

New Year's honours—Editorial

HERE IN THE United Kingdom, the start of each year sees the publication of a list of awards for people deemed to have contributed to public life in some way. The tradition dates from the middle ages, when kings and queens marked New Year, and their birthdays, by giving (and receiving) gifts. In this way, the monarch was able to demonstrate who was in particular favour, and presumably also who was not. Awards range from a life peerage, carrying with it voting rights in the House of Lords, to a humble M.B.E. medal for perhaps a local charity worker or a school lollipop lady. The fortunate recipients receive their awards at an investiture ceremony, usually at Buckingham Palace in London, from the Queen or a member of her family. Doubtless it is a day every recipient remembers for the rest of his or her life.

Over the years, I have occasionally heard rumours of Christadelphians being nominated for an honour. Indeed, a brother or sister who has worked in the civil service might expect to be offered a 'gong' fairly routinely. What I have never heard of, however, is a Christadelphian accepting such an honour. Surely this is right.

An argument might be advanced that a disciple of Christ who has served faithfully in a given role merits recognition just as much as another man. The principles of diligence and faithfulness which we have learned from Scripture and see in the Lord Jesus, if put into practice in our own lives, may well lead to us enjoying a measure of 'success,' humanly speaking. Such was the case during the Second World War, when some employers specifically requested more Christadelphian conscientious objectors for their workforce, because they had acquired such a reputation for hard work. What greater opportunity could there be, we might think, for showing to the world what our faith means to us in practice? Would not the occasional knighthood or some other honour present us with a wonderful preaching opportunity?

Amongst Scriptural precedents, however, there seems to be a near-universal pattern for us to follow. Certainly there are examples of men of God being raised to extremely high position in the kingdoms of men—Daniel and Joseph spring immediately to mind. "According to all your command," Pharaoh told Joseph, "all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be

greater than you" (Gen. 41:40*). Joseph, wearing Pharaoh's own signet ring and invested with a golden chain (v. 42), was in effective control of all Egypt, with Pharaoh apparently leaving Joseph to get on with the job. Yet in no way was this praise he sought for himself; rather, his new-found status was something God brought about to save Joseph's family and ensure, in the long run, the fulfilment of His promises to the fathers, as Joseph himself appreciated (see 45:7).

Daniel, advanced to equally high rank by both Babylon and Medo-Persia, seems to crave obscurity: consider how many times people have to go *looking for* him, presumably because he has chosen life out of the limelight as soon as the task in hand has been completed. He responds almost scornfully when King Belshazzar offers him unequalled power in exchange for interpreting the writing on the wall: "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else" (Dan. 5:17). When Abraham is offered all the spoils of battle, he too leaves the king of Sodom in no doubt as to his mind on the matter: "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich'" (Gen. 14:22,23). And in like vein Moses declines even the chance of royal status in a conscious act of self-sacrifice, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:24,25).

These, it seems to me, are the examples we ought to keep in mind when we find ourselves with opportunities of status and position in this world. Few of us are likely ever to be invited to a Palace investiture; but the shallow glory of human life takes many forms, and temptations a-plenty come our way in everyday experience. What motivates the disciple of Christ is the hope (as Paul puts it) not of "a crown that will not last" but of "a crown that will last for ever" (1 Cor. 9:25, NIV). This the Lord guarantees to all those who love and serve him faithfully; and the start of another year, which—we pray with all our hearts—may see his coming, is perhaps a good time for us to reflect on whether this is the kind of honour we desire above all other.—*Jeremy Thomas*

* Quotations from the NASB unless stated otherwise.