

"T H O U S H A L T R E M E M B E R
all T H E W A Y
which T H E L O R D t h y G O D
L E D T H E E"

(Deuteronomy 8.2)

- A Reminiscence -

If you walk down Upton Lane, Forest Gate, London, E. 7, you will notice a tall building on the corner of Studley Road, and painted high on its side wall a fading text, "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can shew forth all His praise?" Then on the shop fascia you will read J. G. H. Ltd., and if you glance through the windows you will see that this is a lampshade business.

The text on the wall is now the only material reminder of what the building was used for before its present use. And what memories it has for us who have frequented 61 Upton Lane for so many years! Now it has become a place for making lampshades; previously we had sought, for nearly sixty years that it should be a place from which our light should shine before men, and we did not want any "bushel" to keep our "light" shaded. To what extent we accomplished or failed in this, the Lord only can rightly judge.

The building itself, you may not know, was built as a public house, but never received a licence, and so was not used for that purpose. The ground floor is a large room, with a small room at the back, which was always called, "the back room", and a kitchen. The first floor had another large room at the front, and three smaller ones at the back, the second floor had three rooms, and the attic, three rooms. The large rooms on the 2nd and 3rd floors were later divided. Below is a very large cellar which extends the whole length and width of the building and even out under the pavement to the road edge.

My first contact with the place was in 1919 when as a child I was brought to meetings by my father. But one should go back a few years previous to start the story at the beginning.

A young christian, Mr. Percy W. Heward, was the principal of a Bible Training College in Fleet St. in the city of London, and as he studied and taught from the Scriptures he became gradually convinced that the New Testament shows a definite plan of what the Holy Spirit intends for God's people in this age of grace, and further, as he considered the matter, he

felt that he and many other dear christians were not really following the Scriptures in many things, but were following, to a large extent, humanly devised arrangements for which there was no authority at all in Holy Writ.

He became so convinced that it was God's will that there should be the simple New Testament way of gathering to the Lord's Name without any thought of denominationalism, that he determined that from that time that he would : . endeavour to encourage the people of God to step outside human organizations and to gather together on Scriptural lines.

Meetings had previously begun in Romford Road, but in 1908 the premises in Upton Lane were available and were rented, and Mr. Heward and his father and mother moved in. The large ground floor/room, made an ideal meeting room. It was arranged with rows of forms, from back to front of the room, with aisles in between, and a small platform and reading desk at the front. The tiny box room on the left at the top of the stairs on the first floor became Mr. Heward's office. If the walls of that room had lips to tell their story, to tell what went on within them, what a wonderful narrative it would be.' What prayers ascended, what work was done in that small room, so plain, even untidy, yet a place where to us one of God's choicest servants was in continual contact with God. I shall never forget how on one occasion, as I passed that closed door, I heard him pleading with God in such earnestness that he prayed aloud, and I tiptoed away feeling I had intruded, by hearing words meant only for the ears of God

In the lines which follow I do not attempt to tell the whole story of these years by any means, nor do I intend to mention the many brethren and sisters involved in the work; nor to assess the affect or the scope of the work. Each of us must have our memories, and each of us must praise God for what has been ours over these many years. I am telling my own story, as one chapter of my life closes and a new one begins

I cannot tell the story of the early years for I was not born. My first recollections commence in the days when we were living at Clapton, five miles from Forest Gate, and my father began to attend the meetings. He used to push me over to Forest Gate, in a push-chair, Lord's Day by Lord's Day. I still remember Mr. Heward sen. whose eyesight at that time had nearly gone. He sat at the

back of the meeting room writing notes of the addresses on a frame which had strings across it, to keep him writing in line. Dear old Mrs. Heward lived on for quite a time after that and she was always very kind to me. At the back of the room where she sat, there was a kind of table for literature, covered with a green cloth on the Lord's Days. Each Lord's Day evening as we went out after the first address (for there were two addresses then, one till 7.30 for the unsaved and a believers' address till 8), I collected a paper bag, which was just hidden under the green cloth in which was a biscuit or two for my journey.

When I got older I walked, and my sisters in turn sat in the chair. We were not alone in our travels; we had the company of Mr. Moffat and Mr. Shriever who used to walk with us. The last part of the journey home was a mile across Hackney Marshes, and often Mr. Shriever would direct my eyes to the skies and talk of the stars. He gave me a book of drawings of the night sky which I still have. Another day I remember it was very foggy and so my father set off alone across the marshes but after walking for some time he found he was back at the point where he had started, so he made his way home. In those days bad weather did not usually keep us at home, even if there were five miles to cover, in the cold and wet!

