unique facilities existed, and this continued until 1980, when those facilities ceased to exist.

By now there was a teenage postwar generation beginning to assert itself. Knowing little of the movement's pre- 1st war history it was only to be expected that they would wish to strike out on their own. A "Young Bible Students Circle" came into operation in 1948 with the ostensible object of making progress in the knowledge of the faith and work of the community. There was great enthusiasm for a while, the organising of "Young Bible Students" conventions and other joint activities, some

attempts at open-air preaching and other methods aimed at proclaiming the good news, long since found relatively ineffective by the older ones – but each generation has to find these things out for itself. After about fifteen years the erstwhile Young Bible Students were that much older and had settled into the ordinary framework of the community and their successors did not seem to have the same degree of zest for this kind of effort so that not so much was heard of it later on. It served to direct and shape the Christian lives of those who initiated it and that perhaps was the reason for its emergence.

1951 saw a change in the name of the journal, which through all the ups and downs of Bible Student history had consistently maintained publication. From “Bible Students Monthly” it became “Bible Study Monthly” and the reason, as given in an explanatory notice, was that the old Society had begun to resume use of the term “Bible Students” in its own work and this was leading to confusion in the minds of readers and others. For much the same reason, and following this lead, many of the groups began terming themselves “Bible Fellowship” preceded by the name of their town. Leicester in 1946 was the first to adopt the term and they were followed from time to time by others so that in the provinces the name has become more or less universal.

By now many of the original workers to whom so much was owed, stemming from the 1910 to 1920 period, were being called to higher service. Henry Shearn, architect of the secession, in 1946; “Father” Guard, of Forest Gate, 1947; Don McLeod of Swansea, 1948; Ben Thatcher of Leicester and Sidney Smith of Manchester, 1949; Morton Edgar of Glasgow, 1950; William McNerlen of Sheffield, 1953; W. Reid Sharp of Newcastle, 1956; John Melville of Barrow and William Crawford, 1957. These all “finished their course with joy” and their loss made a difference.

And now, towards the end of this period, a certain amount of heart-searching was going on among the more serious minded of the older brethren. There was no doubt that progress in the movement was slowing down. The younger generation, in the main, was not following altogether in the way of their fathers, and in some quarters this was causing concern. The fact that the

same phenomenon has been true of every generation since the dawn of history was not fully appreciated by many, and those who did appreciate it were not sure what they could do about it. What was it in the fellowship, its activity, its theology, its demands, which was failing to induce the young to take part in the life of the community as whole-heartedly as had their forebears? How was it that the message of the present Lord and the coming Age of blessing failed to evoke that same rapturous acceptance that it had done in the earlier years of the century? A few years later the answers became apparent; at present they were but questions. And in the meantime the older ones were passing off the scene, increasingly quickly.

This concern resulted in a series of several meetings in London of leading brethren to consider the position. Here, perhaps for the first time, it was felt, and expressed, by some that the development was inevitable. Every generation has to find its own way for itself and if it has the good sense to profit by the works of its predecessors, well and good; "other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours". But if not, it finds the way by experience and no one generation can be expected to follow precisely the previous one. The Bible Student faith itself was the result of a younger generation of sixty years ago building upon the earlier foundation of 19th century Advent expectation and transforming it into something new. Who knows what might yet be expected of the present one?

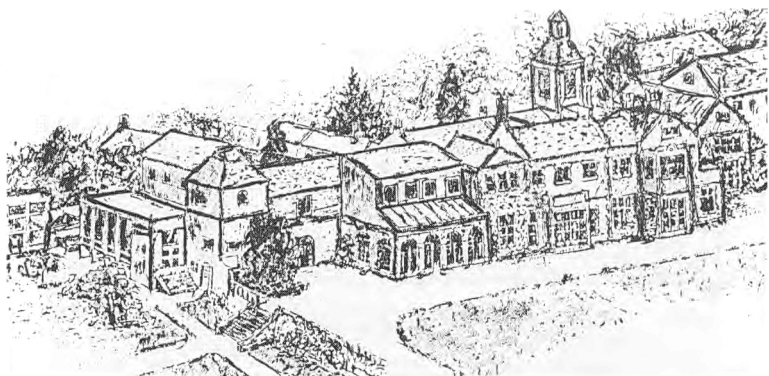
The outcome of all this was the institution of a monthly meeting at Caxton Hall, London, where young and old could come together for mutual consideration of matters of faith and belief; this became a gathering where attendants from the various London groups and the surrounding areas could come together for what amounted to a series of mini-conventions. A good many found common ground in these meetings, which commenced in 1950 and were not discontinued until 1956. Diminishing attendances dictated the discontinuance and these were consequent upon a factor which was becoming increasingly noticeable, the onset of old age. It was beginning to be realised that the pronounced increase in membership of the brethren in the halcyon days of 1910-20, in the days of the

“Harvest”, was now, forty years later, going to be reflected in the consequent departure from this earthly scene of so many of those who had embraced the faith in their thirties and forties, and now were in their seventies and eighties.

