

An Eye-Witness Account

by Br. Irving Carl Foss,
Elder of the Chicago Ecclesia in 1933

[Recorded for his granddaughter,
Alys Schneider, on 3/28/83]

Yes, it was about Aug. 1, 1933 that some of us left The Watch Tower Organization and started what is now The Chicago Bible Students Class. Prior to this, some Brethren (previously associated with Brother Russell) had left at different times and intervals for various reasons. The first was probably when Judge Rutherford refused to follow the instructions left by Brother Russell as to how the Watch Tower Society was to be operated in the event of Brother Russell's death. This was really the starting of the Pastoral Bible Institute.

Then gradually the new Watch Tower Society (under Rutherford) changed many previously-held-to scriptural doctrines, one of which affected three parables having to do with the Harvest periods of three Ages—namely the Jewish Age Harvest, the Gospel Age Harvest and the Millennial Age Harvest, respectively: The parable of the Wheat and Chaff, applicable to the Jewish Harvest; the parable of the Wheat and Tares, applicable to the Gospel Age Harvest; and then, finally, the parable of the Sheep and Goats, applicable to the Millennial Age Harvest.

Somewhere around 1919, a Tower article under Rutherford's regime made application of the Sheep & Goats to around that current period, around 1918-1919, giving the Watch Tower Organization the authority to decide that all who opposed to and would not follow that organization were of the Goat Class, whereas those who concurred with that organization were of the Sheep, and a number of Brethren left on that account.

Of course, the Judge attempted gradually and positively to bring all Bible Students' classes under his thumb, but it was difficult to get the Chicago Class fully under control.

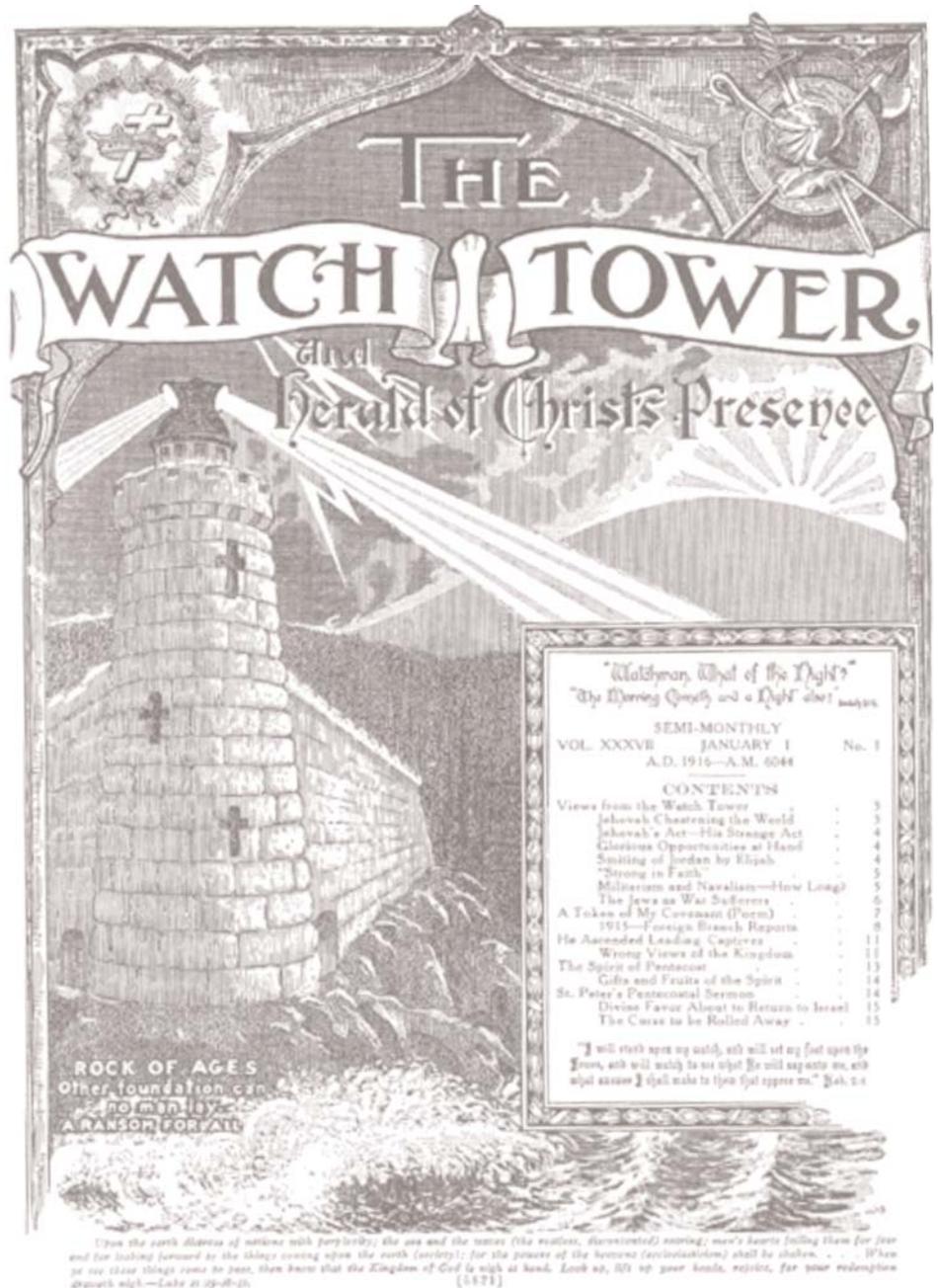
So it seemed to dawn on Rutherford, that officers in the United States Armed Forces had certain training to keep people subservient, and there apparently were certain ones that accepted the Watch Tower doctrines and theories. Possibly three or four such previously Armed Forces individuals were found and sent to Chicago to get them fully under Headquarters' Brooklyn control.