But I did not only attend meetings at 61 Upton Lane. Before I was 10 I would go in the school holidays up to Mr. Shriever's home early in the morning and he would bring me over to Forest Gate, for in those days he assisted Mr. Heward in the work. Mr. Dopson and Mr. Reeves were engaged in the printing work, for now in the cellar there was installed the printing machine with some of the type, but there were also some type cases still in the meeting room at the Studley Road. side, so that the composing could be done in daylight. Here the type for the "Thoughts" and "Student" magazines was set up (though the magazines were printed elsewhere as our machine was not large enough), and of course tracts, in English and other languages. Dear old Mr. Turner was usually in attendance, making himself useful, and providing meals) he had had a small restaurant across the road). So here, as a little lad, I was initiated into the art of printing, I was shown how to compose and I spent my days there setting up hymns and sometimes small tracts and sometimes type in languages of which I did not understand a word.

I remember on one occasion a dear sister who helped with folding the literature calling in when I was composing a tract in Maltese. She was astonished that I, who was so young, could set type in Maltese, when she felt she was so poor in English! Thus early in my life I was able to enjoy and take part in the work of the Lord based on this house, although of course, I did not then know the Lord.

There were also the meetings of the Bible School, but as I lived at a distance, I could not attend on Monday or Saturday, but only on the Thursday evenings. I had, after school, to come by train and bus to Forest Gate. The Bible school was organized properly with a syllabus for the term, and Mr. Heward sat us, a child in each form from the front up the three rows. Everything was arranged just as at school with homework, and after the general class, some of us learned N.T. Greek with the aid of another brother.

When I was about 11 years old Mr. Heward took over a small "mission hall" at Grundy Street, Poplar, and my father was asked to live in the rooms above and act as a kind of caretaker, while still following his calling on the Underground Railways. So we moved into this new district. Little did we know what awaited us there. The place was infested, the roof was always leaking, the ceiling would sometimes bulge with water and then a large piece would fall in. The windows were continually broken by children's balls. The window texts attracted all kinds of people, such as the man who came for a right shoe, he had a left one! And my father patiently repaired the damage and my mother was almost distracted at times. On Mondays various friends went to the docks nearby to invite Indian seamen from the ships to a gospel meeting in this place, which Mr. Heward addressed in Urdu and/or Bengali as was necessary. Tuesday was a Bible meeting, but it was mainly attended by friends from Forest Gate and attracted no one local, except now and again. Friday was again Mr. Heward's evening for work among the foreign seamen, but on the ships themselves. He would call at Grundy Street and have some refreshment in the big room. He would ring me on my homemade telephone from downstairs, and I would go down to him, where we would spend time on my Greek homework, and of course, continually he would seek to direct me to the Saviour. Usually I stood at his side as he sat at the table, and his arm would be around me. While I was still at school he began to take me on the Friday evenings with him to the docks, and often the question was asked, "Is the boy your son?"

On the Lord's Day my father, my sisters and I would walk over to Forest Gate after dinner for the meetings. This was nearer than before, only three miles instead of five, and we were there in an hour. The afternoon began with reciting verses of Scripture we had learned, Mr. Heward listening to us boys in "the back room" and one of the senior brethren to the brethren in the large room. Then Mr. Heward would go to the adults and we would split up into classes. The girls had their classes upstairs

Later I began to walk over alone in the mornings and then after the morning meeting, the menfolk would have dinner together (that is those who did not live in the district) "in the back room". This was cooked on Saturday by dear Mrs. Perry at No. 8 Studley Road and all we had to do was to warm it up, serve and eat it. The ladies would eat at No. 8. Teatime it was the same.

The Lord's Day evening would begin with the Lord's Supper. Great stress was laid on this important meeting; to obey the Lord in the simple way which He appointed with unleavened symbols, remembering Him. This was followed by the two addresses before mentioned. In those days the congregation was quite large and there were many earnest believers in the company, who are now with the Lord

Besides the ordinary meetings, special meetings were arranged at Holiday seasons, announced as "Quiet Bible Hours". Sometimes it was necessary to get extra chairs from other parts of the house to seat the visitors. The first part of the evening meeting was always the time for the young people to recite. Verses which had a "pattern" were given us to learn, such as "the journeys of the children of Israel". Then Bible questions would follow, and if we knew the answer we had to lift a hand. This was most interesting for young and old. I remember on one occasion Mr. Heward switched his questions from us to the adults, and they were not so well up in Scripture facts and details as some of the young people! Oh yes we were well trained in the Bible School! If only we had had more interest then!

