

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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The Christian's Two Conflicts

(The Pastor's Letter November 1973)

Dear Friends,

There is hardly another thing that puts the reality of our spiritual life more to the test than the inner conflicts of temptation that arises within us due to the outward circumstances that so often surround us. Very often, we miss this point, and we are inclined to imagine that the outward evil of a situation in which we find ourselves is the great issue with which we must first contend, and yet, this is very often not the case at all. Invariably, the *real* issue of an outward trial, or circumstance, or situation is not the outward aspects of it, but the inward reactions that it is going to produce on our hearts and minds and, therefore, on our spiritual well-being and existence. Thus, we say, in fact, that the reality of our spiritual life is put to the test, not by the outward things that surround us, but by our inward reactions to these things.

This principle of Christian living is beautifully borne out in that famous eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We all readily recognise that chapter as setting forth the great conquests of faith wrought at the hands of those gallant Old Testament saints. And, indeed, it is all that. How it should ever inspire the Church of Christ to realise that she is “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” Those people, whom Calvin says, “were guided to heaven by only a shaft of light.” And as we read of them being “stoned”, and “sawn asunder”, and “slain with the sword”, and being “scourged” and “destitute” and “afflicted”, let it always be retained in our minds that they were flesh and blood just as we are. They were not “paper people” – the creation of some talented author; they were the people of God, under persecution for the sake of God.

Now, once we come to terms with that, then, we will begin to see this principle of Christian living which we have mentioned. For, you see, tucked away there in that 37th verse of that eleventh chapter of Hebrews is one very telling little phrase. Says Paul, “they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, *were tempted ...*”

That's the phrase; they "were tempted." In other words, the outward aspects of the stonings and everything else, were one thing, but there was something else, as well: there was an inner conflict and crisis of faith as they were forced to weigh up what was happening to them. And because they were flesh and blood, then, says the apostle rightly, "they were tempted." The stones beat down upon their bodies, the swords made great gashes in their flesh, but there was another conflict capable of inflicting deeper and more lasting wounds, and it was being fought out in their innermost souls and could only gain the victory through faith beholding "the evidence of things not seen."

When we read any of the accounts of those who "suffered" for the faith, let us never forget what their hearts and minds had to overcome. We get one of the most moving passages in all of the volumes of John Bunyan when he relates in his *Grace Abounding* how he was affected for his family, and especially his little blind daughter, as he was about to be led away to enter his imprisonment in the town of Bedford. He has many tokens of God's upholding, he tells us, but, nevertheless, he discovered himself to be, Oh, so human. "But notwithstanding these helps," he says, "I found myself a man, and compassed with infirmities; the parting with my wife and poor children, hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling the flesh from the bones ... because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with should I be taken from them – especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all besides; Oh! The thoughts of the hardship I thought my poor blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces."

Well might such a passage break any of our hearts. And yet, you see, the thing that we are to understand from it is this, that martyrdom doesn't lie - nor never lay – primarily in what is done to the body, but what is very often undergone in the soul. And that makes martyrdom ever contemporary for the Christian in whatever age he find himself – even in this century, and in this year. If any of the Lord's suffering people of the past had, first of all, yielded to the temptations fought out in their hearts and minds, they would never have undergone that suffering. And the reality of their spiritual life was put to the test, not by the outward circumstance – no matter how extreme that circumstance was – but by the inward reaction to it.

In this country today, we have no stakes, or bonds, or imprisonments for the sake of the gospel, but we do have temptations. We are faced with issues, and pressures, and accepted standards which cause a turmoil in our hearts and minds, and it is within our hearts and minds that we are still first called to be martyrs, just as surely as Bunyan, and all the saints, were. How tempting it is to comply with that which is most easy and pleasing to our self-life; and how many arguments our natures set before us to persuade us to do just that.

