

## "High time to wake out of sleep."

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Another year of the church's pilgrimage is fast running to its close, and we have a desire to sound out, before it ends, a word of warning and an awakening cry to all our fellow-believers within reach. A very stealthy and unsuspected foe is amongst us. Its presence is not signalized by grave sins or scandals. It gains the ascendancy and holds sway even when the outward religious life of the Christian is conducted with regularity and smooth propriety. Its name is SLEEP.

*Sleep* is evidently a foe marked by peculiar pertinacity during the present dispensation, and this for the simple reason that *watchfulness* was intended to characterize it. We are living in the moment in which the kingdom of heaven was likened by the Lord Jesus to "ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom," and of these He said,

*"While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps" (Matt. 25: 5-7)*

Our Lord's parabolic prophecy was duly fulfilled. Rejected and condemned to death by His own people, and handed over by them to the Gentiles by whom He was crucified, He took up His place in risen glory, outside every existing institution on earth, and consequently those who believed in His name and became His followers went forth also outside all existing human institutions, sharing His rejection and awaiting His return. This was the church's proper and primitive position. They "went forth to meet the Bridegroom."

Again the prophecy was fulfilled. The Bridegroom tarried and consequently sleep supervened. Both wise and foolish, "they all slumbered and slept." Drowsiness overcame the people of God. First love waned, as we find in Rev. 2: 4, and consequently the soporific influences of the world prevailed against them and they lapsed into that condition of insensibility and lethargy which is sleep of a spiritual sort. As the result of the insensible condition of the people of God, every kind of corruption invaded the church, and all the abominations of the Romish system appeared.

We may pursue the parable one step further and point out that the "midnight cry" has gone forth. The coming of the Bridegroom has again become an expectation and a hope and consequently once more its separating power has been known. Saints reverted once more to the original position that they had left but which should have marked them all along. The cry was, "*Go ye out to meet Him,*" and they obeyed and consequently found themselves where they had been when first they "*went forth to meet the Bridegroom.*"

And now, especially in these highly-favoured English-speaking lands, there are serious symptoms which would lead us to fear that sleep is again supervening with many. The world is tolerant, outward persecution is lacking, circumstances are comfortable compared with most lands; how easy, then, whilst doing nothing that can be objected to by one's fellow-Christians, to become insensible to the urgent needs of the hour and lethargic as to the Lord's interests; to be kindly and amiable and orthodox, and as to the things of God regular enough and quite willing to help, if such help does not involve the setting aside of one's own interests, and yet to be *asleep* in the Scriptural sense of the word.

We need to awake from dull lethargy and to shake off the drowsy influences of the earth and the

world. The coming of the Lord draws nigh, and shall we, who are His and consequently identified with His interests and testimony, be frittering away the present opportunity of being wholeheartedly for Him by immersion in the pursuits and the pleasures of the age? — even if "harmless" judged by ordinary standards. Listen to the words of the apostle:-

*"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day . . ."* (Rom. 13: 11-13).

Here the exhortation to awake is based upon the fact that the day is approaching which will mean our full and final deliverance from the present age. We are still in the night but we belong to that day and are to walk "honestly" or "becomingly" *as in that day* — not taking the ways and customs of the night-age as our standard, but walking according to the ways and principles of the day-age, before the day comes.

The day, carrying with it our salvation, is at hand! Do we really believe it? Is it plain to us that the night is rapidly approaching its darkest hour of apostasy and the consequent outpouring — once the church is gone — of the long pent-up wrath of God?

The signs of the last days are fully manifested. We have no wish to occupy our readers with the doings of the present evil age, but, on the other hand, it is well sometimes to take a good look at conditions as they are. Many of our readers have learned the blessedness of the true Christian path of separation from the world-system, and perhaps for that very reason they hardly realize how fully the world is approximating in its ways to the days of Noah and of Lot, only on a much greater scale. The days of Noah ended in a deluge of water; the days of Lot in a deluge of fire; the present age will soon end in a deluge, not providential nor provisional, but of the direct judgment of God.

We have just received from the United States of America a small leaflet giving a review of conditions as they struck one of the Lord's watchmen in that great country early in 1921. We give below a substantial extract from it. The writer is dealing with signs of the times.

"COMMERCIAL SIGNS, Daniel 12: 4. God told Daniel to close up the book until 'The time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.' When? *In the time of the end.*

"One hundred years ago there was not a railroad in this land. If a man wished to come from London, he must spend a month or more on the voyage, take a stage coach after landing, as far perhaps as the Ohio river, and then have an unexplored route before him if he wished to journey further. Today he crosses on an ocean greyhound in six days, takes a palatial palace car, and speeds away to the Pacific coast. If this is not fast enough he can take an airship. Men are running to and fro. Railroads cross and recross this land; they run from Chile to Alaska, and penetrate the heart of Africa and China. The Inter Transit Company in New York sold in one year 1,700,000,000 tickets — one city alone. And besides this there is the automobile traffic. One state boasts enough machines to carry all its inhabitants at once.