I still continued during school holidays to take interest in the printing, though by now the type was no longer in use, and the printing of the magazines was now in the hands of a printer. It was at the end of 1932 that Mr. Heward began a new

magazine, with gospel messages in various languages, called "A Testimony of the Truth". This appeared for the first time in Jan. 1953. A little before this our brother had asked me to leave my daily employment and come and help him full time in the work I had come to know the Lord, and had been baptized in the large tank, inserted in the meeting room floor, and now it seemed my early training could be put to use. But as I prayed about it, I could feel no guidance. The pay suggested was very small, and although I was anxious to do all I could to assist, I delayed my decision for a period during which the generous support of a brother in Canada ceased, because of his death, and so Mr Heward withdrew his offer for the time being.

However, the "Testimony" magazine was of great interest to me, and I helped with this, preparing a page for each issue of a gospel verse in a dozen or so languages, and also addressing all the envelopes and labels to send the copies away. But this also had afterwards to cease publication through lack of funds.

Meanwhile during the years the basement and the top floors became packed full of magazines, and tracts in many languages. There were boxes and boxes of literature and stocks of paper etc. In a lot of instances far too many copies of tracts were printed and many had to be destroyed as they became dirty and unusable. Mr. Heward had also very many books he had bought or acquired, stored in the cellar shelves, and they also became dirty and damp and had eventually to be scrapped. I spent many long hours alone in the basement amidst all the boxes and stocks of literature, setting the type for the issues of the Spanish and Portuguese "Come for all things are now ready" booklets, and other printing such as large texts; we had plenty of large type.

Many have been the comings and goings during the years, and one looks back remembering the dear faithful saints who once gathered with us, who are now with the Lord. Some of those who helped Mr. Heward in the work in that house have gone "Home", some of those who lived there are gone, including our dear brother. Some no longer gather with us. This is not to be wondered at, for we have not followed a popular path over the years, we have restricted ourselves to the practices of the apostles, the New Testament teaching. And not many in these day are ready to walk in such a path. To break with tradition, and give up many of the things held among God's people is not easy. So, as the years have rolled on and saints have been called "Home, few have taken their place. Of all the young people who attend-

ed the Bible School with me and who had such privileges in those early days, with such help from Mr. Heward (my spiritual father indeed), there remains none in the gathering today. How one often yearns for the days of the past. How wonderful were some of those meetings. One can recall occasions when I felt as if I was the only one in the room and the ministry was just for me, pleading with me. How often we were thrilled by our brother's themes as he unfolded the Scriptures to us.

There were other things of great interest. When my family finally moved into the Forest Gate district I was able to be at more meetings, and not having to go out too early in the mornings for business I used for a time to be at the early morning prayer meeting at 7 a.m. which was always in "the back room". Mr. Heward used to come down a little earlier and we two would read a few verses of Scripture together, in a different language each day, before the others arrived. The testimony of the gospel in the docks into which Mr. Heward had so early initiated me still continued to be an outlet for service, and we were often together each week on a Friday or Saturday, and on Tuesday too (though on Tuesday with different other brethren). I still hold the dock pass, though I have not used it lately.

An interest in other languages was stirred in me by our brother, (though he regretted that I did not make the progress he would have liked in the Bible original tongues). Then as he travelled abroad with the gospel and among the saints there, he encouraged me (and others too) to help in this, and thus many visits were made by various ones to the Continent. Once I had the opportunity of being with him in Luxembourg with two other brethren, and we were rushed off our feet by his determination to use every minute profitably in a land where no gospel witness existed. He arranged for me to visit our brethren in Germany in 1934 and after five days again in Luxembourg with a brother, I set off on the long journey to what is now Poland, staying there about ten days. Every detail of that trip is as vivid in my mind as though it was yesterday, even to the daily readings we had when I was there. Little did I know then that the daughter of the house, then still at school, would later be my wife, but she is, to my great joy.

The full story of our brother's work on the Continent will not be told, for I doubt if any one has now sufficient

knowledge of the details. I have recently been handed some of the notes of one of those journeys, and what memories they awake! Holland, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Czechoslovakia and so on. Our brother hardly ever needed an interpreter; he was a master of languages, specially when it was enough to present the gospel or minister to the saints.

