

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Secret and Silent Labour in the Gospel

The Pastor's Letter (September 1971)

My Dear Friends,

How good a thing it is when we can imitate the very kingdom of heaven itself and go about our work **secretly** and **silently** (like the leaven that was hid in the three measures of meal) to the glory of God. It was the sin of the men and women of Babel, you may remember, that they desired to “make a name for themselves”. And, in a different sense, that seems to be a pre-occupation with the world yet. But, the believer in Christ should not be, concerned with getting a name on earth, but with getting a name in heaven – aye, with remembering that he already has a name in heaven! How often the apostle Paul points us to this “blessed anonymity” that each of us should ever be seeking after. “Those women which laboured with me in the gospel,” he writes on one occasion; “no names, no pack drill,” as we would say today. “And other of my fellow-labourers”, he writes again “whose names are in the Book of Life”. Here is the all-important thing: that we work out of gratitude as those who already received a name in their Saviour; and that we labour as secretly and silently as possible lest any of the glory be ascribed to us and not to the One who has established our names in the heavens. Our Lord spoke of those who performed their religious deeds in the open for all to see, and said of them: “They have their reward”. The name that they received for their labours of piety was the only reward that they would receive, for it was the only reward that they sought. “**But ye,**” said the Lord, as He pointed to His own, “when ye do your works, do them in secret; and your Father which seeth in secret, will reward you openly.”

What a blessed principle of Divine dealing with us that is. What an encouragement to labour on, even though misunderstood at times, and unheralded for the work that is being done where no eye, save the eye of the Lord, can see. Mordecai's good deed was soon forgotten of men – if many had even heard of it, in the first place; but it had been registered in “the book of the records of the chronicles” of the king, and Mordecai received the reward of his “secret service” at the Lord's appointed time.

Sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

What was the name of that wee boy,
Who gave himself to Christ's employ,
And offered up the fish and bread,
With which the multitude was fed?

And who that noble unknown one,
Who bowed the neck to God's own Son,
And gave his beasts as offerings,
To bear the glorious King of Kings?

And yet again, what was the name,
Of he who lives in gospel fame,
The one who gave that upper room,
Where Christ foretold His awful doom?

And leaping forward through the years,
We hear the words, "Why have ye fears?"
The words that won the great John Owen,
Yet he who preached them's still unknown!

And see those wives of Bedford town,
They speak of God 'til sun's gone down,
But what their names we've never learned,
Yet through them Bunyan's heart was turned.

And with abundant names we're armed,
When Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed",
There's Luther, Romans, Aldersgate,
But he who spoke we can't relate.

And who that bold unlettered one,
Who cried, "Look unto God's own Son,"
When Spurgeon "Looked" and saw the Lord?
Search hist'rys page, there's not a word.

Unknown, unheralded, unsung,
Yet in the ladder, placed a rung,
Of God's Elect, as they were moved,
And silently, their service proved.



Men of the Awakening

Rowland Hill

Beneath the flowers of Bunhill Fields there lie interred the mortal remains of one, Lady Ann Erskine. Bunhill Fields is, of course, a graveyard. It is a graveyard where a whole host of God's most eminent saints lie buried awaiting the great resurrection morning when the dead in Christ shall rise. And if Lady Ann Erskine has a part in that glorious resurrection, then she has it because the Lord in His mercy sent forth the power of His gospel into her heart, and sent it forth under the human instrumentality of the subject of this edition's "Men of the Awakening", Rowland Hill of Surrey Chapel.

The scene is Moorfields Common where our man of the Awakening is preaching to a vast company of men and women. As he preaches, the gaudy carriage of Lady Ann Erskine approaches and the stylish Lady signals the coach and company to a halt. Every eye is drawn away from the preacher and on to the new arrival. But the open-air preacher seizes on the situation to apply the truths of the Law and the Gospel to this aristocratic heart. "Let us conduct an auction," he declares, turning his attention to the party concerned; "The article offered is the soul of Lady Ann Erskine, and there are three bidders! The world offers riches, honours and pleasures; the devil offers all the kingdoms of this earth and the glory of them; the Lord Jesus Christ offers grace here and glory hereafter. Who shall have the soul of Lady Ann Erskine?" The words, we are told, make a deep impression upon this noble-lady's heart, and by them she is, first of all, brought under a deep conviction of her sinfulness before the Lord, and later, into the liberty of the gospel of God's redeeming grace to sinners which places her flesh and bones among the eminent of Bunhill Fields, and her soul among the saints in glory.

