

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
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- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham



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A Consideration of Citizenship

(The Pastor's Letter – October 1974)

My Dear Friends,

Our magazine goes out to our many readers living in different lands – most will class themselves citizens of the land in which they live or from which they came – but it surely becomes the Christian to remember that, first and foremost, his “citizenship is in heaven.” (Philippians chapter 3 verse 20)

One of the features of each and every one of us who profess the Name of Jesus in these days seems to be the absence of any real conception of the glories of heaven and how our lives should be governed by the realisation that “here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” The apostle Paul drew a vivid picture for the Philippian believers when he reminded them of this very fact from their own situation.

He has been saying some very hard things about those who were “the enemies of the cross of Christ,” and has been contrasting them with the faithful apostles whom he has been exhorting the church at Philippi to emulate. And one of the features of these “enemies of the cross” is that “they mind earthly things.” They are all taken up with the things of this life and they have no eye whatsoever for spiritual and heavenly business. But, says Paul in that twentieth verse that we quoted above, “Our citizenship (our conversation) is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

How this must have struck a familiar note in the hearts and minds of those believers who were also inhabitants of this city of Philippi, for, although situated in the region of Macedonia, Philippi was a “Roman” colony and the Philippian people, in general, gloried in the honour of Roman citizenship and all that it contained in those days of Rome's national grandeur. Although born in Philippi, they were, nevertheless, citizens of Rome. Their names appeared on the

Imperial register of that city, and they were governed under the laws and legislations of Rome, and enjoyed its privileges. Above all, to many citizens of Philippi, Rome was the place where their Lord and saviour dwelt – for so the Emperor of Rome was considered by many – and at a moment's notice he would muster his Imperial forces and dispatch them should any danger threaten the well-being of those under his care.

How vividly, then, must Paul's comparison have shone into the hearts and minds of the Philippian believers. Oh yes, they were citizens of the world, by nature; but, by grace, they had been “born again from above,” so that they were now “heavenly” citizens and their “citizenship” was in heaven. Were not their names registered “in glory” - in the Lamb's Book of Life? And was it not heaven's laws and legislations that truly governed and ruled their lives? Was the Emperor, indeed, a saviour to the worldly-minded man or woman in the streets of Philippi? But, was not their Jesus the Saviour of saviours and the King of all the kings of all the world, who would hear the cry of His people before they cried, and would answer from heaven His dwelling place, while they were yet speaking?

Heaven was the “capital” city of the Elect of God at Philippi, just as Rome was the capital to the other inhabitants. The church at Philippi was a “heavenly” colony, and what threw the believers into contrast with the unbelievers – the friends of Christ into contrast with “the enemies of the cross of Christ” - in this portion of Paul's letter, was the contrasting attitudes to heaven and earth. On the one hand, there were those who “minded earthly things;” on the other, those whose “citizenship” was “in heaven.”

How valid the lesson for us today, as in every day. Is it not true that, in so many ways, we have lost the light of heaven from our eye of faith? The “voice of our beloved” no longer effectively beckons our heart to “rise up ... and come away.” We know little of Bunyan's “Mr Weary-of-the-World”, for, of a truth, few of us are really and truly weary of the world. Would it not be the case that, if we knew more of our heavenly citizenship, we would less-often resort to the town of Carnal Policy for counsel and more to the enquiry rooms of

Glory? Perhaps, it's because we know so little of the Christian warfare and struggle in our day that we have apparently so little desire for “that rest that yet remaineth unto the people of God.” Perhaps, even, we don't really have a heart-longing to visit the place of our true nationality – even to see “The King there in His beauty.”

Let us learn to pray: “Lord, in Thy mercy, Thou hast caused us to be made citizens of eternity; forbid that we should rest contented under any other flag or rule, but Thine alone.”

