January 2012 Signs of the Times Newsletter

The Signs of the Times newsletter is a collection of stories and quotes from past issues of Signs and These Times.

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Let me tell you about Noble Alexander, a twentieth-century hero of faith. His government would have left him alone had he lived his faith silently. But no, the young layman insisted on leading people to Jesus. So they imprisoned him as a plantado—a rebel against the revolution.

Noble’s ordeal began innocently enough. One day the police pulled over his car and politely requested, “Would you mind coming with us to headquarters? We’ll only keep you five minutes.”

Those five minutes turned into 22 years of suffering I cannot describe. For 42 days they tortured him. Then they starved him for six weeks, demanding that he abandon Jesus Christ.

And after Noble refused to work on the Sabbath, they plunged him, with his Adventist friends, into a pool of raw sewage. Four Sabbaths in a row they worshiped God, up to their chins in that slime, singing hymns of praise. Finally the guards let them keep the Sabbath in peace.

Somehow Noble smuggled a Bible into the prison, and every night the prisoners gathered for worship. Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists prayed together and sang together, united by their common faith in Christ.

Noble Alexander remained confined until 1984, when Jesse Jackson negotiated his release and deportation to the United States. He became a pastor for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New England.—By George Vandeman, Signs of the Times, June 1991. (The incredible story of Nobel Alexander is available in his book—I Will Die Free—available online: http://www.adventistbookcenter.com/Detail.tpl?sku=0816310440 Order online or from your local Adventist Book Center--1-800-765-6955.)

Quote: “The greater the ignorance the greater the dogmatism.”—By Sir William Osler, 19th-century Canadian professor of medicine, Signs of the Times, August 1991.

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Don’t miss the February 2012 issue of Signs of the Times: “6 Time-Saving Strategies for Healthy Family Meals,” “Imagine Heaven,” “These Changin’ Times,” “The Devil’s Door into Spiritualism,” “Pursued by Grace,” and other important articles.

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It is said that once when Sir Michael Costa was having a rehearsal with a vast array of performers and hundreds of voices, as the mighty chorus rang out with the thunder of the organ, and roll of drums, and sounding horns, and cymbals clashing, a man who played the piccolo far away up in some corner said within himself, “In all this din it matters not what I do!” and so ceased to play.

Suddenly the great conductor stopped, flung up his hands, and all was still—and then he cried aloud, “Where is the piccolo?” The quick ear missed it, and all was spoiled because it failed to take its part.

O my soul, do thy part with all thy might! Little thou mayest be, insignificant and hidden, and yet God seeks thy praise, He listens for it, and all the music of His great universe is made richer and sweeter because thou givest Him thanks.—By Mark Guy Pearse, These Times, December 1961.

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NEW from Pacific Press—The Great Controversy Countdown. To understand the great controversy theme is to peek behind the curtains at what is really happening in the ongoing war between good and evil, between life and death, between God and Satan. The Great Controversy Countdown is a study guide for tracing this theme through Ellen White’s Conflict of the Ages series. These thirteen lessons will expand your understanding of this precious truth as well as give you the confidence to share it with others.

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As people face tough times and discouraging moments, there is nothing like a letter to lift the spirits. Unlike an ordinary conversation, a note can be put away and then read and reread many times over.

A great note writer was the late Art Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team. In 1968 one of the new players was Rocky Bleier. After his first season Bleier was drafted by the army and soon found himself as an infantryman sent to Vietnam. There, uncertain that he would ever again play football, Bleier was pleasantly surprised to receive a handwritten postcard from Rooney, which read: “Rock, Team’s not doing well. Hope things are going better for you than they are here. Looking forward to having you back with us. Art.”

During Bleier’s tour in Vietnam, Rooney continued to send cards, newspaper clippings, and game programs. When a hand grenade exploded, shattering Bleier’s right foot, he was told that he would never play football again. However, Rooney continued to send notes of encouragement. One was received while Bleier was in a Tokyo hospital. “Rock, we want you here in Pittsburgh with the Steelers.”

Those cards fueled Bleier’s determination to play professional football again. Indeed, he did return to the Pittsburgh Steelers, helping them win the Super Bowl in 1975. Bleier did not retire from the team until 1980.—By Victor Parachin, Signs of the Times, February 1991.

Quote: “God is still running the world, so be patient.”—By Charles G. Bellah, Signs of the Times, April 15, 1930.

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“How much am I offered for this violin?” It was the stentorian voice of the auctioneer. A sale of household effects was in progress, and a number of persons had gathered about, some desirous of making a purchase of some sort, others with an idle curiosity to see what was to be seen.

“How much am I offered, gentlemen, for this violin?” he shouted, holding aloft the instrument, turning it around and around that the people might have a look at it.

But his hearers were not interested; there was no bid, so he called again, “How much am I offered? Won’t someone start me on this fine old instrument?”

“Twenty-five dollars,” squeaked a voice from the crowd.

“Twenty-five dollars!” snorted the auctioneer, as though in disgust, “only twenty-five dollars! Why, man, what are you thinking of? This is a Cremona, and I’m offered only twenty-five dollars—the very ideal!”

No one spoke.

“Well, twenty-five dollars will do for a start. Who will raise it?” urged the auctioneer.

“Fifty dollars,” came from the crowd.

