



*Jay Richardson*

# HENRY PICKERING

AN editorial notice in the January number recalled that *The Witness* had continued publication without interruption for seventy years, the end of 1940 marking the completion of that long period.

Before the next number was issued the beloved Editor had received his Home-call. He had been residing at Largs, Ayrshire, for some months, and it was there he passed away very quietly and peacefully on January 20th, having almost completed eighty-three years of active and useful life.

HENRY PICKERING was born at Kenton, near Newcastle-on-Tyne, in 1858. Brought up as a member of the Established Church, his conversion to God in 1874 proved to be the event which affected the whole course of his life. It was brought about as a result of Gospel meetings held in a farmer's barn, the preacher being Mr. J. Cecil Hoyle (of Spain). Mr. Pickering narrates how the moment of

## His Acceptance of Christ

came to him. "In desperate earnestness I closed my eyes, clenched my fists, and from my heart said: 'Sink or swim, just now I'll trust Him.' There and then, sitting on a wooden plank, in a farmer's barn that cold night of November, 1874, I realised that:

'Soon as my all I ventured  
On the atoning blood,  
The Holy Spirit entered,  
And I was born of God.'

What conversion meant to him (and its significance did not diminish with the passing years) is told by him in his downright way in his tract, "How I Tried the Five C's." These C's. were, Christening, joining the Choir, Confirmation, taking the Communion, and, lastly, receiving Christ. He found the first four unavailing for salvation, but that the fifth meant everything.

It was intended that he should take up the teaching profession, and he actually served for some time as a pupil teacher. Having meantime come into touch with "Brethren," he came to feel, however, that he could not go into a Church of England college for training, and gave up the idea of becoming a teacher. He commenced a small printing business in his father's house, and travelled the district soliciting printing orders. Being full of youthful ardour for the Gospel, he in his spare time joined with other young men in village work, and, in addition to engaging in preaching and tract distribution, they took a stall in Consett market-place on Saturdays and sold Gospel tracts, books, and text-cards. In

Preacher  
Publisher  
Editor

his later years he would recount, with a twinkle in his eye, how he used to circumvent the local bye-law prohibiting preaching in the market-place. He would hold up one tract after another, and in a voice loud enough for every bystander to hear, tell the story each contained, not

omitting the Gospel appeal to which the story led. This was not preaching, of course, but merely describing his wares. Mr. T. D. Simpson, one of his co-workers, still resides in Consett, and continued this stall for very many years.

In 1886 he was invited by Mr. J. R. Caldwell and others to take charge of a Bible and Book Depot in Buchanan Street, Glasgow, known as "The Publishing Office," and seven years later he entered into what proved to be an ideally happy business partnership with Mr. Wm. Inglis. A printing works was then started, and the familiar name of

## Pickering & Inglis

came into being. After removing to 73 Bothwell Street in 1894, the firm took, in 1908, the present shop, offices, and factory at 229 Bothwell Street. Before they had removed, however, a heavy and keenly-felt blow fell in the death of Mr. Inglis. Shortly after he was joined in partnership by Mr. John Gray, of Kilmarnock, then by his only son Mr. Cecil Pickering; and later by Mr. John Hawthorn. Mr. Gray was called Home in 1936, and Mr. Hawthorn in 1937.

From its inception the publication of evangelical Christian literature has been the firm's principal line, and the business has become one of the largest and best-known concerns of its kind in the world.

In 1919 the book-selling business of Alfred Holness, at 14 Paternoster Row, London, was acquired; and at present, in addition to the Glasgow and London premises, there are also branches in Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, and Newcastle-on-Tyne, as well as agencies in many of the principal American and Colonial cities. The development from such small beginnings of so large a business is a tribute to Mr. Pickering's industry, enterprise, and business acumen.

He had early associations with the Assemblies of the Lord's people, and as soon as he came to Glasgow threw his energies into the spiritual work of the company at Marble Hall, in the west of the city, where J. R. Caldwell, C. P. Watson, J. P. Sinclair, Wm. Kyle, and others, were in fellowship. In 1897 he united with Elim Hall Assembly, and for many years took a leading

## HENRY PICKERING

part in its activities. Its healthy growth in numbers and influence was in no small measure due to his labours. He also took a prominent part during this period of his life in the convening and arranging of the Glasgow Half-Yearly Meetings, and acted as one of the Treasurers of the Home and Foreign Missionary Fund; etc.

