

BREEDING PEACE MARTYRS IN CRADLE

Children of Jehovah's Witnesses

Refuse to Salute the Flag

For centuries pacifists have braved prison rather than don uniforms. To-day the 20,000 fanatical members of an odd American-born religious sect go further, refusing to permit their children to salute the Stars and Stripes, to them a "devil's banner."

A year ago the first such case, in Pennsylvania, startled the newspapers. "If you *kill* me I won't salute!" quavered an eleven-year-old schoolboy. He was expelled. Soon after, in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, a teacher was dismissed for refusing to honor "the flag of horror and hate." Followed similar instances of zeal and its punishment in Secaucus, New Jersey; Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, and Los Angeles. An eight-year-old Lynn, Massachusetts, lad was driven from school. Soon authorities found mere expulsion inadequate to stem the mounting tide.

Two weeks ago a Massachusetts county court sentenced two Belchertown boys and their sister, ranging in age from six to nine, to Hampden County Training School, fined the father \$40. Four Pennsylvania children, after a thorough beating from their teacher, had been threatened with a similar fate, a few weeks before. In the Belchertown case, a citizens' committee, including members of the Smith College and Amherst faculties, is preparing to carry the fight to the United States Supreme Court.

What manner of religion is this that breeds martyrs in the cradle?

Its 50,000 zealots in eighty-three countries throughout the world call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses. In America they are incorporated as the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, in England as the International Bible Students' Association.

Mixture of Heresies—Their creed is a strange mixture of several ancient heresies, a touch of fundamentalism, a dab of first century eschatology, and pacifism.

They believe that the rule of the "Gentile Kingdoms" ended in 1914, that the Kingdom of God already has been established, that Armageddon is imminent, and that the wrath of God is upon "Christendom" and its "Unholy Trinity" of organized religion, big business, and organized government.

They regard "the Roman Catholic hierarchy" as the "Antichrist," but are equally bitter about Protestants. The League of Nations they see as "the Image of the Beast." Especially, they say, does Jehovah God oppose the arrogant Anglo-American seventh empire (foretold by Daniel), which conceives itself the world's peacemaker.

Others before the Witnesses have awaited the epiphany from housetop and hillside, braving the profane jeers of skeptics. Millennialism goes back a thousand years. The Second Coming was confidently predicted for 1260, 1367, 1660, 1700, 1715, and 1734. Mormonism had its genesis in the craze, Smith's earliest desire being to set up a new Zion before the end overtook him.

In 1831 William Miller, a pious farmer of Low Hampton, New York, fixed 1843 as the year of retribution, later amended it to 1844. Ten years ago A. Robert Reidt, a Sayville, Long Island, carpenter known as the Apostle of Doom, gathered a few



"Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford, head of Jehovah's Witnesses, who circulate—faithful in ascension robes for the Coming. The depression arrived instead.

The Plymouth Brethren, or Darbyites, founded in 1830, hold similar tenets, but pin themselves to no dates. The various branches of the Seventh Day Adventists likewise fix no year, but believe the Coming is "imminent."

The Smith-Miller idea was inherited by one Charles Taze Russell. This God-fearing Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Congregational youth heard from a pool-parlor infidel that there was no heaven, no hell. Turning to the Holy Writ for guidance, he developed the idea of the millennium and another chance, began a ministry that lasted forty-two years.

Metropolis Beckons—Later New York beckoned and "Pastor" Russell (he was never ordained) took over the imposing Tabernacle in fashionable Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, of Henry Ward Beecher, the sulfur-tongued Litchfield, Connecticut, Congregational crusader against slavery and the Confederacy. He even installed himself in the Beecher home nearby.

The new hope spread faster than gossip. "Pastor" Russell, covering more ground than Bishop Francis Asbury and St. Paul combined, established more than 12,000 churches here and abroad. A prolific writer, he boasted that his interpretations of the Bible were "more extensive than the combined works of St. Paul, St. John, Arius, Waldo, Wycliffe, and Martin Luther."

One of his best remembered utterances was that "many of the Lord's most faithful children live in a matrimonial furnace of affliction." From his own "furnace" he was delivered by a divorce court, tho his wife won the decree. They had quarreled over the space allotted to her in his publications.

Waiting for Christ in a sun-baked Texas hamlet in 1916, death ambushed the great millennarian, and he "drew up his feet in the bed like Jacob of old" and passed away.

Bald, gangling "Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford, a small-time Missouri lawyer with hazel eyes and a *basso profundo* rumble, succeeded to the mantle in 1917. Emerging unchastened from the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta with Eugene Debs and a host of other conscientious objectors to bearing arms for America in the World

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War, the "Judge" whipped up an organization which now publishes hundreds of books, tracts, pamphlets, and two periodicals, translating them into sixty-two languages, including Esperanto, Gujarati, and Zulu. Every week his booming voice is carried over 300 radio stations.

Tucked away in a corner under the Brooklyn end of Brooklyn Bridge between two warehouses is an eight-story, white oblong building—the power-house of Jehovah's Witnesses. An electric sign above winks out in ruby lights the word "Riches."

Cooperative Bliss—Here 196 Witnesses, known as the "Bethel Family," toil in cooperative bliss for "Judge" Rutherford and the Lord. Their "riches" are \$15 a month. For this sum they man station WBBR, print and mail literature, manufacture phonographs and transcription machines (used to play Rutherford speeches when the radio is not convenient), make the 35,000 pounds of ink used annually to print \$700,000 worth of books. Florida and Staten Island farms supply food.

Meanwhile the crusade for peace and exemption from oaths and saluting goes on. And not only in America, where thousands have been roused to interest in the ultimate fate of the three Opielouski children of Belchertown.

More than 1,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses, for daring to tell Hitler that the Third Reich is "the Devil's Kingdom," were thrown into Nazi concentration camps. There, too, their greatest fight is for peace.

But pacifism, remarks *The Christian Century*, "does not always appear in the rational garb that many would desire. This is true of Gandhi's *satyagraha* enswathed in Hindu metaphysics, of Tolstoi's mysticism, and of the more bizarre aspects of early Quakerism. So it is with Jehovah's Witnesses. But bravery is bravery. Those who are not against us are for us."



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