The war years then interrupted the contacts with the Continent, but as soon as it was possible to go over again he was there; not that he was able to reach the same places as before, or the people. Some still remained; most of our brethren in Germany came through that awful time, but those in the east could not be visited.

Our brother's last journey to the Continent was in April 1948. It was to Germany, among the Lord's people and in camps where there were Latvians and others, but he was evidently not at all well physically.

Usually when he returned from such trips, some of us would meet him, but on this occasion no one did, and he came alone on the Underground from Victoria. He dozed on the way and when he arrived at Bow Road Station to change to the bus, he found his case was gone! The Bibles, everything that he valued (and what a weight he carried!) was stolen. He came home, began to straighten out his matters, money etc., but the shock of the loss brought on pneumonia, and he had to go to bed. That quarter of the big upstairs room, which was now his bedroom, became the centre of our longings and hopes. Here he lay in pain, the one who had been such a blessing to us all, the man who, to me, was the greatest christian I have ever met. He asked for the senior brethren to pray the prayer of faith over him, but when they had prayed, he perceived it was not what he intended. Doctors were called, but he was not interested in their drugs. In a delirium he preached in languages which those who sat by his bedside did not know. I sat with him some evenings when the meetings were going on below, and even then he was anxious that I should be at the meeting.

So the Lord took him "home", and I called on the doctor in London and collected the death certificate. What a blow had fallen! Perhaps the largest meeting ever held in that room took place not with our brother on the platform, but in a coffin at the front. Three brethren spoke in the presence of ourselves and many others who knew and loved him; some who had come from far. Then the funeral procession moved off to the City of London cemetery and the coffin was

borne from the hearse to the grave by four of the brethren. Our brother was gone. He had not thought the Lord would take him. But those of us who knew him closely, knew he had packed more service to his Lord into those 65 years than others might do in lives ten times as long. What a reward will be his!

But we were left! Without a shepherd! Some said, "The meetings will not last long now", and I was inclined to agree. But they did continue. The time came when it was not thought necessary to have the big room on the street level as we were so few and it cost so much to heat. So the building was altered by the owners and we moved to a room upstairs. The printing machine, type etc was all disposed of, the literature had to be destroyed where it was unusable, and everything had to be concentrated in the upstairs rooms. So things went on, Mr. Kirk continued the "Thoughts" magazine, Mr and Mrs. Williamson moved into the living accommodation on the second floor.

The building could at one time have been Mr. Heward's, but he preferred to live in "his own hired house" as did Paul, and so it was purchased years ago by a sister in the meeting, and Mr. Heward paid a small rent. The time came however, that the dear sister sold the property, and we had to give up our room and move into a smaller one, which though not so big, suited our numbers.

The meetings continued on in this way till towards the end of 1966 and then there were hints from the owners that they wanted more of the building, and the end came when they found other accommodation for Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and then asked for our meeting room. So the last meeting, a prayer meeting, was held on Monday the 28th November, the last meeting in 61 Upton Lane. Fifty eight years this building had been our "spiritual home" (for me, only forty seven years), and now where should we go? The house where we had prayed and worshipped for so long had at last become 'a house of merchandise' (Except that as I write our brother Mr. Kirk continues the literature work from that address).

I think we were rather stunned, and no one had any suggestions. That old house, not very attractive, cold and draughty, was after all just a house, but somehow all that

had gone on there had endeared the place to us. It was really part of me, for I had never attended any other place of worship from childhood onwards.

My dear wife to whom I referred had been brought up in Peterswaldau, Germany, in the home where her father was the host of the gathering. Her older brother now has the similar privilege, and so we prayed, and talked over what could be done. The only thing that we could suggest was that we should offer our home for the meetings. And yet we felt we were hardly the right people to have such a great privilege and responsibility. But in the end we offered, and so we have met in our home now since December 1st, 1966.

What does the future hold? That we cannot foresee. A brother said recently, "There will be no breaking of bread at Forest Gate in five years time". I thought that too in 1948! And there is also one who would be glad if this simple testimony to the Lord's truth of a few humble people of God, who desire to walk in His ways and be guided by the teaching of the Holy Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, was to come to an end. But there is ever One Who is greater than he that is in the world, and we rely on His blessing, and grace to keep us faithful to the end, not forsaking our gathering together, but the more so as we see the Day approaching, doing His will, till He come.

S C Bown (Feb. 67)

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