When Robert Leighton was accused of not “speaking to the times;” that is, not always preaching about what was going on in the country; his reply silenced his accusers: “Gentlemen,” he said, “When so many are speaking 'to the times', permit one poor brother to speak for eternity.” And why not? We are not “nationals” of any nation on this earth, but nationals and citizens of heaven.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 65)



Subject and Divisions. David sings of the glory of God in His Church; and in the fields of nature; here is a song both of grace and providence. It may be that he intended to commemorate a remarkable harvest, or to compose a harvest hymn for all ages. We shall view in the first four verses the way of approach to God, then from verses 5 to 8 we shall see the Lord in answer to prayer performing wonders for which He is praised, and then from verses 9 to 13, we shall sing the special harvest-song.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 1. “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion ...” The worshippers of old stood outside the sanctuary in silence while the High Priest entered into the Holiest with the blood of atonement. Once he emerged, then the people might have cause to praise their God, because He had granted pardon for their sins. When the church of Christ takes time to reflect and “wait” upon that blessed assurance of sins forgiven through the merits of Christ, then, how she praises her God aright in such circumstances. “Praise waits” for Him in His spiritual Sion, and unto Him the vow is performed. God has ordained and set His church upon the earth for no greater reason than this, that out of Sion His praise should be heard and observed.

Verse 2. “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.” No doubt the prayers which the faithful put up to heaven from under their own roofs are very acceptable to God; but if a saint's single voice in prayer be so sweet to His ear, how much more the church “choir”- His saints' prayers in consort together. A father is glad to see any one of his children, and makes him welcome when he visits him, but much more when they come together; the greatest feast is when they all meet at his house. The public praises of the church are the emblem of heaven itself, where all the angels and saints make but one consort. There is a wonderful prevalency in the joint prayers of God's people. When Peter was in prison, the church meets and prays him out of his enemies' hands. There is a special promise to public prayer: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

William Gurnall

Verse 3. “Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.” The holy prophets and penmen of scripture, have no grounds of hope for pardon of sin apart from those which are common to the meanest of God's people. David, in his confession, comes in by himself alone, aggravating his own sins most - “Iniquities prevail against *me*,” he says; but, in hope of pardon, he joins with the rest of God's people, saying, “As for *our* transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.”

David Dickson

Verse 4. “**Blessed is the man *whom thou choosest ...*” The benedictions of the psalter advance in spirituality and indicate a growth. The first one blessed the godly reader of the Word. Psalm 1 verse 1. The second described the pardoned child. Psalm 32 verse 1. The third pronounced a blessing upon faith. Psalm 34 verse 8. The fourth commended the active and generous believer, abundant in deeds of charity. Psalm 41 verse 1. And this last, mounting to the fountain head of all benedictions, blesses the elect of God: “Blessed is the man who thou choosest.”**

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 8. “**... thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.**” Some understand it of the morning and evening sacrifice, which good people greatly rejoiced in, and in which God was constantly honoured. Thou makest them “to sing”, so the word is; for every morning and every evening songs of praise were sung by the Levites; it was that which the duty of every day required. And we are to look upon our daily worship alone, and with our families, to be both the most needful of our daily business, and the most delightful of our daily comforts. And if in these we keep up our communion with God, the outgoings both of the morning and of the evening are thereby made truly to rejoice.

Matthew Henry

Verses 9 to 13. “**Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it ...**” Our “harvest-homes” are times of rejoicing, but I would that our tillers and reapers of the soil would as piously refer all to God as the psalmist did. “***Thou*** waterest the earth, ***thou*** greatly enrichest it, ***thou*** preparest the corn, ***thou*** waterest the ridges, ***thou*** settlest the furrows, ***thou*** makest it soft with showers, ***thou*** blessest the springing thereof, ***thou*** crownest the year with thy goodness.” Not one word of man, or man's skill, or of man's labour; not one thought of self. How different from him whose grounds brought forth abundantly, and whose only thought was, “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”

Barton Bouchier

“Little Thomas Bilney”

Martyr-
Retractor-
Denier-
Believer-



The apostle Peter was not alone in his denying of Christ, and afterwards bitterly and sincerely repenting of his great wickedness, and going on to suffer all sorts of persecution, almost, for the sake of Christ.