“Fifty dollars I am offered; and a new man in the field. Who’ll make it a hundred?” called the auctioneer.
But there was no response.

“Gentlemen, what are you thinking of? Come and examine this instrument for yourselves; it is in good condition, a genuine Cremona, and we’re only at fifty dollars. Make a bid, somebody; we can’t tarry; won’t somebody make it one hundred? Fifty I’m offered, only fifty; fifty dollars once, fifty dollars twice—down it’ll go! Fair warning! Fifty dollars—all I’m offered for this violin!”

Nobody spoke; the bidder stood listening; others were indifferent.

The auctioneer spoke again. “Are you going to let a chance like this go by? Remember, gentlemen, this instrument is genuine; look for yourselves. We can’t wait—make it seventy-five then.”

There was silence again.

“All done, then; fair warning. Going at fifty dollars; going—going—”

“Let me try the violin, please,” came a voice from the crowd, and a man with a velvet cloak made his way to the auctioneer’s block, and the sale stayed.

The instrument was handed to the stranger, who raised the bow, and began to play a few measures. All sounds were hushed as they harked to the harmonies and marvelous melodies. When he paused, no one spoke—not even the auctioneer. Then the musician quietly announced, “Five hundred dollars.”

There was a silence.

“Sold!” announce the auctioneer, as he brought down his hammer, and breathlessly the crowd watched the purchaser depart with his treasure under his arm.

Someone whispered, “Paganini!” and the word went forth from mouth to mouth, “Paganini! Paganini!”

The master musician played in the great hall again that evening before the crowd that thronged to hear him; and he used the Cremona, purchased that afternoon for five hundred dollars. Its value was unrecognized until a master hand had played; then it responded, and the pent-up sounds poured forth in liquid cadences to charm and to cheer.

Let the Master Hand control the chords of your life.—By Louise Towris, Signs of the Times, December 12, 1939.

Quote: “No language is so international as love.”—By Lady Astor, Signs of the Times, January 6, 1931.

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2012 Doomsday or Distraction is a special issue of Signs of the Times that can be shared with friends. Many theories abound as to what may happen on December 21, 2012. This Signs special issue addresses these questions and provides biblically sound answers as to what we can expect when the “end of the world” does come. For a FREE sample copy, send your name and address to: dalgal@pacificpress.com before January 15, 2012.

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It is said of Charlemagne that he was proud of his power, wealth, and influence, for had he not extended his sway over a great part of the world? At his own request he was buried as he had lived—in regal splendor. He was arrayed in his beautiful robes of state; a crown lavishly decked with precious jewels was placed upon his cold brow; the royal scepter reposed in one clammy hand, while in the other were loosely clasped the parchments that proclaimed him ruler of his vast dominions. Lastly, his lifeless body was seated on his great ivory throne, and Charlemagne was placed in the royal vault.

Years later the tomb was opened, and what a different sight met the eyes! Time had humbled the haughty monarch. The regal crown had fallen over a fleshless shoulder bone; the golden scepter had slipped from the dead sovereign’s hand, and now lay in a pile of dust—all that was left of the royal robes and parchment. A few bones and some heaps of dust were all that remained of one who had put his trust in his own frail strength. Hundreds of years ago, one of royal descent, sensing the transient character of power and wealth, said: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.” Psalm 146:3.—By Robert H. Pierson, Signs of the Times, October 18, 1938.

Quote: “Great explorers do not merely add to the sum of human knowledge, but also they add immensely to the sum of human inspiration.”—By Herbert Hoover, Signs of the Times, August 5, 1930.

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Six weeks before he died, Elvis Presley was asked by a reporter, “Elvis, when you started playing music, you said you wanted three things in life: You wanted to be rich, you wanted to be famous, and you wanted to be happy. Are you happy, Elvis?”

Elvis replied that he was lonely.

Quote: “If Christ had our whole hearts, if we were entirely His, we should be more peaceful, happy and holy.”—Unknown, Signs of the Times, May 3, 1877.

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A group of missionaries on tour in India came to a region where there were no mission churches, no hospitals, no Christian schools; and yet among the people there seemed to dwell a spirit of love and brotherhood. By means of an interpreter the visitors began to tell of the life of Jesus and His purpose among men, of His power to save from sin and elevate life to its highest and best. To their great surprise, as the story unfolded, those who listened began to nod in agreement and to speak to one another in happy, eager voices. Presently one of them said confidently, “We know Him. He passed this way. He dwelt among us for a whole year.”

“Ah, no,” answered the missionaries. “He of whom we speak lived in the flesh almost two thousand years ago; and now, although we cannot see Him, He comes to us in the Spirit.

The members of the community, however, persisted in their declaration: “We know Him; He dwelt among us.”

As the touring group went on, each new village bore the same testimony. They had not known that the man’s name was Jesus, but they knew of a certainty that He had passed that way.

After several weeks of doubt and bewilderment on the part of the missionaries, they finally heard the story of a quiet man of God who, twenty-five years before, had indeed so lived among these people in the spirit of Christ that when they heard the story of the Master a quarter of a century later, they felt certain that they had seen Jesus.

This shaken, doubting, questing world needs disciples like that today.—By Alice Crone Twilley, These Times, July 1954.

Quote: “I said to a man who stood at the gate of the year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown,’” and he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way.”—By M. Louise Haskins, These Times, January 1961.

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