And in 1956 there had to be serious consideration of prospects for the future and particularly in what way the message of the Truth could most effectively be proclaimed to the contemporary generation.

Members of Bible Students Committee 1919-1945

	Secretary						
1919	Shearn	Crawford	Edgell	Tharratt	Seager	Guard Sr:	Guy
1920	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1921	"	"	"	Housden	"	"	"
1922	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1923	"	"	"	"	McNerlen	Brett	Palmer
1924	"	"	Thatcher	"	"	"	"
1925	"	Jacobs	"	"	"	"	"
1926	"	Hillary	"	"	"	Wileman	Morrall
1927	"	Holmes	"	"	"	Humphrey	"
1928	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1929	"	"	"	"	Morrall	Court	Smedley
1930	"	Morrall	"	Drinkwater	McNerlen	"	"
1931	"	Holmes	"	"	"	"	"
1932	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1933	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1934	"	"	"	"	Ford	"	"
1935	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1936	Hudson	"	Absalom	Smith	Cruikshank	Couling	Morrall
1937	"	"	"	"	Wenborn	"	Guy
1938	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1939	"	"	Ward	"	Batcheller	Osborne	Boyce
1940	"	"	"	Hall	Ford	"	Sears
1941	"	"	"	"	"	Rew	Allbon
1942	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1943	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1944	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
1945	"	"	"	"	"	"	"



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Millennial Message

No 4

"He, every one that
thirsts, come ye to the
waters . . . buy, and eat
without money and
without price" (Isa.
55, 1).



GOD'S FULFILLING PURPOSE

An Address Delivered Before a London Audience

The audience assembly, interested in consequence of previous meetings, gathered in Conway Hall, London, to listen for an hour and a half to an exposition of the Divine Plan regarding some new and generally unknown features. A very abbreviated digest of the speaker's remarks is given here for the benefit of our readers.

The fact that God is working out a predetermined and inflexible purpose was one of the greatest discoveries of the nineteenth century—great, because it has made such a difference to Christian thought and expectation, so sadly darkened by the confused theology of medieval theologians. The feudalism of the Dark Ages all but blotted out any real understanding of Christianity, and it was only in a few centres of learning, monasteries and abbeys such as that of Jarrow, that a handful of saintly men did preserve enough of the sacred books to make possible in after days the increased understanding of God and His Plan that came with the wider dissemination of the Bible in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The modern understanding of God's fulfilling purpose has come only within the last four centuries and has come in stages. First, at and after the Protestant Reformation, came the restoration of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, principles governing God's relationship to man, man's fallen condition and need of a Redeemer, and the call to personal holiness of life. Next came increase of scientific knowledge which led to more accurate understanding of Biblical narratives and history. Finally came the rise of the Bible societies and a very general expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. It was in the light of this expectancy that it began to be realised that God is working to a Plan, and the Bible was thereafter explored from a new viewpoint.

In the present time, when the world that we know is falling to pieces, this knowledge of God's fulfilling purpose shines like a beacon, leading us on, if we will, to the feet of Jesus, there to learn what He is doing for man's salvation. Rightly to understand His work we must go back to the beginning, to the Book of Genesis, wherein lie the seeds of all history. The earth had waited for long ages, evolving to the point at which it was fit for human habitation, but at the creation of man God made a fresh start. Man is the only earthly creature possessing qualities which make him a possible candidate for everlasting life. As created, man was physically and mentally perfect, but he was not yet ready for God's ultimate purpose. He must

needs undergo a thorough experience of the relative natures of good and evil.

The mystery of the permission of evil is still a mystery, but it was ordained by God for a wise purpose. We know, dimly, that the endurance of suffering does have beneficial results in human development. Although suffering is the result of sin, it is turned to a good end by God. Because man is essentially a free-will being, created so, he had liberty to choose between good and evil. He chose evil, and rejected God. But man cannot exist without God. Full life can only be enjoyed in tune and harmony with God. Hence the human race degenerated into death. Not until the time

God Does Care!

for a long time, but the forces that ensure its eventual doom had been set in motion. The next impetus to those forces was given when the descendants of Abraham left Egypt and became, at Sinai, a nation itself devoted to God's purposes, and during the whole period slaying between Moses and Christ, nearly fifteen hundred years, gave the world, even in their imperfect and unwilling obedience of their obligation, invaluable instruction in the fundamentals of Divine overlordship in the affairs of men. It is true that in the Israelitish theology there was little, if any, conception of God as a God of love; His attributes were viewed in the light of stern, unbending justice, and the life of the nation reflected that conception. That was a necessary stage in man's development; it required the coming of Christ later on to build on that basis the deeper doctrine of the love of God.

