

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-session 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.

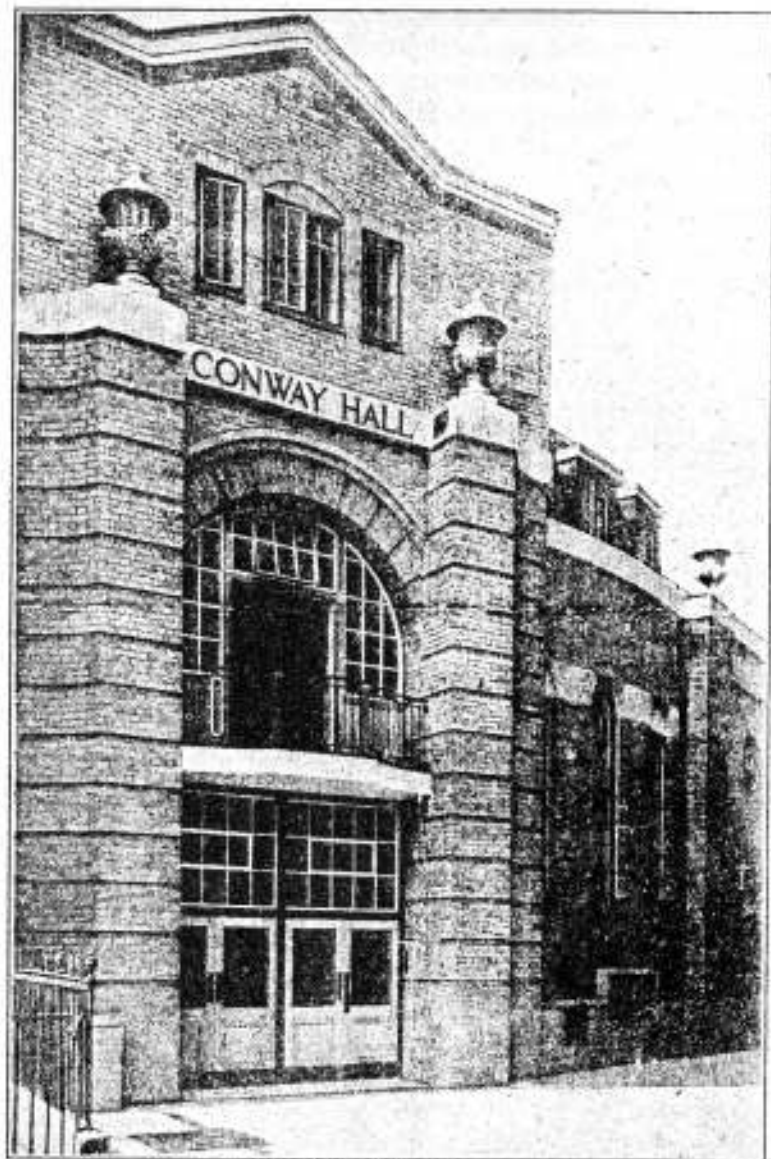
At this time there were something like 240 regular assemblies in the country, ranging from the big city churches like Glasgow and Forest Gate with about 400 members each, through places like Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, where membership was in the order of 100 to 150, down to the country 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



LONDON
CONVENTION
OF
BIBLE STUDENTS

arranged by London Ecclesias

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

AT
CONWAY HALL
RED LION SQUARE,
HOLBORN, W.C.1.

TELEPHONE: CHANCERY 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

PEACE ON EARTH

WHEN?

With the world in the throes of an economic crisis, war and thousands of war on every kind, 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 schools of thought ready with a panacea for the world's distresses. Political organizations of every hue, proponents of social and economic reforms, apostles of every theory under heaven all add their voices to the general clamor.

According to the masses of people who support them they are able to correct a suffering world. Each claims its Age of universal security and endeavor has failed. If there of necessity, it is the inability

The world as we know it is self-preservation. Although the events, yet Christ challenged clearly and definitely answering that by self-sacrifice would the victory of that belief? Christ the universe. Now that the records of the ages cannot be denied unequivocally that the universal practice of the way, for many accounts embodied results of that teaching—yet be the fruits of victory will be the

The Bible is the only book that peace on earth will one day often earnestly believed—consecrated by increasing the pleasure in observing is found. With with equanimity the spirit of a heart they can to improve their message is one of peace which not only solves the world's problems but also the individual life so far from being indifferent is already of a desperate plea of

WORLD ORDER—OR CHAOS. WHICH?

THOUGHTFUL minds, of old and young alike, are in this time inquiring, "To what is all the present confusion leading? Where can we look for safety and security, for peace 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 tomorrow will be the same." But is this true? If today is as yesterday, and if tomorrow 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 indulging those who prophesy rocks ahead. It is common knowledge that we have not only washed the rocks, but that the steps of war are in grave danger of founding themselves, while the storm has increased. There is no need to enlarge upon the difficulties,—helplessness of nations, unemployment and poverty in the midst of abundance, international hatred and jealousy, universal dissension, 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 flames.

Are there nevertheless answers to the above questions? We say with confidence that there are, and that it is our duty to walk, and our desire to combat.

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? Is our country the last word in "Communism," is another it is "National Socialism," have we exhausted of each other, and therefore though apparently peaceful at home, are contributing to the already overburdened international situation. Clearly then, the only solution, if it be along the lines of a dictator, is that he control not just one country, but all.

There is the one that can be trusted to take control of the world 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 really and give peace and unity 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