How often poor old Noah must have felt the pressure of public opinion as he laboured away on what had, no doubt, been branded as the production of a religious maniac. And how Abraham must have had to fight tooth and nail, both with the natural feelings of his own heart towards his son “his only son, Isaac,” and even in relation to those promises that God Himself had given him, for all those promises resided in the future life of Isaac, and, surely “that Eleazar” was not to be the heir of his house? Remember, too, the men who walked round Jericho until, at their shout, the walls fell down. How crucifying to human endeavour; never did they fight such a fight in their whole conquest of Canaan than they did with their own hearts and minds concerning the taking of that city. And what of the “martyrs” already mentioned? Those who were stoned, and sawn asunder etc.? How was their faith put to the test, and the reality of their religion proved? “They were tempted,” as well. The wondering look of a child, must surely have pierced much deeper into a father being dragged away for the sake of the gospel than any spear that would later on enter into his body. Or, the crushing aspect of seeing other professors of the faith of Christ drawing back from the stake, and taking the more “flowery path of ease.”

These and a dozen more temptations beset the road of all the saints in all the ages. And although the outward circumstances and the outward conclusions vary from age to age, nevertheless, the inward warfare is ever present, and there, - in the inward man – the true reality of our spiritual life is vindicated or questioned. The world taunts yet, in a dozen-and-one ways, just as it did in Noah’s day.

The promises of God are very often shrouded in God’s “mysterious ways”, just as surely as they were for Abraham when he led Isaac up that

mountainside. The means of spiritual conquest are still every bit as trying to the desire to resort to the “arm of flesh” as they were for Israel’s army camped just over from Jericho. Disappointments and disillusionments with others who profess to having “a like precious faith,” will always be as barbs to the conscience, and there will always be the nagging suspicion that if these careless, disinterested and workless souls are going to end up in heaven at last regardless of what they do, or fail to do, then, why on earth should I not opt for that “flowery path”, as well?

Ah, but then, we are on dangerous ground. Remember Christ’s words – and, no doubt, many tempted along that line have remembered them – “What is that to thee? Follow thou Me.” “The cause makes the martyr,” and although we can’t all be “stoned”, or “sown asunder”, for the “cause” we can all be *tempted* for the cause, and therein lies the battle for true spirituality. Circumstances may change; but no matter how they change, they will still react on the inner life of the child of God, and there the child of God is tempted, and so, must learn not to “yield” to temptation, regardless of the cost in taunts, trials, mortifyings, or disappointments. How Moses must have felt the “pull” of the prestige of being the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, or the “ease” which the treasures of Egypt would have afforded him, or the disillusionment of the squabbling and ineptitude of his own country-men. Yet, he came forth from the fray to the glory of God. *How?* Says Paul, “he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.” It is always faith alone that must interpret the seen into the unseen – the temporal into the eternal – the physical into the spiritual. *So that it is not really the outward circumstances that dominate our lives, but our inward assessments and reactions to those of circumstances.* So that we are enabled to say with Paul – “we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

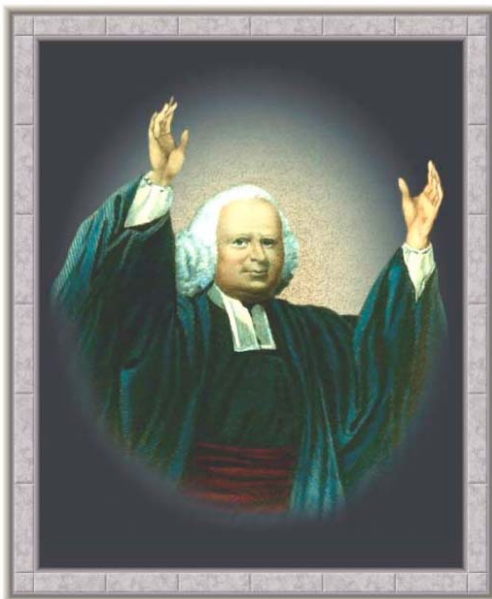
Before those old saints overcame the sword, or the stone, or the rack, or the stake, they, first of all, had to overcome the heart, and the mind, the emotions and the flesh, the thoughts and the feelings; they “were tempted.” And the Lord’s people are ever tempted, and will ever know the worlds temptation. But there is “a victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.” And “By faith, Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the martyrs, and the tempted, and the Lord’s people in every generation till Christ shall come, shall see God; for “the just shall live by faith.” Let our faith ever

interpret the circumstances, and forbid that our circumstances should misinterpret our faith.