Rowland Hill was "the only one of his mother" as far as preaching was concerned, as this incident should undoubtedly show, and we have the

feeling that when “dear old Rowley” was made a preacher the mould that fashioned him was set aside and never ever used again. As the spiritual child of old John Berridge, who we looked at in the last edition of the Wicket Gate, it is, perhaps not surprising that he should develop a style of preaching that was the very essence of uniqueness and yet, of great usefulness.

Born in the year 1744, he was “born again” eighteen years later and continued in the work of the Lord until he went down to his grave as “a shock of corn fully ripe” in the ninetieth year of his age. Like most of the men of the evangelical awakening that was to lift the church of Christ out of its slumber and indefinite belief, Rowland Hill – right from the very start almost – knew the sharp end of religious oppositions and ecclesiastical censure. After his ministerial studies he was refused ordination by no less than six different Bishops for what was termed “perpetual irregularity.” (How many scandals have been perpetrated under such veiled terms as those?) Rowland Hill needed no man’s hand to “ordain” him, however, and in **true** apostolic succession he followed his spiritual fathers in the faith out into the highways and byeways. “Dear young honest friend,” wrote the great George Whitefield to him as he set his plough to work in the open fields for the glory of the Lord. “Dear Professor,” he addressed him on another occasion when he had heard of the Bishops’ actions towards him – “Dear Professor, I wish you joy in the late high dignity conferred upon you. As one who has been admitted to the Degree of Doctor for nearly thirty years,” he went on, “I assure you that I like my **field** preferment very well.”

But, it wasn’t only in the fields that Rowland Hill’s voice was going to be heard and, under the Lord, there was erected for him the building with which his name is most readily associated, the Surrey Chapel in the East end of London. It was often referred to as “The Round House” on account of its shape – a shape, it is said, that was suggested by Rowland Hill himself “so that the devil might not have a corner in which to hide.” According to all accounts, Rowland Hill was going to need every weapon he could find against the evil one in that particular place at that particular time. Old John Berridge gives us a hint of this in a letter which he wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon concerning his young son in the faith. “I am persuaded that your ladyship will rejoice,” he wrote, “that dear Rowley is going, with the Lord’s help, to erect a standard for the gospel in the very middle of the devil’s territories in London. What a bellowing and a

clamour the old enemy will make at this fresh invasion of his kingdom!” And an “invasion” of the old enemy’s domain was, indeed, executed in that eastern sector of the great Metropolis.

But these were the days of “horseback evangelism,” and although Rowland Hill’s pulpit was at Surrey Chapel he, nevertheless, speaks volumes in the title which he smilingly adorned himself with: - “Rector of Surrey Chapel, Vicar of Wooton-under-edge, and curate of all the fields and lanes throughout England and Wales.”

The value of his work in this “extended” parish eternity itself will alone reveal. “Sir,” said two old men to him, when he himself had passed his threescore years and ten, “Do you remember preaching on this spot fifty years ago?” He remembered! “Well sir,” they went on, “We came with our pockets loaded with stones to throw at you; but as you engaged in prayer, and then, read your text, and preached your sermon, we put our hands into our pockets and dropped the stones on the ground one after the other, **for God had taken the stones out of our hearts.**”

The preaching that took the stones out of men’s hearts, as the two old aged saints put it, although “unique” was, still withall, of the very essence of the evangelical awakening – Rowland Hill could see no other. He described those ministers who confessed to know the whole counsel of God but who held back in certain of the doctrines of grace, as “donkies munching thistles – they do it very cautiously.” He himself knew nothing of “cautious” preaching. He spoke of the gospel as “a good milch cow.” “I first give a pull at justification,” he said, “then a plug at adoption, and afterwards, a bit at sanctification; and so, in one way and another I fill my pail with the good gospel milk.” He was inclined to “roam” occasionally in his preaching. “Dear Mr Hill,” said a lady to him after one such rambling address, “you surely took us from Dan to Beersheba tonight” “Never mind,” he said, “it is all holy ground.”

