

25th January, 1957

Mr. S. Cannon,  
1 Trevellance Way,  
Garston, WATFORD.

Dear Brother Cannon:

I am now enclosing a statement concerning part of the  
prison experience which we had during the first World War.  
I trust this is what you need for presentation at the  
young people's meeting.

Wishing you every success, and with kind personal  
regards, I am,

Sincerely your brother,

President

WMA/h

Encl.

I have been asked to give an account of an incident which happened to fourteen of our young men, of which I was one, when we were in France during the First World War. As this happened nearly forty years ago some of the events had become a little dull in my memory, but recently I turned up a copy of a statement made by Pastor Lowe and myself which was forwarded to the War Office at that time, and this has revived my memory a little.

As you may know, we all went to France. When we arrived there, in 1916, we at once had difficulties regarding the Sabbath, but the Lord overruled and for nearly two years we were able to have Sabbath privileges until we moved to a new district under a new commandant. There the Sabbath was refused us and in consequence we were court martialled for disobedience, and given hard labour in a military prison.

I will not go into the details of the horrible treatment we received, but finally each of us was cast into a small cell, approximately 7 ft. by 4 ft. with iron walls and a concrete floor, and it was mid-winter. There after punishment our hands were placed behind our backs and locked with what were called "Figure of Eights." This was very painful.

When the Sabbath morning came, I remember hearing the door of the cell to my right being opened and the sergeant giving instructions to one of our young men to go to work. I could not hear his reply, but I did hear him leave the cell and the door was bolted.

The same thing happened to the youth on the other side, and I was left by myself. I heard other doors opened and bolted in the same way

and finally the door of my cell was opened, and I was commanded to go to work. I refused to do this in a courteous way, explaining once more the reason for my refusal. I fully expected to be thrashed and beaten as I had been the previous evening, but to my surprise the sergeant was quite affable. He told me not to be a fool; that all the other young men had come to their senses and they had all gone to work as good Britishers should, and that I would only get into further trouble if I was stubborn.

This news, of course, surprised me, and I could hardly believe it, but I remember making the statement that whatever my brethren might do, I must remain firm to the truth of God, and I endeavoured to get some sort of spiritual understanding into the mind of that gross sergeant. I learned later, however, that all our young men in the cells had remained faithful.

Upon my refusal he then changed his affable manner and became abusive. He seized me by the lapels of my coat and threw me against the wall with consequent pain. After kicking me violently he left me and shut the door.

A short while afterwards a little way down the corridor I heard somebody whistling one of our well-known hymns -- although I cannot remember just which one it was. I was surprised to hear this because to whistle or sing was counted as gross insubordination, but to my surprise I heard a voice singing with the whistling, and it was only a question of seconds before many other voices were singing this hymn, and I found myself spontaneously joining in the singing of that good

old hymn. We sang the first verse, and the second verse, and for all I know we may have sung the third, and inspite of our condition, the singing of that hymn brought wonderful comfort and strength to us as we were there in that prison. But the most amazing thing was the reaction of the sergeant. He realised that if he allowed us to continue singing he was likely to get into trouble for permitting such insubordination and in a frantic kind of way he tried to stop us, but in vain. It was not long before quite a number of other non-commissioned officers gathered in that corridtor, and strangely enough the anger and hatred which we had experienced on the previous evening, and some of us that same Sabbath morning, were subdued and I remember distinctly we finished that hymn in an atmosphere of absolute quiet. There was something in the hymn itself as well as the spirit in which it was sung which affected those brutal men, for brutal they were to the extreme, and although we did experience considerable persecution subsequently, I felt that these men had far more respect for us after they had heard our singing.

Surely the Spirit of God was nigh at that moment, and this illustrates once more how oftentimes the singing of a hymn can be a witness to the power of God and cause even hard stubborn hearts to soften.

- W.W. ARMSTRONG

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