The Israelitish age did at least reveal the truth that the supreme purpose of life is to serve God. General realisation of this fact to-day would solve all our problems at once. That truth was insisted upon by the most significant body of men it is would has ever known—the Hebrew prophets. Over a span of about four hundred years the prophets made an incalculable contribution to human progress and religious thought. Both Judaism and Christianity are founded on their words, and the whole Plan of God is revealed in their words. Their ministry reached its highest level in the life of Isaiah, and he it was who, more than any other, prepared men's minds for the coming of Christ, insisting that He must come first to suffer on behalf of man and afterwards to reign for the salvation of men. His description of the One who gives Himself into death rather than use the forces of evil to secure His release, and by that act becomes the Lord of all things in heaven and in earth, to that He can at the last destroy all evil, it unparalleled in the world's literature.

The Hebrew prophets finished their work. Four hundred years later there was a nucleus of people who had rightly appreciated that work and were ready. It was to that nucleus that Christ came and out of that nucleus that Christianity was born. In the meantime the other nucleus of earth had been increasing, dividing, differentiating into races and tribes, intermarrying, until the earth became tolerably thickly populated. From the simple



"For as the rain cometh down, watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud . . . so shall my word be that shall forth out of my mouth: it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing wherein I sent it" (Isa. 55, 10-11).

of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham was there any marked change and noteworthy effort to come back to God. Prior to his time there is little evidence of any real seeking after God in the world. Here and there are traces; the old mythological religions are probably distorted traditions of a once tolerably clear understanding of God, but it was lost at a very early date.

The story of Abraham is the first recorded instance of a man wholly and unreservedly consecrated to the service of God. To this man came the Divine call and promise that through him God would bring blessing to all men upon earth. Such promise implied the removal of sin and death and the undoing of the harm that was done when sin entered into the world. From this point, nearly half-way through known human history, the upward and Godward trend began. Evil must

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MARAN-ATHA

THE LORD COMETH!

JESUS SAID—
 "BE YE ALSO READY for in
 such an hour as YE ARE NOT
 THINKING, THE SON OF
 MAN COMETH" Mat. 24:44
 "even so, Lord Jesus, COME"

THE FOREST GATE CHURCH BIBLE MONTHLY



WINDSOR, ENGL. 1905

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Lift up your heads, O ye gates
 And ye ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
 For the King of glory shall come in

The Dawn Herald of Christ's Presence

November 1988



THE HERALD of Christ's Kingdom

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PERIODICALS IN USE IN UK
 ("Dawn" & "Herald" published in USA)

10

VISTA OF JORDAN

INDICATIONS OF change began in 1960. So far as the brethren in general were concerned, the situation was unaltered. Local fellowships carried on their church life, services of worship, conventions and the like. Literature was in plentiful supply from the London centre, and a certain amount of desultory tract distribution went on. But something of the old fire was lacking. The zeal which had fuelled the public meetings and the witnessing work of past years was evaporating; the "old stalwarts" who had borne the heat and burden of the day were still as stalwart but considerably older, and natural powers were fading. The later members and the younger generation, which had never known the fervour of the old sense of mission to proclaim the imminence of the end of the Age and the coming of the Millennial world, growing up in a materialistic Age in which these things were as idle fancies, were more concerned with the practice of the faith in their own fellowships. There was evident in many of the meetings a partial return to the old Christian tradition stressing the holiness of Jesus and emphasis on his death at the expense of the magnitude of his coming work for man in the power of his resurrection. The degree to which this became true varied as between one fellowship and another; there were those, mainly where the elderly were predominant, where something much more like the old standards prevailed. The zeal was there, and the certainty, but the onset of old age had sapped the essential vigour to act, and changing social conditions closed the doors which once had always stood open. The fires burned low, not because of loss of faith and belief, but of physical strength and outward opportunity.

So the older ones began to pass off the scene, familiar faces were disappearing, and there were not so many younger ones

ready to take their place. This position became more noticeable after 1960. It was more fully realised by then that the tremendous increase in membership over the period 1910–20, consequent upon the results of the Albert Hall and other national campaigns of 1910, and the Photo-Drama exhibitions of 1914, was now to have its repercussions. A great many who then were young in years – and the movement at that time was essentially one of young people, largely in their twenties and thirties – meant that an equivalent number was now at the end of the way. In the ordinary way one would expect such losses to be made up by new and younger adherents, but this has not been the lot of any Christian denomination for many years and the Bible Students have been no exception. By 1970 some 80% of the brethren who took part in the 1919 secession had passed on and by 1980 most of the rest had followed. By this latter year the fellowship consisted for the most part – by far the most part – of newly-joined members and the children – and grandchildren – of the original founders. But the newcomers did not make up the number of their predecessors and the scale of things lessened.