The Lord Reigns,
Yours sincerely,
W.J. Seaton

“Faith is that grace against which the attacks of Satan are more directly and constantly directed than almost any other. Not ignorant of its spiritual nature and essential importance; and knowing the great glory its exercise brings to God the subtle and sleepless foe of the believer employs every art to mystify its simplicity, and neutralise its efforts.”

Octavius Winslow.



GEORGE WHITEFIELD (Part 3)

To understand aright the person of George Whitefield, and, indeed the source of much of the criticism levelled against him, it is necessary to take into account what the great evangelist of the 18th century really believed with regards to the gospel of God’s saving grace to sinners. It was, indeed, in Whitefield’s estimation, “the gospel of grace,” and to him, that meant that no thought of a contribution of man’s “work” could in anyway enter in. Like many of the Lord’s people, George Whitefield was an Arminian to begin with (believing in the free will of man in the things of salvation). But, it is after a second visit to America that he begins to lay aside these

views to lay firm hold on all the implications of the truth that “salvation is of the Lord.”

As the “Doctrines of Grace,” then began to appear more and more in his preaching and ministry, so the oppositions, too, increased. The great themes of his preaching were to become, Sin, Regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God, Justification by faith alone, Election and the Perseverance of the saints to glory. To these doctrines of God’s electing love to sinners Whitefield unashamedly traced all the zeal of his soul expended in the work of the gospel; “Would to God the doctrine of Election were considered more,” he said, “and people were more studious of the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. For my own part, I cannot see how true humbleness of mind can be attained without a knowledge of it; and though I will not say that everyone who denies election is a bad man, yet I will say that it is a very bad sign. Redemption is so ordered that no flesh should glory in the divine presence; and hence it is that the pride of man opposes this doctrine, because according to this doctrine, and no other, ‘he that glories must glory only in the Lord.’ It is the doctrine of election that most surely presses me to abound in good works. I am made willing to suffer all things for the elect’s sake. This makes me preach with comfort, because I know that salvation doth not depend on man’s free will, but the Lord makes them willing in the day of His power, and can use even me to bring some of His elect home, when and where He pleases.”

This assurance and knowledge, however, in no way led to any form of “fatalism” on the part of Whitefield – a charge very often thrown at those who hold such truths – and in his study and preaching he is “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.” It was said of him that he “ransacked creation for figures, time for facts, heaven for motives, hell for warnings, and eternity for arguments.” The manner of his preaching of the things discovered in the study before the Lord was also with the same earnest spirit and desire for the souls of men and the glory of God. Bishop Ryle tells us of one night of preaching which had begun with the clouds of heaviness hovering over both preacher and hearer – one old man in front of the platform had even fallen asleep. “Then,” we are told, “he suddenly broke forth in an altered tone: ‘If I had come to speak to you in my own name, you might well rest your elbows on your knees,’” he cried, “‘But I have not come to you in my own name. No! I have come to you in the

name of the Lord of hosts – (here he brought down his hand and foot with a force that made the building ring) – and I must and will be heard.’” Even the old man woke with a start; “Ay, ay!” cried Whitfield, fixing his eyes on him, “I have waked you up have I? I meant to do it. I am not come here to preach to stocks and stones ...”