Like all of that generation of preaching giants, Rowland Hill was born to proclaim the gospel. “I would rather be shut up in my coffin than shut out of my pulpit,” he said, and right to the end, he preached. It’s told of him that on almost the last occasion that he did declare the unsearchable riches of Christ, he moved along the aisle of the church, when the crowds had all gone home and he was left alone with the caretaker of the building, and as he slowly left the building he was heard to recite to himself:

“And when I’m to die, receive me, I’ll cry,
For Jesus hath loved me, I cannot tell why;
But this do I find, we two are so joined,
He’ll not be in glory **and leave me behind.**”

In a choice little volume entitled “Eccentric Preachers”, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who also laboured in the East of London a little more than a decade after Rowland Hill tells of what it was like there to meet with any of the old members of the Surrey Chapel: “It will do your heart good to see how their eyes sparkle as they recall the days of their youth when Rowland Hill – dear old Rowland Hill as they like to call him – was in his glory.”

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

Once upon a time five little boys went to Sunday School. They were quite friendly little boys and quite well behaved. They liked the hymns and choruses, and the stories they were told. Then came the time when they were called to put their pennies into the Missionary Box.

The first little boy had plenty of pennies in his pocket. He picked one out, laughing as he did so. He had no thought in his heart about Jesus, or the missionaries, or the poor people who had never heard of Jesus. Another boy then came up and he too put a penny in the box. As he did so, he looked round at all the other boys and girls, with such a proud look on his face, as though he had done some great thing. A third boy gave a penny, and as he did so, he muttered to himself: “I suppose I must as all the others are putting in their pennies”. The fourth boy dropped his penny in the box, saying: “I’m so sorry for the poor people in other lands who have no food or clothes as I have”. This little boy was full of pity for those people who were not as well off as he was. Then came the fifth little boy, and, as he gave his penny, he said: “Dear Jesus, take my penny and use it

to send somebody to tell these poor people in other lands who have never heard of you that you love them and want to be their Saviour”.

Now, which little boy do you think pleased Jesus most with his offering? I think it would be the fifth little boy! Don't you? I hope, boys and girls, as you put your pennies into the Sunday School box you will pray, and think how some missionary might use them in some way to tell other boys and girls about Jesus and His love for them too. Of course you will never do this until you know the love of Jesus in your own heart. You see, the fourth little boy was very kind, and what he did in thinking about those not so well off as himself was very good. But, it was only the last little boy – the fifth little boy – that really pleased Jesus, because he was thinking about others coming to know the Lord Jesus as their own Saviour. This is what Jesus really wants us all to do. He wants us to come to know Him ourselves as our own Saviour; and then He wants us to tell others about Him so that He may become their Saviour as well. Try and remember this, as this is the most important thing in the world.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.



Gleanings In the Psalms

(Psalm 37 concluded)

Verses 23 and 24 “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.” There is no more comforting truth than the doctrine that the Lord leads His people “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” When a man, or a woman, or a young person is brought to a saving knowledge of Christ’s redeeming love on the Cross they need have no hesitation in looking over their past life and believing with all their heart that the “steps” that have led them thus far have all been “ordered by the Lord.” It was what the old preachers called “Prevenient Grace;” that is, “going-before” grace. The grace that “went before” the day of our salvation and led us under the sound of the

truth that saved our souls. But having led us **into** the way of righteousness by His Prevenient Grace, and having saved our souls through His Redeeming Grace, the Lord “orders our steps” and keeps us from falling through His Restraining Grace – the grace that keeps our feet from slipping. “Aha,” say some, “but the Lord’s people **do** sometimes slip in this life and where is your Restraining Grace then?” The answer is plain. It has been removed so that the Lord might manifest His mercy to the sons of the Covenant in granting them His matchless Restoring Grace: “Though he fall,” says David, “he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.”

Verse 25 “**I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.**” This does not apply to an occasional seeking relief in time of want (for David himself desired bread from Abimelech, and he and his soldiers food from Nabal,) but it speaks of continual begging from door to door. Nor does it mean that the righteous and his seed may not be brought to a sad degree of misery. But so rarely does such a thing happen that David has never seen it in his life on earth.

Arthur Jackson

Verse 27 “**Depart from evil ...**” As Lot left Sodom without casting a look behind, so must we leave sin. No truce or parley is to be held with sin. We must turn away from it without hesitation and set ourselves practically to work in the opposite direction. It is our solemn conviction that where there can be no real spiritual communion there should be no pretences of fellowship. Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin. Those who know and love the truth of God cannot have fellowship with what is diametrically opposed thereto, and there is no reason why they should pretend that they have such fellowship.