Among some of those most deeply concerned light began to dawn. Certain words of the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes came to mind; “say not thou, what is the reason that the former days were better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this”. The former world, the world of well-attended public meetings, of wholesale tract distribution, of mass evangelism, with hundreds and even thousands coming together to hear the message of “Present Truth”, had passed away, and it was not going to return. The day of organised Bible Student churches in the cities, where the worshippers were numbered in the hundreds, and numerous lesser fellowships in the towns and villages, was ended. Those that remained were as convinced and confident as ever, but they were lesser in number, and smaller in size, and quieter in outward activity. The number of the faithful in 1970 was 60% of what it had been in 1930, and the number of regular meetings 50%. One might be forgiven for wondering if in fact the Harvest was ended, the message given, the work done, and the entire fabric of service and worship that had been built up over seventy years now

doomed to enter that category outlined by the writer to the Hebrews in the words "that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away".

It was not so to be. This train of thought led inevitably to the reflection that right at the beginning, when Charles Russell commenced his monumental work, he had no idea of creating a new denomination or fellowship, but rather of circulating his message among Christians of all existing denominations, or of none. It was the wide-spread impact of his preaching and writing which led later to the emergence of the distinctive fellowship which became known as the Bible Students. And now the question came to the top: Are we intended to go back to the beginning and turn our efforts to the systematic introduction of the message to individuals without thought of bringing them into another fold? Is it to be an example of the parable spoken by Jesus and recorded in the Gospel of Mark, "so is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how"? Could there be a method of making known the message among those most likely to receive it more fitted to the present-day world than the old now largely ineffective ones?

Thought naturally turned to the one element in the British brethren's "stock-in-trade" which had survived the vicissitudes of the two post-war eras, the "Bible Study Monthly". During the whole period, from its foundation in 1924, while other aids to service and worship, and the number of the brethren, had first increased and then commenced to decline, the circulation and influence of the "Monthly" had been steadily rising. From its modest beginning in 1924, when it was founded to serve the interests of the British brethren who had seceded from the old Society, it had expanded its scope to cover all the English-speaking countries and to some extent areas such as the European continent, South America and the Far East. But always it had gone to the brethren; there was no thought of extending its circulation outside the fellowship. Now came the question: could this medium be used to reach enquiring Christians and non-Christians alike, outside that circle? At the very least, notices in periodical journals, particularly those read

by Christian people, might conceivably yield results.

The scheme commenced in 1956. Announcements in selected British journals appeared and were quickly followed by requests from enquirers. The results rather surpassed expectations. Within four years the circulation had doubled and before long it was four-fold. Some who became readers then are readers still and manifest real appreciation. A goodly number – about one in seven in the UK – are ordained ministers of almost every denomination, including some Anglican canons, one or two Bishops, the Moderator of a Nonconformist communion, the Heads of several theological colleges, quite a host of men who by means of correspondence indicate their interest in, and oft-times concurrence with, the outlook on the Divine Plan presented. Several evangelical churches display copies each month on their bookstalls for the use of their members. Many public libraries place the “Monthly” on their readers’ table. In quite a number of ways the “Monthly” now goes where the tracts and the public speakers went in times gone by. In later years both the “Dawn” and “Maran-atha” magazines, encouraged doubtless by this example, followed suit and also had encouraging results.

Of the many appreciations which constantly come in from ministers of religion the following, severely abbreviated, will yield some idea of the type of response:

“A wonderful collection. Has helped me much in my ministry both in my parish work and my evangelical work” – “Most helpful as a lay preacher in the Salvation Army” – “A good help when preparing my sermons” – “Helpful material which I am able to use in my ministry” – “Fine, fundamental subjects which are true to the Word of God” – “Many of the points you mention are to be found later in my sermons” – “So Scriptural, so devotional, and very helpful indeed; they are of great value” – “In these days of modernism and complacency extremely refreshing to find articles of such value and conviction” – “Very stimulating, building me up in the faith” – “Of immense spiritual value and profit” – “A lamp to illuminate many of the dark passages of the Word of God” – “Extremely interested in “The Coming of the King”; profoundly needed in this generation of the End Time; very sorry it is preached about so

little in most churches” – “The ‘Coming of the King’ has helped me to understand the Second Advent better”.

These have come from ministers. There are, of course, similar observations from laymen readers who range or have ranged from a member of the House of Lords to some unfortunates serving prison sentences.

The logical inference to be drawn from all this is that a field of service is opening up in these more recent times which does not involve making converts to the Fellowship and enlisting them as fellow-workers, but rather to act as did Brothers Sunderlin and Bender a century ago, scatter the seed and leave it to germinate in its own way. Whether it will, as it did then, eventually fructify into a coming together on the part of some to study these things for themselves and proclaim it in turn no man can say; this has in fact happened in a number of cases where group meetings have been started under the aegis of the members’ own denominational church to discuss these themes between themselves. But it has to be remembered that the Christian witness given with failing powers as the Age nears its end is to be overtaken by the emergence of the Divine Kingdom of Christ in which the Gospel will be proclaimed in power infinitely superior to the best that can be done in this present, and perhaps that is to be the real outcome of the present situation.