The first two didn't have the best success. Later about in 1920 the Pastoral Bible group seemed to have some success in getting some Brethren to see the error of Rutherford's way, and including a number in the Polish Class. They had conventions in Chicago largely fostered by the Polish Brethren, and some of the English Brethren attended some of those annual conventions, but not the entire English Chicago Class, but some.

With this in mind, about 1930, the newly-appointed Service Director from Brooklyn Headquarters (a previously Armed Forces Major officer) was sent to Chicago. By this time, there were, in addition to the Chicago English Class, a Black Class, a Swedish Class, a German Class, etc., all quite satisfactorily under Rutherford's domination. This Armed Forces Service Director, whom I will refer to as "GO,"* was well accepted by these other-than-English Classes, and measurably so by the English Class.

"GO" evidently reported in great detail how the English Class elders were doing many things not approved by Rutherford. Rutherford then replied to these charges. (It would appear no one else in Chicago ever knew of the charges.) Finally, in 1933, Rutherford wrote to "GO" giving instructions as to what to do—namely, "To Wit" this, and "To Wit" that. "GO" informed other-than-English Classes of such reply by Rutherford. Being fully in harmony with the Rutherford Organization, they were influenced completely thereby.

After the stage was all set, "GO" informed these other classes that they would do what Rutherford wanted, and notified them all that, on a certain designated date, they would have a business meeting of all the Chicago Classes at the English Class meeting place to bring the matter up with the idea in mind of getting all Chicago Brethren to indicate full support of the Rutherford Organization. On the date decided, such a business meeting was held, well attended.



This meeting proved to be the final break. “GO” chaired the meeting and, of course, the six or seven classes (whatever number it was) other than the Chicago English Class pretty well with him and under his influence. Whatever “GO” said was taken for absolute Gospel Truth. After suitable opening remarks, “GO” read the instructions from Rutherford, which began approximately with words to this effect: — “Replying to your letter re conditions in the Chicago Class, my reply is as follows—etc., etc., to wit, etc.”

After finishing with Rutherford’s reply, one of the English Class elders asked “GO” if it wouldn’t be fair and of interest to the English Chicago Class Brethren to know exactly what the charges against their elders were that “GO” had sent to Rutherford. This he said he couldn’t do because he had no such letter, the impression being given that no such letter had ever been written. That same Chicago English elder then asked would he just read the beginning of Rutherford’s reply, and this same elder then said, “Rutherford says, ‘In reply to your letter,’ and you say there never was such a letter.”

Three or four of the Chicago English Class elders knew things were not right between the Class and Rutherford, and they had discussed it among themselves from time to time prior to this meeting (beforehand). So, while this meeting was going on, they left the meeting to look for a suitable place where they could call a meeting at some early future date for all who were unhappy at the turn and nature of this meeting. They returned shortly, possibly an hour or two, while the meeting was still in force, and they had found a suitable meeting place at 1016 N. Dearborn Street.



Charles Taze Russell, 7th Messenger

While the meeting was still going on, the aforesaid English Class elder got up and made an announcement that such a meeting would be held for all who were not in harmony with “GO”s’ method and objects. “GO,” the chairman, said he wouldn’t make such an announcement. The aforesaid English Class elder (who had been more or less the spokesman for the opposition) said he did not request “GO” to make such an announcement, as he himself had already made the announcement.

The next Sunday at the announced place sixty brethren attended, and immediately they decided to start a separate class and elected elders and officers. Possibly three or four who attended this meeting did go back to the “GO” organization the next Sunday, but gradually others who did not attend this first meeting became regular attendants at the newly-formed class, and later some of them were elected elders and officers. That first meeting, I believe, was August 1, 1933.

*Gene Orrell