In the records of the martyrs similar instances frequently occur. There is the case of Thomas Bilney, for example - “Little Bilney,” As Hugh Latimer affectionately calls him. He suffered in the days of Bloody Mary with many others of Christ's faithful witnesses who were then thinned out. He was an ardent spirit, with a heart overflowing with love to Christ, and was, through the help of God to win many immortal souls to the Saviour. It was a dangerous work to preach the gospel in those days of Rome's triumph; and still more dangerous at Cambridge University, one of the strongholds of Rome's camp, where almost all were sworn soldiers of the spirit of Antichrist, with their eyes and ears eagerly set against the truth, from whatsoever quarter it might come.

Bilney was a Cambridge student, and his zeal found out many ways to publish the gospel amongst his fellow-collegians, the sick, and those in the prisons of that town. It was through his instrumentality that Latimer – the stoutest papist among them all – was brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. “Here I have chosen,” says Latimer in his first sermon on the Lord's Prayer, “to tell you a story that happened at Cambridge. Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney, who suffered death for God's Word's sake, the same Bilney was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge; for I may thank him, next to God, for that knowledge that I have in the Word of God. For I was as obstinate a papist as any was in England; insomuch, that when I should be made Bachelor of Divinity, my whole oration was

against Philip Melanchthon (reformer), and against his opinions. Bilney heard me at that time, and perceived I was zealous without knowledge; and he came to afterwards in my study, and desired me for God's sake to hear his confession. I did so; and to say the truth, by his confession I learned more than ever I had done in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the Word of God, and forsook the school doctors and such fooleries.”

Needless to say, the heads of the college houses, and other rulers of the University, could not remain long blind to what was passing so near to them. Bilney's “heretical and destructive doctrines,” as they called them, were soon picked out and the alarm raised. “We are here to guard the purity of the faith,” they announced, “and such weeds must be rooted out.” They accordingly complained to Cardinal Wolsey, who was not slow in appointing a tribunal for the trial of the man who disturbed the peace. “This,” says one of the biographers of Latimer, “was in 1527, and Tunstall, Bishop of London, a man of mild character, laboured so effectually with Bilney, as to prevail upon him to make a public abjuration of his views.”

Bilney, like Peter, had denied his Lord. Through the fear of martyrdom, through the persuasions of Tunstall, and whatsoever else, he had made public recantation and was sent down again to his college at Cambridge to live quietly and enjoy whatever peace he could.

We must follow him there, and watch him, and see if he had peace. He was thoroughly persuaded of two things – of justification by faith alone, and of the antichristianism of the doctrines of Rome. Not only was he persuaded intellectually, but he was a true and sincere believer in Christ. What torments had he prepared for himself! Worse than the gibbet, the prison, or the stake. He had denied his Lord – sold Him – put Him to an open shame. He cannot rest. It is as if he had the worm of hell in his bosom. Day or night no rest for him. Hugh Latimer again takes up his case in a sermon before King Edward 6th on the evils of turning from God: - “I knew a man myself,” he says, “Bilney, little Bilney, that blessed martyr of God, when he had borne his faggot*, and was come again to Cambridge, had such conflicts within himself, beholding this image of death, that his friends were afraid to