A certain amount of publishing continued. Between 1955 and 1965 sixteen new booklets were published and another twenty during the following decade. The quantities printed were considerably smaller than had been the case in former years but then there were not so many brethren to make use of them. Altogether the publishing centre had issued fifty-eight different booklets since 1939. Then in 1975 came a more ambitious effort in this field.

It had long been felt in some British circles that there was one notable omission in the published works of Charles Russell. Although the doctrine of Future Probation was inherent in his understanding of the Divine Plan, and often referred to in his writings, there was no formal and detailed treatise on the subject as had been with such matters as the Second Advent, the doctrine of Hell, and so on. It was resolved to remedy this

deficiency and to make this the basis of another evangelical effort. The result was the publication in 1975 of "Future Probation in Christian Belief", a 100-page book setting out the Biblical basis for the thesis with not only the work of Pastor Russell but also the supporting views of eminent 19th and 20th century churchmen and others on the subject, forming an up-to-date analysis of present-day thought on the subject. Theologians like Dr R. H. Charles (Anglican) and Dr W. B. Pope (Methodist), eminent ministers of the calibre of F. W. Farrar, F. B. Meyer, Dr J Paterson Smyth, Dr Vranken Holmes of USA, gave their testimony. Very little affirmative treatment of the subject had appeared since the days of Archdeacon Farrar of Westminster Abbey in the late 19th century and it was felt that a powerful witness to the Truth could be given by this book.

A first edition of twenty thousand copies was printed. As a first step copies were sent to a large number of ministers of all denominations in UK with an explanatory leaflet. At the same time the British public library system was approached and as many libraries as would accept copies were supplied with same for their shelves. In later years an appreciable number of enquiries were received from readers who had picked up the book from their local library; this source of interest still continues.

A great many ministers were favourably impressed. One surprise was the discovery that quite a few of them already had Pastor Russell's "Studies in the Scriptures" on their bookshelves and intimated how highly they thought of them. The "spade work" of past generations of brethren in the "Harvest" must have had greater impact than they knew. One C of E Canon was so impressed by the implications of the book that he called a conference of all the ministers in his area to discuss the subject after obtaining sufficient copies to present them with one each. A Methodist minister in a seaside town called a meeting of all the ministers in his town with a similar purpose. The circulation of the book has continued through the years and its wider use is only limited by lack of man-power.

A final flicker in the realm of public meetings came in 1986 when a few brethren in the North-East endeavoured to revive

the old interest in film presentations. A modern cinerama of still pictures with sound accompaniment entitled "For This Cause" had been produced by the "Dawn" brethren in USA and had evoked considerable interest over there. Would it be equally effective in the UK, was the question. Putting it to the test, a hall was taken in York and the function well advertised. A fair number of people attended and what seemed to be a reasonable harvest of enquiries resulted. In the long-term outcome there were a few permanent readers of the "Monthly" and that was about all. Further showings at Oxford and Yeovil elicited a flicker of interest but after that there was nothing.

The number of conventions, and their attendances, began perceptibly to diminish. The old regulars, Warrington and Glasgow at Easter, Leicester at Whitsun, London at August, remained, albeit on a smaller scale than of yore. Speakers began to comment on the increasing number of gray heads in their audiences. The last Conway Hall convention was held in 1969; after that, decreasing attendance and growing lack of brethren able to undertake the ancillary duties and services contingent on an organised convention dictated a change to smaller venues and so succeeding gatherings for London were held, first at Langley for a few years and then at the present venue at Chesham. By 1971 Blaby in Leicestershire had become the permanent home for the traditional Midlands Whitsun gathering, again with reduced numbers. The annual "Maranatha" week-long conference, which had commenced in 1950, closed its doors in 1980, for the usual reason, although on the other side of the coin a series of five-day gatherings in Yeovil, the "Patmos" convention, endured from 1978 to 1987. Dublin held just one fairly modest convention in 1976 but this was not repeated, and Lancashire friends organised a five-day function at Southport in 1986. It was evident, though, that the days of sixty years past when six or eight hundred brethren came together for a three or four-day session of exhortation, exposition, and fellowship, were no more.

Against this perhaps rather sombre background there must be set the emergence of one or two periodic functions associated with the younger fraternity. These are set in the Midlands where there is a greater aggregation of such. From the later

1960s and into the present there has been a regular week-long Easter get-together, intended mainly for the young, but open to all, at Purley Chase Conference Centre, near Nuneaton. The nature of the sessions and the subjects dealt with are those more likely to interest the younger element in the fellowship as are the recreational side-lines so often associated with this kind of function in most Christian groups. Whilst not suiting the tastes of some of the older brethren it must have its place in the Master's scheme of things.