"'Knowledge shall be increased.' An event takes place in the middle of the Atlantic at night, and the metropolitan papers print the news the next morning. The daily paper circulates everywhere. We have schoolhouses on every hill, high schools and colleges in abundance, and universities in every state, disseminating knowledge; and too often a knowledge which denies the very God that bought them and rejects His Word which has been given to enlighten the world. Yes, Daniel was right. Knowledge has increased until men have placed it on a pedestal, worship it, and call it a god.

"SOCIAL SIGNS, James 5. 1-8. James speaks of treasures heaped together. For what time? '*The last days.*' He then offers comfort to the oppressed, but the hope is not in legislation; it is not in labour unions; it is not in the triumph of justice through the ministry of a church which is in apostasy. It is in the Blessed Hope of our Lord's return. 'Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.'

"It is said that ninety-nine per cent of this nation's wealth is controlled by one per cent of its population. Ten thousand millionaires have made their appearance in the last four years. By their combines and monopolies they have heaped treasures together, and at the cost of much suffering. Senator Curtis says that the sugar combine cost the nation billions of dollars in just a few months. If Adam had lived to this day, 6,000 years, and accumulated \$100,000 a year he would not be as rich as some 'Self-made' men to-day. Can they acquire such wealth honestly? Let God answer in the last day.

"One woman invited a number of poodle dogs to join her dog in a \$30,000 banquet; another spent \$25,000 for a string of pearls for her cat; yet thousands of little children went to bed hungry near by. They have lived wantonly, they have nourished their hearts as in the day of slaughter. The great gulf between capital and labour is ever widening, and none but the Son of God can solve the problem.

"MORAL SIGNS, 2 Tim. 3: 1-5. These verses also speak of that time we are considering. 'This know also, that *in the last days* perilous times shall come.' Men are here shown to be lovers of pleasure, lovers of their own selves; but not lovers of God. All the wickedness of the age is held within these few verses. Paul, if living now, could not better describe the present time.

"The year 1920, just ended, is said to have been the worst on record for crime, — not only in scope and numbers, but in blackness, magnitude and daring. The ancient Blue Beard is no longer fiction but a fearful reality. For the first time the Federal prison at Atlanta is unable to care for all the prisoners sentenced there. Reformers said prohibition would do away with crime. It may have relieved the suffering on the part of many who were innocent, but crime marches on. A sober criminal can function better than a drunken one, and they now have more time to spend at their trade.

"Others said that education was the key to the solution of crime; but, alas! we have found the educated criminal is the worst type. It takes more than education to change the heart; but it enabled them to commit crimes that the uneducated could not have done. For instance, the bombs used by anarchists are products of the highest mechanical and chemical skill.

"Divorce is likewise on the increase. In some places the ratio is about one divorce to three marriages. What will be the result with this ulcer eating away at the home and social life of our people? The time seems to have come, spoken of by Sam Jones, when marriage licences will be issued with divorce coupons attached, and the shame that once followed the divorced is no longer present.

"After an automobile accident at two o'clock in the morning two girls were taken to a hospital. By ten o'clock over seventy mothers had called to see if they were their daughters! Yes, there is disobedience to parents, and many a parent's heart aches at the thought of their children having to face the fearful temptations that confront them. The moving picture business is like a mighty vampire spreading its black wings of death over the land and sucking away at the very life blood. The crowded dance halls are also sending a steady stream down the broad path of degradation into the dark night where the star of hope will never again pierce their sky.

"RELIGIOUS SIGNS, 1 Tim. 4: 1, 2; 2 Tim. 4: 3, 4. Here perhaps lies the greatest peril of all. If the church of Christ stood steadfast, holding its proper place as a separated people, living in the world, yet not of the world, this warning message might not be needed. But the church has lost its bearings and is fast drifting towards the rocks. Critical times are upon us because of false doctrines, and because

after their own lusts men are heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears. Reformation is taught now instead of regeneration; social life instead of spiritual life. Instead of thundering out God's warnings against evil, the ministry is compromising with it. The Methodist Centenary Commission boasted that 5000 moving picture machines were sold at the Columbus exhibition. 5000 churches turned into houses of amusement instead of places of prayer and praise!

"Practically every fundamental doctrine is being denied in the pulpits to-day. A prominent preacher in Cleveland said that since the Holy Land was open to research, no doubt the very body of our Lord and Saviour would be discovered, embalmed in the lost tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Did that poor blinded preacher never read the fifteenth of First Corinthians?

