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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.

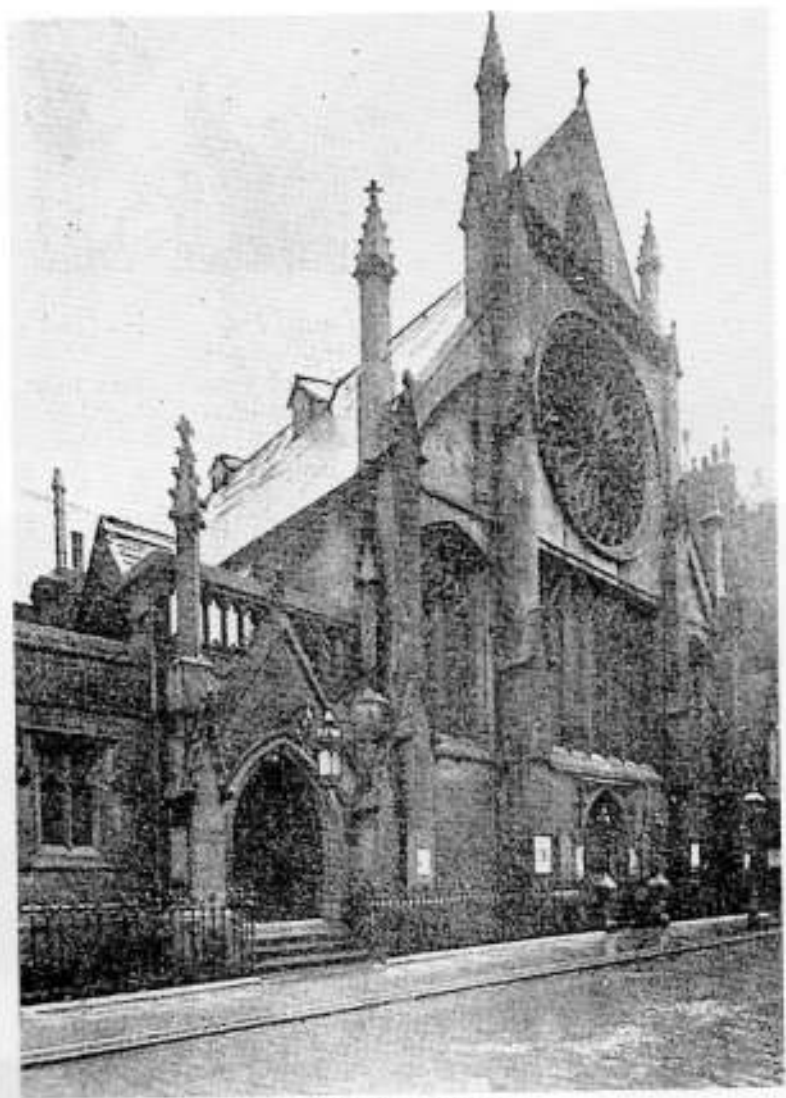
And it was even so — except for a small party of the younger brethren who determined that they were not going to miss anything, and so assembled in an inconspicuous corner on the other side of the road to observe what went on. Sure enough, at the appointed time the carriages-and-pair — occasionally a 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. Hamery