The organised Pilgrim service continued to find its place, perhaps a little quieter than in the past. A number of old friends came from USA by invitation and fulfilled itineraries, planned usually by the London centre, visiting local meetings all over the country. Thus Paul Thomson came in 1958, renewing old acquaintances in forty-two towns. The same year came Will Siekman for a shorter period. 1960 saw Fred Essler on his first visit to this country where he travelled the whole territory from Cardiff to Ipswich and Portsmouth to Dewsbury. He was followed by Percy Read, the new secretary of the USA. Pastoral Bible Institute, who in 1962 covered the area from Glasgow to Bexhill and Cardiff to Ipswich with some visits to Ireland including Dublin, Belfast and Londonderry. Alex Muir set foot in this country on his first pilgrim visit in 1962, where after a mix-up at London airport on his arrival where, after advice of his arrival on, successively, two separate planes arriving within a few hours of each other, two unsuccessful trips from the London suburbs to meet him, several Transatlantic telephone calls on the part of the airport authorities to find out where he really was, he was eventually discovered waiting patiently in an arrival lounge, having been there all the time. Despite this apparently inauspicious start, he covered the entire country from the South Coast at Paignton, Bournemouth and Eastbourne through London and the Midlands to Glasgow and Dundee, then Northern Ireland and Eire before returning home. This era of organised USA visits was closed by Fred Essler and Alex Muir in 1967 and 1968 respectively with similar travels through the entire country.

From this time onward the tendency was for local groups to make their own arrangements for this kind of service, usually on

a small scale involving a relatively small number of visits in a particular area, sometimes inviting a USA or Canadian brother but more often utilising the services of a British brother. The services of the London centre ceased to be necessary or desired in this field of service; in any case it largely died out in later years.

The ever-extending arms of the Welfare State, it had long been thought, would eventually render the Benevolent Fund Service unnecessary and redundant. This, however, did not prove to be the case. Founded in 1919 twenty-five years before the Welfare State was thought of, 1967 found it still actively operating with contributed funds and meeting a need. It had been under the personal supervision of George Ford, who had looked after its fortunes since 1946, but by 1968 George was feeling the weight of years and decided it was time for a change. Consultation with the former administrators resulted in an invitation to three younger brethren who readily accepted the duties involved. This committee, with occasional changes, has continued to the present. Despite the existence and amenities of the Welfare State, this committee has found that the Lord's words on one occasion "the poor ye always have with you" are still, sadly, only too true, and the twin facts that the need still exists and the funds still continue to come in hearten them to continue in the work as of yore. Whilst it had been true that most of the larger city churches, when they were large, had maintained benevolent funds of their own for their own members there was always a wide spectrum of need among isolated brethren and small communities in various parts of the country and while the contributions to the fund continued, and continue, to come in, that need was and is being met.

Concern for those in need was also manifested in the province of impecunious old age. In earlier days, before the advent of the Welfare State, in 1946, there was, in the case of extreme and impotent old age without means or relatives, no alternative to the old-time Victorian workhouse, where the hapless inmates could do little but sit and wait to die. Within the circle of the independent fellowship the solution was often found by brethren of younger years and possessed of the necessary facilities taking such older ones into their own homes

and caring for them in their last years. By the 1930s the average age of the brethren was rising into the later years and this practice was becoming less feasible. Some desultory discussion on what could be done was beginning to be instituted but the pace of this was too slow for one energetic sister who eventually sailed into action on her own account.

Rose Bush was an ex-matron of a large London hospital, now in the early thirties retired from the cares of that position. Rose Bush was a rather formidable and decisive character with some sense of humour and a heart of gold. The thought of brothers and sisters in the faith who had laboured for the Cause in their own younger years condemned to rot in the workhouse at the last was repugnant to her, and, in her book, a challenge for someone to do something about it. Nothing less could be squared with her conception of the fraternity of the fellowship. So she did something about it.

Came a day when a stately lady (described rather irreverently on one occasion when coming up the central aisle of a convention hall as resembling a 19th century full-rigged sailing ship advancing under full sail) stood in the street of a South London suburb surveying a rather ancient three-storey Victorian house having many rooms. Rose Bush went ahead and bought it. One of her erstwhile hospital colleagues, Ruth Pressley, a sister in the faith, joined her. The brethren generally were apprised of the fact that Rose Bush was in the market for gifts of unwanted furniture and linen. Before long the house was fully furnished. Soon after that it seemed to be full of residents, elderly people in various stages of physical decline. This part of the proceedings seems to be somewhat wrapped in mystery. It used to be said, apocryphically, that the authorities at various workhouses, going about their legitimate business, suddenly found themselves confronted by a large and somewhat awe-inspiring apparition and before they quite knew what was happening found that one of their charges was in a rapidly receding taxi half-a-mile down the street. This may have been an exaggeration, but anyone who had known Rose Bush would have no difficulty in giving the story credence.

The Home for elderly brethren endured for some twenty years until 1955 when the redoubtable Rose and her equally

redoubtable Ruth had to give up on account of age and health. Rose died in 1957 but her memory remains as one who had no patience with protracted discussions and went out to do things herself.

