

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 flock also says 'Praying time . . . both year after year, that swords, and your plowshares be made into spears!' There always have been wars, and there always will be wars," and he discusses the subject with a wave of the hand.

Good treatment of that nation-day and

EVOLUTION— AND THE SCRIPTURES

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

X

"This has made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thine hands" (Ps. 8, 5).

WHEN THE MORNING COMETH

Manasse has long hoped for and believed in a new day, in which terror, 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 sins of sin and death, which has so long oppressed the masses of the world.

"THY KINGDOM COME,"

IMMEDIATE FULFILLMENT OF
AN AGE-OLD PRAYER.

Few people realize with what intensity the words "Thy Kingdom Come" have been beseeched by Christians who know that in that

THE WORLD'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

Time of Divine Intervention at hand

What a world that is! Certainly it is very different from what it was. Indeed, if our grandfathers, and with some of us even, if our grandmothers, had been brought from the dead, they would probably at first think they had awakened on a different planet altogether. What wonderful changes have taken place! Our grandfathers could look back to the time when there were no railway trains, no telegraphs, nor the numberless inventions for motion and labor-saving devices which we have, let alone the daily new wonders of recent years. In our days, steamships, motor-cars, wireless, X-rays, etc. Little over 100 years ago the quickest way to travel was on horseback, and it is quite usual to go to cities as here by train, and by airplane 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. We need no wonder that for thousands of years the world could not without these inventions and devices move. It would appear that such knowledge, prevalent by the discovery of some great god, was probably lost. For instance, there was a wonderful civilization in Egypt. The Egyptians were wonderful architects in cathedrals, in obelisks, and pyramids in mounds.

THE BIBLE A SURE GUIDE

A Book that speaks with authority
at this day of uncertainty

It is not always realized that the past seventy years mean more to the world in its line of education, wealth, liberating, moral and economic, and religiously for human life, than did all the thousands of years which preceded them—many more years. The world has probably created a thousand times as much wealth in the past seventy-five years as during all the years of its long preceding. Yet these changes have come so gradually that few have noticed them.

Seventy-five years ago, almost a new era began. Its vast possibilities and possibilities were not covered in the minds of men. World communication by telegraph, telephone, or such, was unknown. It is commonly realized now that these things are so common compared with the discoveries upon the track of which mankind stood at the present time.

But its population at the close of Manasse have been brought into the service of man, the discovery of humanity has increased, and mankind, not only in respect to the Bible as the Bible Revolution, but in many instances to the very essence of an individual's career. The age which is the strongest evidence for belief has brought us age of material. Nevertheless, there is in the Bible itself abundant

SELECTION OF 12-PAGE PAMPHLETS 1940-50 PERIOD