"Dr. Charles Foster Kent and his associates have given the world 'The Shorter Bible,' with the 'Non-essentials' eliminated; and the sad part is that the so-called 'Non-essentials' are the things so dear to the heart of every true child of God — The Atonement by Blood, Resurrection, Regeneration, the Blessed Hope, etc. When Jehoakim of old attempted to make a Shorter Bible by the use of his penknife, God did not say, 'Well done, it needed revision.' No, He told him he should be 'Buried with the burial of an ass.' God says that he that taketh away from the words of His Holy Book, shall have his part taken away out of the book of life. Of all the treachery since Judas kissed our Saviour, I know of none so base as the so-called attempt to eliminate the 'Non-essentials' from the Bible.

"Everywhere there is the cry of a shortage in students for the ministry, and church councils have decided that the cause is insufficient support. Friends, the cause is more serious than this. It is because, under the withering power of rationalism, many who go to the Seminaries lose the conviction that they must preach the Gospel. They leave without a Christ to preach. No wonder they quit. They are more honourable in doing so than those who continue to hold pulpits and deny the very Lord that bought them. I wish a thousand more would quit, but do not slander them and say it is because the support is insufficient. Men that are called of God are still willing to bear the reproach and suffer physical need if need be. Our Seminaries are in truth 'Cemeteries,' where hopes die and many make shipwreck of faith."

Are conditions in Great Britain very different? We think not. Here there is rather more restraint and reserve, and tendency to reverence ancient religious landmarks. There all novelties are more eagerly welcomed, people are less restrained, and the general pace of things is hotter; but substantially things are much the same.

The present condition of affairs in both world and church, apart from any other consideration, constitutes a loud call to every true saint to awake. Supposing these things were no sign of the end of the age being upon us; supposing we knew for a certainty that another thousand years must elapse before the coming of the Lord, they ought still to warn us of a great crisis, and stir us to our depths with desire to be faithful witnesses and servants of our absent Lord in the emergency. How much more should they awake us and stir us to this, seeing that they are very clear signs of the end of the age, and consequently of the fact that the Lord may be in the air with the assembling shout for His saints at any moment? — and thus the day of grace and of the church's testimony may end. It is indeed high time that we should awake out of sleep.

The present conflict is intensely real, and we long to be fully in it ourselves through the power of the Spirit of God, and also to see every true saint, however small and feeble their measure, thoroughly alive to it, and wholeheartedly identified with the interests of their Lord. Zeal in the things of God we do most badly need; we need intelligence as well.

We shall not serve our Lord's cause, no matter how fervid our zeal, if we ignore His word and attempt a service which He has not prescribed. It is not our work to attempt to put the world right. We

are not sent to convert the world and much less to Christianize it. No mistaken notion has had more disastrous results than this. It has led directly to the adopting of social service as the great objective and has opened the door to the whole flood of modernist heresy which has swept over the professing church.

To clean up the world, whether socially or nationally, is not our business; it will be effectually accomplished by the Lord Himself at His return in glory. He cleaned up the world *temporarily* in the days of Noah by water, and *partially* in the days of Lot by fire. He will do it *altogether* and *forever* in the coming day of His wrath and judgment. Our business is not to attempt before the time what belongs to the coming dispensation, but to be true to the Lord's present commission, and to all that has been revealed and accomplished by his first advent, and which has consequently become the subject of testimony. That which was set forth in Christ here is, according to God's purpose, to be continued in the church — in his servants — during the time of His absence.

Two great things marked our Lord's exit from this world. First, as recorded in John's Gospel, *He bore unfaltering witness to the truth.* Before Pontius Pilate He "witnessed a good confession."

*"Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king, then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice"* (18: 37).

Secondly, as recorded in Luke's Gospel He spent His latest breath not in protesting against the world's unrighteousness, or in formulating an ideal scheme of righteous principles, but in *saving one soul out of the world for heaven.*

*"And he [the other malefactor] said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise"* (Luke 23: 42, 43)

Behold, then, in the great Master Himself that which should mark all His servants to-day! If you would be in the current of His will, and follow in His steps, make these two things your objective. Earnestly covet this from the hand of God, that you may be set as a witness to His truth — to the whole of it and not a part merely — and that you may be of use in the completion of His present purpose of gathering out of the nations "a people for His name" (Acts 15: 14). If these two are laid down firmly as the rails on which you travel, then you may safely generate every possible ounce of zeal. Off these lines your zeal may be largely destructive, like an engine under full steam which jumps the metals.

Brethren in Christ — you who are young, especially — it is indeed high time to awake out of sleep! The night grows darker, but our salvation out of it, and the subsequent dawning of the day, is now very near. Shall we ever forgive ourselves if we spend these last hours in easy-going slumber and self-pleasing? Certain it is that if we miss the present opportunity we shall suffer irreparable loss in the day of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Rather let us bestir ourselves from our natural lethargy and wholeheartedly identify ourselves with the whole truth of God as revealed in the New Testament, and the service of God according to that truth, today.