How the venture was financed was always a mystery. The "old age pension" of the times was ludicrously small. Rose Bush used to say that if the Lord wanted the enterprise to continue He would send the money; her faith was vindicated and He did. Various brethren contributed. It is not likely that she was ever over-burdened with funds with something like twenty to thirty people to care for. She did the shopping herself, and the general public got used to the sight of a very large lady riding a very small bicycle from Croydon market laden front, rear and both sides with large bags of commodities, at imminent risk of contact with passing vehicles and meeting disaster on the tramlines. It is certain that a small detachment of unseen guardian angels must have been deployed on such occasions keeping the entire complex upright and steering a tolerably straight course.

In Rose Bush's book, of course, the fact that they were brethren meant that they must have a meeting. It was obviously impossible to get them to existing regular meetings or to conventions, so there had to be a regular meeting in the house. It was equally impossible to sit bedridden residents in chairs so part of the large room used for meetings had to be furnished with beds. The one thing no one could ever find out was how Rose and Ruth got the bedridden ones down the staircase, which was of the old-fashioned spiral type, from the upper floors. By the time the invited speaker from some other centre had arrived to conduct the meeting, they were all tucked up and waiting. Anerley, South London, was probably the only Bible Student meeting ever where the speaker faced an audience of listeners in several rows of beds jammed up tightly one against another. No one ever thought of fire risk and how they could be got out at short notice, which was just as well for it would not have been possible anyway. It is certain though that the same detachment of guardian angels which supervised the shopping expeditions was on duty at meeting times as well.

By 1950, realising that Rose Bush would not be here for

ever, the Welling group mooted the idea of a concerted effort to establish a suitable Home for elderly brethren in line with Government regulations which had recently come into force for the conduct of such establishments – the old house at Anerley could not by any means be made to conform to such, although it did in fact subsist for another five years. A notice of enquiry appeared in the “Monthly” for November and December 1950 but the proposal, sadly, came to nothing. The complex regulations now existing for new enterprises of this nature appeared too formidable – and perhaps there was not enough faith! But in 1975 it was mooted again, by the original proposers, and this time there was a marked reversal of sentiment. The usual adverse criticisms were made, but this time the “ayes” considerably outnumbered the “nays”. A heartening aggregation of moneys was pledged by an appreciable number should the scheme go ahead; rather embarrassing was the fact that some, in their enthusiasm for the enterprise, sent monetary gifts before any decision had been taken, and these had to be banked and recorded in case it later became necessary to return them. The number who signified their wish to become residents at such a centre seemed to afford promise that the scheme would be viable, and so early in 1976 the decision was taken to establish such a Home.

The die cast, the search for a suitable property began. The favoured area was to be Dorset and South Somerset, in the South of England, where the climate was genial, the winters mild, and, importantly, where property prices were among the lowest in the country. A team of explorers, five from London and four local who knew the area, set out, in blissful innocence, at least as far as the Londoners were concerned, to find a large country house set in several acres of land in the midst of rolling countryside with a picturesque village not far away, in which idyllic setting the fortunate brethren could spend their declining years. It is possible that a mental picture of the future Millennial earth had somehow got a little mixed up with the ideals which had inspired the pioneers.

Somehow it did not turn out quite like that. The search endured for two years during which some forty varied but very fine country houses were inspected by one or other of the three

teams into which the searchers were divided. Starting in the summer the glories of the countryside where the sun was always shining were ardently pointed out by the enthusiastic house agents anxious to find a buyer for any one of the available properties which at that time and in that area were something of a drug on the market. It was not long before an apparently suitable property was found, set in three acres of magnificent gardens in a tiny village nine miles from the nearest town – and, wonder of wonders, it had been on the market for nine months and no one had yet been to see it. Surely it had been saved for the searchers! The Trustees of the newly formed Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust hastened to offer a price which exhausted their available funds at the moment and consequently was a little under the asking price, on the agent's assurance that the bid would be accepted – and so it would have been had not some stranger walked in at the last minute and offered the full price, and the dream faded.

Another house was found and this was better than the former. Four acres instead of three, a greater number of rooms and they were larger. The nearest town was only two miles away and there was a bus service. A bargain was struck and the legal formalities put in hand. They would have been completed quite happily had not the owner of the adjacent property, a retired military man, conceived a violent antipathy to having what he described as “a lot of senile old people” living next door. The Trustees felt that life in that locality might not be too pleasant and it might be prudent to cut losses, withdraw and look somewhere else.

That somewhere else proved to be a house in every respect better than either of the other two and a second set of legal formalities was put in hand. The local landscape was flat and there was a river not far away but nobody took any notice of that until a chance word with the local Planning Officer revealed that the river periodically overflowed its banks and flooded the land for miles around. Somehow the idea of elderly brethren wading knee-deep in water to reach the dining room did not seem too appealing, and enthusiasm vanished.