The scope too of that preaching of the truth of the doctrines of grace must never be forgotten either: “George Whitefield,” we are told in one brief sketch of his life, “made the doctrine of the *new birth* his universal message because he found that it met a universal need ... Here he is seated with an Indian in a canoe on one of the great American rivers! He is visiting the various encampments of the Delawares. He loves to go from tribe to tribe, and from wigwam to wigwam, telling the red men, by the aid of an interpreter, that a man of any kind and any colour must be *born again* ... Here he is preaching to the black men of Bermudas! ‘Except,’ he cries, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ ... Here he is in Scotland! He is visiting Cambuslang; and there is no building large enough to accommodate any considerable fraction of the crowds that throng to hear him. He therefore preaches in the glen ... ‘He dwelt mostly on *regeneration*,’ the record tells us. And the result vindicated his choice of theme. On the last Sunday of his stay he preached to between thirty and forty thousand people ... Here he is in the Countess of Huntingdon’s drawing room! The sumptuous apartment is thronged by princes and peers, philosophers and poets, wits and statesmen. To this select and aristocratic assembly he twice or thrice every week delivers his message, ‘Ye must be born again!’”

Not only in his preaching, but even in the letters which he undertook to write, we find this great and essential doctrine of being born again by the Spirit of God, entering in somewhere or other before the close of the letters. We find him writing to the great American philosopher, Benjamin Franklin – “I find you grow more and more famous in the learned world. As you have made a pretty considerable progress in the mysteries of electricity, I would now humbly recommend to your diligent, unprejudiced pursuit and study, *the mystery of the new birth* ... One, at whose bar we are shortly to appear, hath solemnly declared that without it we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. You will excuse this freedom. I must have something of Christ in all my letters.”

As we have stated, the doctrine of the necessity of being born again, and of the “sovereign” nature of this work, were most strongly formulated in Whitefield’s mind following his second visit to America. But this wasn’t his first introduction to the truth and implications of the doctrine. Whitefield had begun a series of correspondence with the two Scottish seceders, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, and it was, in fact, on their invitation that he first visited Scotland. Unhappily, the association between Whitefield and the Erskines grew cold and diminished; this was largely due to the fact that the Erskines believed that Whitefield, on coming to Scotland, should refuse to preach in the National church, because, as they put it, Christ had departed from it. Whitefield’s reply is fairly typical of him; “Then,” he said, “we must go and preach Christ back again.” Even if “the pope himself would lend him his pulpit,” he declared, “he would gladly proclaim it in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Perhaps the Erskines erred in their behaviour on this occasion, but their actions are possibly best understood if we remember the great cost of their separation from the established church while others continued to live in comparative ease. Be that as it may, it was their influence under the Lord that helped to burn the glories of sovereign grace into the heart of the young George Whitefield, and two more noble saints seldom graced the scene of the Church of Christ in Scotland.



Ebenezer Erskine



Ralph Erskine

Next time, we will turn to look at some of the labours of Whitefield in our own land, and see the great and comforting truth that “to everything there is a season.” Whitefield, indeed, thrust in the sickle and reaped a harvest in Scotland, but there was a “Winter afore harvest,” and there was reaped that which had been first of all sown by faithful saints. An example of Ralph Erskine’s preaching, where he speaks of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in conveying grace to men and women, bears this out: He

pictures grace as “honey”, which, he says, we have “in the flower” in the Father – we cannot reach it; in Christ, we have the honey “in the comb,” but still unattainable for us; but, by the Holy Spirit we have “Honey in the mouth,” for He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us.

Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 57



Title. “... of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.” This is a song from the bowels of the earth and, like Jonah’s prayer from the bottom of the sea, it has a taste of the place. The poet is in the shadow of the cave at first, but he comes to the cavern’s mouth at last, and sings in the sweet fresh air, with his eye on the heavens, watching joyously the clouds floating thereon.

P. H. O.

Verse 1. “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me ...”

According to the weight of the burden that grieveth us, is the cry that comes from us. David, in the day of his calamities doubles his prayer for mercy: “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me.” His spirit being up in prayer, like a bell that rings out, he strikes on both sides – “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me.”