He was all this while indefatigable in

### His Work as a Preacher

among the Scottish Assemblies. He had a breezy, vital way of presenting his message to the ordinary and untheological hearer. There was a vein of humour which, sometimes to the concern of solemn brethren, would not altogether be suppressed. He was in much request to address large gatherings of Children, Sunday School Anniversaries, Conferences of Sunday School Teachers and Children's Workers. He had a flair for the composing and presentation of Gospel Object Lessons, and did much to popularise this now familiar method of presenting Gospel truth to young minds. He also took part in general ministry at Christian Conferences in all parts of Great Britain and Ireland. To such preaching labours he gave the years of his strength ungrudgingly.

In 1922 he moved his home to London, and was associated with the Assembly at Grove Green Hall, Leytonstone.

Whilst he wrote a good deal, tracts and articles from his pen gaining a wide acceptance, it is probably true that his most valuable literary work was done

### As an Editor.

It may be recalled that *The Witness* was originally *The Northern Witness*, and was founded by Donald Ross, pioneer evangelist, and its first editor, in 1870. Mr. J. R. Caldwell succeeded him in 1876, and the name of the magazine was changed in 1887. On Mr. Caldwell's retirement, Mr. Pickering succeeded him as editor in 1914. This was his best-loved work, and he continued it up to the very close of his life. An evidence of the conspicuous success of his labours has been the growth of the circulation of the magazine, until now it is around 30,000 copies per month.

Other monthly magazines under his editorship have been *Boys & Girls*, *The Believer's Pathway*, *The Herald of Salvation*, *The Christian Graphic*, and *The Evangelist*. A great many volumes for the furnishing of Christian workers have been

compiled or edited by him. Some of these are, "Through Eye-gate to Heart-gate," "Bright Beams from the Blackboard," "A Thousand Tales Worth Telling," "A Thousand Wonderful Things About the Bible," and "One Hundred Twice-born Men." Some volumes of spiritual ministry, gathered from the pages of *The Witness* and from other sources are: "Soul Food," "Fresh Minted Gold," and "The Believers' Blue Book." He was interested in the history of the rise of the people called "Brethren," and edited a volume of short biographies of leaders among them, called "Chief Men Among the Brethren."

He was quite fearless in his championship of the truths of the Faith,

### A Modern Valiant-for-Truth,

and was outspoken with all plainness of speech. He stood for "the old paths" of evangelical and evangelistic Christianity, for the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, for all the distinctive and fundamental doctrines of the Christian revelation, nor ever wavered in his testimony to them nor in his stand for them against all comers.

There was a very human love of a joke in him, and when in reminiscent mood his memories of his preaching experiences were immensely entertaining. He once remarked that he would have liked

to write a book called "Fifty Years Among Brethren," but forbore lest passages in it might offend the canons of gravity. His love of little children was one of the most charming traits of his character. It never waned in him. Even when he had reached an age at which the chatter, noise, and ceaseless energy of small children become a trial, the years when "the grasshopper shall be a burden," he would pause in the midst of his writing to take up a child on his knee and amuse and interest the little one with sketches of impossible horses and policemen, or with explanations of the pictures in some periodical. The children instinctively responded and loved him straightway in return.

His simplicity of life remained unaffected by his business progress. He was staunchly loyal to the friends of his choice, firm in purpose and not to be turned aside once he had made up his mind as to the rightness of his course. Yet he knew how to be conciliatory when circumstances called for it. On one occasion the late Dr. A. T. Schofield wrote a strongish letter of complaint about some matter. Mr. Pickering replied, and at once came another note from the Doctor, beginning, "Dear



DONALD ROSS.  
First Editor of "The Witness."

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Pickering, you are a master of the soft answer."

He passionately believed in the simple mode of gathering beloved and followed by the Assemblies, and so long as physical strength was granted he was never willingly absent from the Lord's Table on the morning of the Lord's day.

His home was a centre of ever ready Christian hospitality. Many of the Lord's servants, missionaries, evangelists, and teachers were entertained there for longer or shorter periods, and he and Mrs. Pickering took pleasure in rendering this good service. They delighted to befriend young folks, who, arriving from the country, found themselves strangers in a great city, and many letters have been received acknowledging such kindnesses and telling how much they meant to those who received them.