So the story continued, until six properties in succession had been approved and tentative agreement for purchase arrived at,

and then for one reason or another abrogated. Two years had passed, and attainment of the object seemed as remote as ever. "What you people need is a miracle" grumbled one agent to the sister who had been a regular enquirer for longer than he cared to remember. "You are right" was the rejoinder "and we shall get one".

And we did!

It was beginning to be borne in on the searchers that the rosy vision of a large country house set in spacious gardens in lush countryside miles from anywhere could have its demerits. Who would look after four or five acres of garden? Who would do the shopping and get the old folks' pensions in a village where there were no shops and no post office? What about the winter when snow blocked up the country lanes and communication was at a standstill? What about the maintenance costs for a large house only half tenanted at the beginning of the project? Were ideas a bit too ambitious and should it not be remembered that most of the achievements of the Truth had sprung from small and inconspicuous beginnings?

The result of all this was a meeting of the Trust at which a new and definite specification of desiderata was drawn up. The property was to be small in area, not exceeding one acre. The house was to be moderate in size, able to accommodate a restricted number at first. It must possess an unusually extensive range of outbuildings suitable for conversion into dwellings as the need arose. It must be in or close to a village where a post office, good medical facilities, and a suitable array of shops adequate for daily needs existed, and have a bus service to the nearest town. And when the specification had been drawn up the Trustees agreed with each other that in all their two years' searches they had never come across such a village and doubted if one such existed.

Fourteen days later a property was offered which met the specification in its entirety.

Gainsborough House, Milborne Port, was a semi-derelict property which had been bought by a local builder with the express object of restoring it and offering it for re-sale. During the entire time that the searchers had been scouring the two counties for a suitable property, this preparation had been going

on unknowingly to them. Now the Trustees stood in the gardens of the house, viewed the extensive range of outbuildings which met all their hopes, looked at each other and said "This is it!". And this time there was no hitch and no failure. Within four weeks the property was in the hands of the Trust and ready for conversion. In December 1978 the first residents moved in.

Following the putting into service of the main house, successive years have seen the progressive conversion of the outbuildings into self-contained flats which, surrounding the garden on three sides, have taken on more and more the complexion of a miniature village, a work which is still going on, for the full potentialities of the property have yet to be exploited. The year-by-year progress of the work has been made possible by generous gifts and legacies, small and great, from interested brethren not only in the UK but also America and Australia. Under the administration of a Board of Trustees drawn from amongst the brethren, it bids fair to continue as long as the need exists. Besides fulfilling its primary purpose of a residential centre for the elderly, it also receives visitors from far and near, and houses a library in which the literature and publications associated with the Bible Student movement over the century of its existence is kept for record and reference. The Deed of Trust requires that Gainsborough House shall always be confined to use as a Christian residential centre for elderly Christians, so that whatever the future may hold, those who have contributed and do contribute to its establishment and maintenance may feel that their gifts will always benefit Christian work. And for the distant future, the project and its well-being are in the Lord's hands.

A century ago the Bible Students proclaimed that the world was encompassing its own end, and the greed and selfishness of man would bring about utter disaster. They said that man's extremity would be God's opportunity, and that the rulership of Christ over the earth would supersede that of man and all things be made new. They expected that consummation sooner than the events have justified, but all that was then predicted has come and manifestly is coming to pass. World war, followed by the fall of monarchistic kingdoms and their replacement by peoples' republics, followed by social discord and finally general

anarchy, the world's social and commercial systems collapsing; decline in religious observance and increasing demoralisation of human conduct; the restoration of Israel to her native land and re-emergence as a sovereign State; all these things were foreseen, and they have all happened. And now the ecological system of the earth is breaking down and it is admitted on all sides that things have gone too far and no man knows how to put them right. This world has come to its end and the message of the Bible Students is what it always was. The time has come. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

So this is not the end. It is the introduction to a new beginning. The dawn gleams on the horizon. The heralds of the dawn are still needed, those who understand the significance of the times in which they live, and are prepared to make its proclamation their life's work. God never in all history has left himself without a witness, and now in what is perhaps the most momentous period of world history that witness must still be given – not with acclamation and outward show as in earlier times perhaps, more likely quietly, unobtrusively, reaching into the hearts and minds of men and women who perceive the course the world is taking and would fain know the outcome. So the sowers can only scatter the seed which peradventure may inspire to a new understanding and a new hope. Scattered, but effective, destined to grow and flower and at the last bear fruit in that coming Millennial world which was the burden of the Harvest message.

So, it may be, those who laboured in the proclamation of this message which replaced Christian orthodoxy with a better and more cheering gospel, "of great joy, which shall be to all people", looking back on the achievements of the past, and participation in the perhaps quieter works of the present, may take good heart. Like the Apostle Paul two thousand years ago, they can reflect that they have been – they still are – "citizens of no mean city".



GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE - MAIN BUILDING



GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE - MEETING HALL



GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE - GARDEN AND FLATS LOOKING NORTH



GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE - GARDEN AND FLATS LOOKING EAST

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