Joseph Caryl

Verse 1. “... until these calamities be overpast.” He compares his calamity and affliction to a storm that cometh and goeth; as it is not always fair weather for us in this life, so it is not always foul. Athanasius said of Julian who was furiously raging against the Lord’s Anointed, “He is a little cloud, he will soon pass away.” “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” If we put our trust in him, and cast all our care upon him, He will, in His good time, bring it to pass, that all our afflictions shall overpass. He will take them from us, or we

from them. And then we shall know assuredly that the troubles of this present life are not worthy of the glory which in the life to come shall be shown unto us.

John Boys

Verse 2. “I will cry unto God ... unto God that performeth all things for me.” As he says in the 138th psalm, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.” David’s whole trust was in the Lord who would bring all things relating to him to pass in His own good time. In this cave, he had Saul at his mercy, as he had him on another occasion, but he would not lift up his hand against the Lord’s anointed. If the throne of Israel was to be his, then it would be his through what the Lord would “perform” and “perfect” on his behalf. Blessed resignation to the will of God.

Verse 3. “... him that would swallow me up ...” If I were to take you to my house, and say that I had an exquisitely fat man, and wished you to join me in eating him, your indignation could be restrained by nothing. You would pronounce me to be crazy. Yet that is only feasting on the human body. But, many will sit down and take a man’s soul, and look for the tender loins, and invite their neighbours in to partake of the little titbits. They will take a mans honour and name, and broil them over the coals of their indignation, and fill the whole room with the aroma thereof, and give their neighbour a piece, and watch him, and wink as he tastes it. They are cannibals, eating men’s honour and name and rejoicing in it ...”

Henry Ward Beecher

Verse 4. “My soul is among lions ...” How did it come there? If it was for the Lord’s sake, then I may remember six things:

1. So was my Lord in the wilderness with the wild beasts.
2. The lions are chained.
3. Their howling is all they can do.
4. I shall come out of their den alive, unhurt and honoured.
5. The Lion of Judah is with me.
6. I shall soon be among the angels.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 7. “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed ...” It is implied that the “heart” is the main thing required in all acts of devotions; nothing is done to purpose in religion further than is done with the heart. The heart

must be “fixed;” fixed *for* the duty – fitted and put in a right frame to perform it. Fixed *in* the duty by a close application – attending on the Lord without distraction.

Matthew Henry

Verse 8. “Awake up my glory ... I myself will awake early.” I will sleep lightly, for I am in an enemy’s country; I will ask God to arouse me; I will set the alarm of watchfulness; I will hear the cock of providential warning; the light of the Sun shall arouse me; the activities of the church, the trumpet of my foes, and the bell of duty shall combine to awaken me.

Hits to the Village Preacher

Verse 9. “I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people ...” Gentiles shall hear my praise. Here is an instance of the way in which the truly devout evangelical spirit overleaps the boundaries which bigotry sets up. The ordinary Jew would never wish the Gentile dogs to hear Jehovah’s name, but this grace-taught Psalmist has a missionary spirit – “among the people.”

P. H. O.

The Scots Baptists

To the majority of people today, the Baptist witness in Scotland is represented by a type of Christianity that is indefinite in its doctrine, and man-centred in its presentation of the gospel. The following extract, taken from Rippon’s Register of Churches, 1795, shows that this was far from the position of the historic baptist tradition in our land.

“They believe,” records Rippon of the old Scots Baptists, “that the salvation of guilty, helpless sinners, is first and last of sovereign free grace, and not of him that willeth or runneth. That *Jesus* is the saviour of His people from their sins – *The Christ*, or anointed prophet, priest and king of His church – *The Son of God*, or the word made flesh, God

manifested in the flesh, the first-begotten of the dead, and constituted heir of all things. That by His life, death, resurrection and ascension into the heavenly, holy place, with His blood, He hath obtained eternal redemption for his people from the guilt, power and all the consequences of sin, and procured for them everlasting life with Himself from the dead. That men are justified freely by Divine grace, without works of any kind, but solely through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whenever they really believe, or credit the testimony of God concerning His Son; which belief is not of themselves, but the gift of God. That all who believe and are justified, have immediate peace with God in proportion to the degree of their faith; and joy in God through Jesus Christ, by whom they have now received the reconciliation.