The marriage of Mr. Pickering to Miss Mary Johnstone, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, took place in 1887, and through the 53 years that have elapsed since then she has been the devoted partner of his life and service. She survives him, and there are four children: Mrs. Chas. E. Stokes, now serving the Lord at Johnston Falls, Northern Rhodesia; Mr. Cecil Pickering and Miss Mabel Pickering, who have been associated with the business many years; and Mrs. Scott-Mitchell.

It is not for us to appraise

### The Service he Rendered

to his Lord. The Day shall declare it. Yet we may believe that the influence of his life was even greater than is immediately apparent. His preaching labours during a long and strenuous stretch of years in a moving-about ministry, his services among the young (for which he was so specially gifted), his influence in inspiring with fresh zeal Sunday School Teachers and Children's Workers, his general ministry in the Assembly and at Conferences; his editorial labours, impressing a character of Scriptural soundness upon the publications he controlled, his written ministry, reaching far and wide, touching young and old; his books furnishing workers with ideas, his tracts with their straight appeal to the unconverted, his articles instructing and encouraging thousands of readers—all these must have had beneficent spiritual results in a multitude of souls. Add to this the inestimable spiritual effect of the constant stream of Christian publications loyal to the Scriptures and setting forth "the Word of the truth

of the Gospel" that has flowed from the presses of the firm he founded into many lands, a stream of living waters, and it becomes more apparent that his was a service of breadth and scope. Echoes and evidences of the Divine blessing on labours long ago were constantly reaching him. Only a few days before he died came a letter from a well-known evangelist containing this passage: "I recall when I was newly converted, some 38 years ago, hearing you speak in a tent at Craigneuk on the Ethiopian Eunuch, and that day I saw it was my duty and privilege to obey the Lord in baptism. Your message so thrilled me that I have never forgotten it, and I am only one of thousands who have been helped by your ministry."

Early last year he had a serious illness from which he never fully recovered, and gradually his strength diminished. When the intensified air raids on London commenced it was thought advisable to move to Scotland. After spending a few weeks in the hospitable home of the family of his late partner, Mr. John Gray, he settled in Largs. The sure

### Hope of the Lord's Return

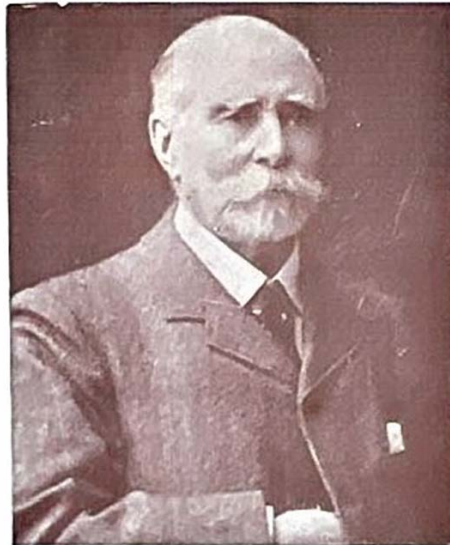
was dear to him. It was a frequent theme of his ministry, and the hymn which probably deserves to be called his favourite is Trevor Francis':

"I am waiting for the dawning  
Of that bright and blessed day,  
When the darksome night of sorrow  
Shall have vanished far away."

There was something peculiarly appropriate that he should have received his Home-call in Scotland, and near to the scenes where the best years of his manhood's strength and prime were spent in happy and strenuous Christian service.

He had desired that it might be given him to be among "them that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord," but it pleased God instead to appoint his lot with "the dead in Christ" who await the moment of their glorification on the other side. We know that they shall "rise first," and shall forfeit nothing of their joyful participation in the triumph of that Day.

So, on a hillside looking over the Firth of Clyde to where the sun sets over the Isles of Cumbrae and distant Arran, close by an old haunt of other days where he had preached to many a great open-air gathering, his body was laid to rest. By the open grave many of his old comrades-in-arms sang his hymn of hope. "Till the Day dawns." J. B. W.



J. R. CALDWELL,  
Second Editor of "The Witness."