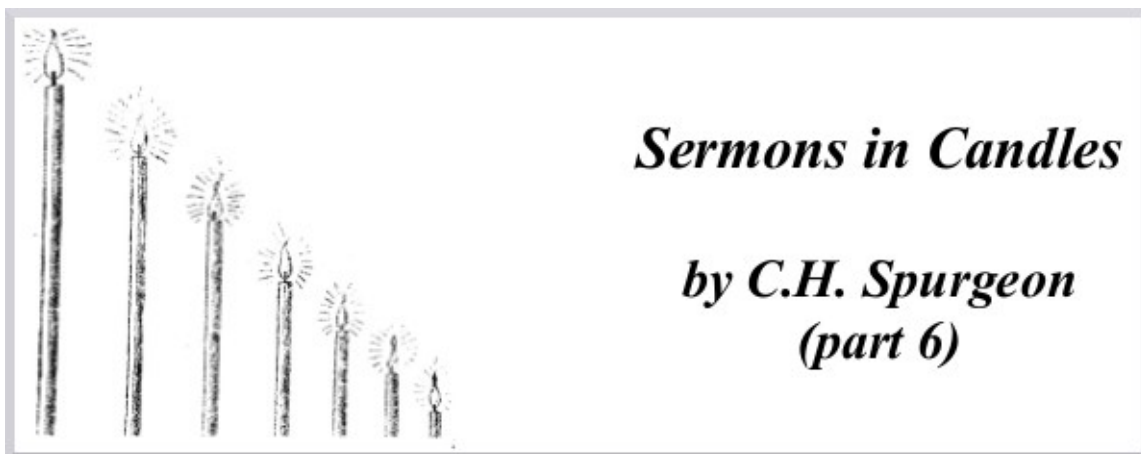
let him be alone. They were fain to be with him night and day, and comforted him as they could; but no comforts would serve. As for the comfortable places of Scripture, to bring these unto him, was as though a man would run him through the heart with a sword.”

Out of this fearful state Bilney was at length delivered. He was again restored to peace and comfort. The countenance of his dear Redeemer shone in upon his soul and filled it with abundant joy. He immediately took his resolution. He found that it would not do for him to remain silent – he must be up and about his Master's work. In the hall of Trinity College, he one evening took his farewell of his friends, never again to return to their society, (although, in the dealings of providence Latimer and him were to renew their fellowship behind prison bars). From Cambridge, he hastened into Norfolk, his native county, and preached the gospel, first in private houses, and then, openly in the fields. He was not long engaged in this work until he was apprehended, and put on trial. During his imprisonment he corresponded with Latimer; the letters that passed between them on this occasion show something of the resolute spirit that now upheld the early reformers. On one occasion Bilney wrote to Latimer, consulting him as to the defence that he should make before his accusers. “Better a few things well pondered,” replied Latimer, “than to trouble the memory with too much ... I intend not to contend much with them in words, after a reasonable account of my faith given; for it shall be but in vain. They will say as their fathers did, when they have not more to say, 'We have a law, and by our law he ought to die.'”

So it proved to be; Bilney was condemned. But during the time that lay between his condemnation to the stake and his actual execution many of the Lord's saints resorted to him. These were times of mutual blessing, both for him and for those who visited him in the prison. He never ceased to comfort, exhort, and encourage the remaining believers as he opened up the Word of God in their hearing. He was to be burnt in “The Lollards' Pit” - a saucer-like valley surrounded by sloping hills. The choice of this place was so that many could watch his death and be deterred from the heresy that he was sentenced for. But, the opposite proved to be the case, for in his dying hour, little

Thomas Bilney continued to exert a testimony to the glory of the gospel of free redeeming grace to sinners. As he was chained to the stake, his friend, Dr. Warner, came to bid him farewell with tears in his eyes. Bilney smiled gently, and said, “Feed your flock, keep your flock, that when the Lord cometh, He may find you so doing; and farewell, good master doctor, and pray for me.” Just prior to this, he had expressed his state of heart and mind that was to remain with him until the flames enveloped him and raised him to his everlasting rest with his Saviour: “When the mariner is tossed upon the troubled sea,” he had said, “he beareth his trials better, in hope that he shall yet reach his harbour.” The little martyr had, indeed, been blown from his course for a little time, but the irresistible pull of the compass of a Saviour's love could only ultimately point to his being faithful even unto death, and now he bore the fires for the sake of a good conscience. So ended the earthly life of “Bilney – Little Bilney, that blessed martyr of God ...” (Adapted)

*“Bearing the faggot” involved carrying the wood of the martyr fire in public to show that the “heretic” had recanted to escape death.