That the belief of the truth will be shown by love to God who first loved us, and to those who are of the truth for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them; it will overcome the world, with all the allurements and tribulations thereof; and it will purify the heart, not only from the guilt of sin, but also from worldly lusts, such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, that is, sensuality, covetousness, and ambition. That in proportion as we hold fast the faith, and are influenced by it to love God and keep His commandments, who shall have an increasing evidence of our interest in Christ, additional to what we had at our first believing; therefore, we ought to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, and to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. Though they hold the doctrine of particular election, of God's unchangeable and everlasting love, and of the perseverance of the saints, yet they think it dangerous to comfort people by these considerations if they are evidently in a backsliding state.

In this case, they think the scripture motives to *fear* are most useful, and ought to have their full force, even the fear of falling away, and of coming short of the heavenly rest. They think it also unsafe in such a case, to draw comfort from the reflection of our having *once believed*, it being their opinion that we must be reduced to the mere mercy of God, through the atonement that gave us relief at first. These appear to be their views of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and of Christian experience.”

It should require little pointing out, in the light of that brief extract of baptist belief, that what pervades in Scotland today, although it may be

“mainstream” baptist belief and practice, is certainly not the *historic* baptist position, and is the child of a newer age and era.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

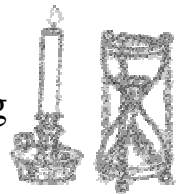
A Letter From Mrs Seaton

Dear Boys and Girls,

In today’s letter I want you to imagine what it was like years ago before there ever was any electricity, or gas; everything, like cooking, or mending, or school-lessons had to be done during the day-light or else by the light of candles.

There is a story about a young girl called Alice, whose daddy had died, and whose mummy had to work to earn money so that Alice and her brothers would not go hungry. Alice had to do all the sewing and mending of socks and clothes to help her mummy. All this had to be done at night by the light of a candle.

One night, as Alice was sitting at her usual place, darning socks, she was heard saying to herself, “I must be very busy, for this is the only candle I have, and it is almost gone.” You see, boys and girls, she had a *time limit*. When the candle would burn out she would have to stop sewing, because it would be too dark to work. So, Alice kept this in her mind, and didn’t waste any precious minutes, but sewed quickly and with determination.



Our Life is like Alice’s candle, and will one day come to an end. This is because God has set a *time limit* for our life on the earth. The Bible says that our days are “numbered;” that means that our life won’t go on forever in this world. It is most important, then, boys and girls, to “Remember,” as the Bible says, “Thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Seaton

Warning to the Churches

*“When Nations are to perish in their sins,
‘Tis in the Church the leprosy begins.”*

God values nothing in a nation apart from His Church, for only regenerate people can rightly glorify God – and those that glorify Him not are useless dross, they render God no revenue of praise. God no longer values a professing Church where His truth is not acknowledged, for God cannot be glorified apart from a knowledge of His truth.

Therefore, when the church in a nation departs from the truth, God has no longer any cause to keep that nation in being. It was the fall of truth in the church in Israel that brought the overthrow of the whole land; God tells us so in Hosea chapter 4. Again when Jerusalem rejected the truth in the time of Christ there was nothing left to them but to be given over to the sword – as they were in 70 A.D. ... As one old writer says, “When the gospel of peace removes, eternal peace goes with it, temporal peace flies after it; and whatsoever is safe, profitable, prosperous, takes wings and departs also ...” God is not tied to any particular visible church, and will reject those who reject His truth, “Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee.” The fall of the church is being followed, of necessity, by the fall of the nation, and there is but one hope, but one remedy, that is, that before the day of God’s patience becomes the day of His wrath, He will, in mercy, revive His truth.

(From the *first* page of the *first* Banner of Truth Magazine)
(September 1955.)