F. H. Spurgeon

Verse 34 “**Wait on the Lord, and keep his way ...**” “**Wait ... Keep.**” While we are waiting let us take heed of wavering. Go not one step out of God’s way, even though a lion be in that way. Keep to God’s highway, the good old way, the way which is paved with holiness. Avoid crooked paths ... a man may as well expect to find heaven in hell, as in a sinful way.

Thomas Watson

Verse 35 “**I have seen the wicked ... spreading himself like a green bay tree.**” A tree in its native soil, vigorous, and luxuriant, that had never been transplanted. A striking figure of the ungodly man in the world, firmly rooted in earthly things – his native soil. Grown proud and wanton in his prosperity.

William Wilson

Verse 37 “**Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.**” Mark him in the setting out; he hath many oppositions. Mark him in the journey; he is full of tribulations. But mark the conclusion, and the end of that man is peace.

Thomas Adams

Verse 37 “**... the end of that man is peace.**” Balaam’s wish – Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be as his – is vain and fruitless. If you would die well you must have a mind to live well.

John Kitchin

Verse 39 “**But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord ...**” An echo of Jonah’s famous cry from the belly of the whale – “Salvation is of the Lord.” “And when Jonah cried ‘Salvation is of the Lord’ the old whale vomited him up on the shore; Couldn’t stomach a Calvinist!”

Henry Mahan

A Miscellany for Consideration

Dead: As an Indian evangelist was preaching, he was interrupted by a man in the crowd. “You keep talking about ‘the burden of sin,’” said the man; “I don’t feel any burden. What weight is it? Eighty pounds? Ten pounds?” The preacher answered, “Tell me,” he said, “if you laid a four hundred pound weight on a corpse would it feel the load?” “Of course not,” scoffed the heckler, “a corpse is dead.” “That spirit is also dead,” said the preacher, “that feels no load and burden of sin.”

Free Pardon: “Reader, never presume to balance accounts with Moses, without taking an imputed righteousness, and an all-sufficient atonement,

in the hand of faith. If thou dost, thou wilt get thy feet in the stocks, and there thou wilt lie until thou lookest to that great Ransom which alone can deliver thee.” (William Huntington).

Free Will: “In its best estate, free will was but a weather-cock which turned at the breath of a serpent’s tongue. It made a bankrupt of our father Adam; it pulled down the house and sold the land, and sent all the children to beg their bread.” (Samuel Rutherford)

A New Creature: Just before his death, John Newton’s eyesight began to fail him so that he could no longer read and enjoy the pleasures of the printed page. If God’s Word was no longer clear before his eyes, however, it was still abundantly clear to the heart. Being told on one occasion at the breakfast table that the text for the day was taken from Paul – “By the grace of God I am what I am,” he made the following remarks upon the words. “I am not what I **ought** to be,” he said, “Ah, how imperfect and deficient. I am not what I **wish** to be,” he went on, “I abhor what is evil, and would cleave to what is good. I am not what I **hope** to be, but I can truly say, I am not what I **used** to be – a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am.’”

The Vicar of Bray: In Berkshire was a papist under Henry V111, a protestant under Edward V1, a papist again under Queen Mary, and a protestant again in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. He was accused of bringing scandal upon his office on account of his inconsistency, but maintained that he had not done so: “Although I have changed my religion,” he said, “I have still kept true to my first principle, which is to live and die Vicar of Bray.”

How the Scripture is often read: When a her small daughter was reading a book, her mother asked,

“What are you reading about dear?”

“I don’t know, Mummy,” replied the child.

“But you were reading aloud, my dear.”

“Yes, Mummy, *but I wasn’t listening.*”



“Sin is the Transgression of the Law”

(1st John chapter 3 verse 4)

I say, then, in the first place that a scriptural view of sin is one of the **best antidotes to that vague, dim, hazy kind of theology** which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity now-a-days which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably “something about Christ, and something about grace, and something about faith, and something about repentance, and something about holiness;” but it is not the real thing as it is in the Bible. Things are out of place and out of proportion. As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of “mingle-mangle,” and does no good. It neither exercises the influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death; and those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet.

Now I believe the likeliest way to cure and mend this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven, and live like pilgrims, until they really feel that they are in danger of hell.

Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin, in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in Universities. Let us not forget that “the law is good if we use it lawfully,” and that “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men’s attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus and stay with Jesus, and live for Jesus, unless they really know why they are to come, and what is their need. Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

J. C. Ryle.

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