J. Gentle

H. C. Thackway

H. Hooper

G. T. Swain

T. M. Seeck

SENIOR ELDERS - 1918



F. Pett

S. Martin

TABERNACLE DOORKEEPERS

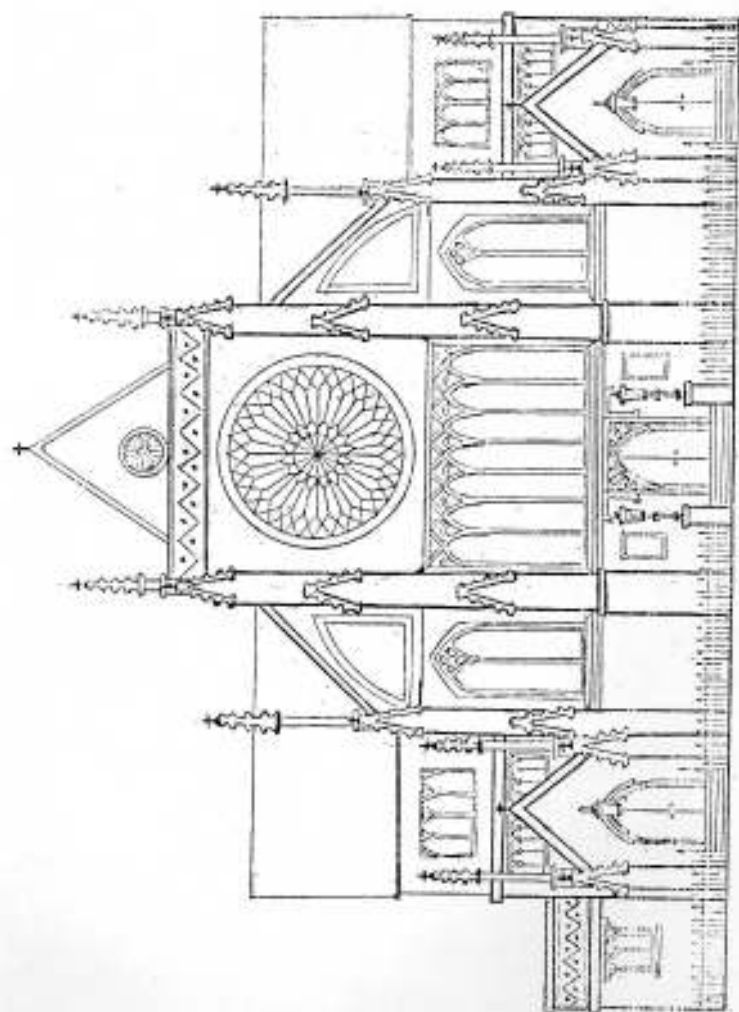




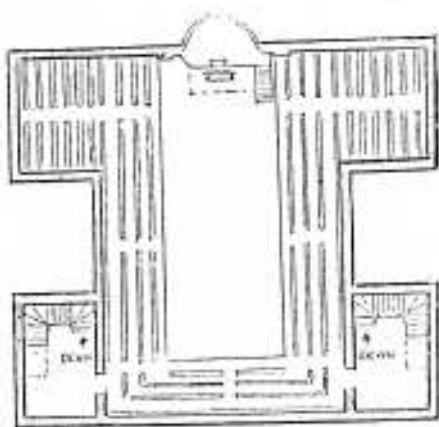
After the service



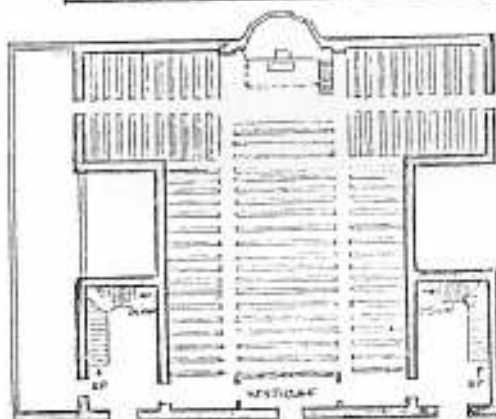
Tabernacle main entrance



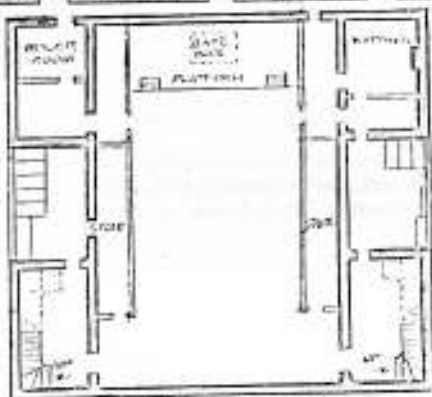
LONDON TABERNACLE



Gallery



Ground Floor



Basement

LONDON TABERNACLE
Floor Plans

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

World's Mission is to be
the Centre for Christian
Evangelistic Efforts.

In New York, in the
London Tabernacle, the
headquarters of the British
mission, and a large
number of converts and
other workers are
being trained for the
evangelistic work of
the world.



Rev. Wm. Miller
Pastor Russell

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



-LONDON-TABERNACLE-
PEOPLES PULPIT
 CRAVEN TERRACE LANCASTER GATE, W.

LONDON.

Religious and Scientific
 Gleanings

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 from Mary Roberts' Bureau of Sent. St.

**THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME INTELLIGENT
 CREATOR ESTABLISHED**

EVIDENCE TAKEN FROM THE BIBLE, ESTABLISHED BY THE LIGHT OF REASON—AN UNDISPUTED FACT—
 A SOUNDING TRUTH—THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CIVILIZATION—HUMANITY'S OBLIGATION.

IT IS THE OBJECT OF THIS PULPIT to present to the people of this country a clear and concise statement of the evidence which has been gathered from the Bible, and which, when viewed in the light of reason, establishes the existence of a Supreme Intelligent Creator. This evidence is not only clear and convincing, but it is also of a nature which is accessible to all, and which is not subject to the objections which are often raised against the Bible. The evidence is of a nature which is accessible to all, and which is not subject to the objections which are often raised against the Bible.

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