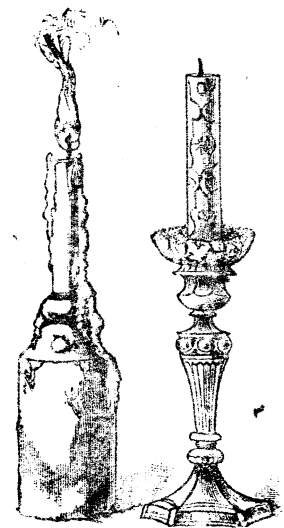
I have here put seven candles together to set forth the seven ages of man. This first candle, long and slender is the child, which, if spared, has quite a length of light and life before it. When newly lighted the flame is easily blown out, but there are large possibilities of continuance. So also at twenty – the second candle – we anticipate long years of life, and yet it may end in one short hour. The other candles show us thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years of age. Our

figure goes no further, “For if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow.” Look at this shining emblem, and let each one of us judge his own position as to what remains of his life. Mark how little is left to some of you! Pray God that you may use all that remains to the praise of God. I enquired about a sick friend the other day, and the answer I received was a shake of the head, and the remark, “I am sorry to say he can't last much longer. It is only a matter of time: his life hangs on a thread.” I answered, “And that is exactly the case with me.” Is it not true to every one of us that we are mortal? And that our departure is only a matter of time? Our life is ended as easily as a candle blown out.



Here is a facsimile of Quarles' quaint woodcut whereby he tried to set forth the eagerness of Death to quench the light of life, and the way in which Time, *for a season*, holds back the hand of the last enemy. Study it well.

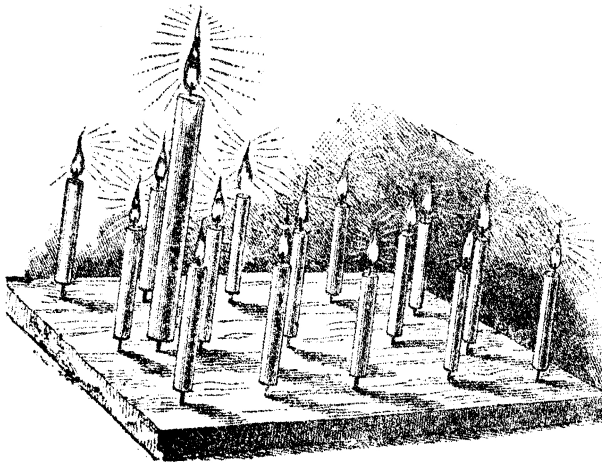
When you go to do a bit of woodworking in the shed and need a light, you are sometimes on the lookout for the means of setting up your bit of candle in a handy way. ***Here is the great invention in which your researches usually end.*** You see I have stuck a candle into a ginger-beer bottle, and the light which comes from it is quite as clear as if I had a plated candlestick. If you have no fitted candlestick, a ginger-beer bottle does mightily well. And how often our lord has used men of scanty education, or none at all! How useful he has made the things which are despised.



And yet, at the same time, if it were left to me to make my choice as to how I would have my candle set up, I should not object to having it in a more presentable stand. Who would object to be rid of the guttering and the hot dripping tallow, and to handle a concern that would not dirty his hands? A thing of beauty and of brightness is a joy for ever. And grace shines none the less because the person and

his speech are graceful. As there is no sin that I know of, in grammatical language and good taste, I hope we shall never set a fictitious value upon coarseness, nor go out of our way to marry godliness with slang. Our Lord and his cause should be served with our best. Even our best is not of itself worthy of his glory; but at least let us not give to him the offal and refuse of human speech. Young man, blaze away; but you need not be coarse. Bring us a light, but use a decent candlestick if you can.

Some excellent persons have very little talent indeed. It is not merely that there is a want of education, but there is a want of capacity. Now, when that happens to be the case, my next illustration may be a serviceable hint.



On this board we have fixed a number of very small candles, and, as they are all well alight, the result is by no means unsatisfactory. As a company of illuminators they make a pleasant and notable shine, although individually would give only a little light. So let us observe how a number of good little people

– well-lighted by grace – can by combination really give out a great deal more illumination than far greater persons who shine alone. But you must each one of you shine your quota, and no one must try to save his candle and take things easy. All at it, and always at it, and you will not labour in vain. What a glory there will be in the one Church when all her members shine, and all are one! May such a day come quickly.

(End of this present series)

Montgomery and Cowper

Although “protestantism”, as such, doesn't have any “official shrines,” there does seem to be a tendency in most of our hearts to be affected to some extent by being in a place associated with some of the Lord's servants of the past. Two travellers of the last century tell the story of

being on a visit to the village of Olney, so closely linked with John Newton and William Cowper, the famous hymn-writer. On their arrival in the area, they heard that another outstanding poet of the church of their own day was also in Olney. It was James Montgomery, and the two men decided to seek out the poet and introduce themselves to him.

However, although they searched the area quite thoroughly they could not find his whereabouts, until an old man directed to a little building know as “Squire Cowper's School.” It was a building that Cowper had lived in for some years, and where he had written one of his greatest hymns - “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” Ever since Cowper's death, it had been used as a schoolroom, and when finally the two travellers tracked down James Montgomery, they found him, surrounded by the children of the school as he taught them the sense and the meaning of those weighty words that had first been committed to paper in that very building.

Able and all as Montgomery was to be hailed as one of the Church’s greatest poets, he was not beyond being affected by those surroundings where that sweet singer of Israel had resigned himself to the mysterious providence of His God.



Dear Boys and Girls,

In the city of Derby their lived a blind girl by the name of Joan Waste. Joan and her family were very poor. In order to make some money to buy food and clothes she knitted strong woollen socks which she sold on the Market days.

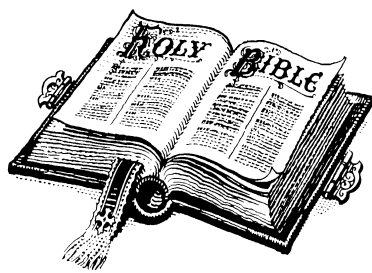
Joan's mother was dead, and she lived with her father who was a rope-maker. Although she could not see, she still managed to

help her daddy with his work but when he died, also, she went to live with her brother.

Joan began to go to church and there, she heard the Bible, God's own Word, being read. How thrilled she was with all she heard and she began to look forward all week to Sunday when she would once more hear about the most wonderful person who had now come into her life, Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As Joan sat hour after hour knitting her never-ending pile of socks the needles seemed to be “click-clacking” even faster than usual, for she had begun to think of a very exciting plan. “Why should I not buy a copy of the Good News Book myself?” she thought; “I can't read it for myself, but surely I could find someone who could read it for me, and as they read it, they too will come to know about the Lord Jesus.” And so, each week, more and more pairs of socks were taken to the Market and sold, and each week, some of the money was taken and was put aside in a little box.

At last, the day came when Joan had enough to buy her very own Bible. How happy she was as she carried her precious book under her arm; but what next? She had her Bible, but who was going to read it for her? “The best man of all to read it to me,” thought Joan, “would be Master John Pemerton, the parish clerk, but poor Mr. Pemerton is in jail for not paying his debts.” However, she was not



discouraged, because her brother told her that even people in jail could still have visitors to come and see them, and so, on two days of every week, two strange visitors would visit Master Pemerton in jail. One of the visitors was the poor blind girl, Joan Waste, and the other was some other girl or boy who could be persuaded to lead her along the dark narrow streets to the jail. In my next letter I'll tell you what happened in the jail.

Love,
Mrs Seaton