

J. Roswell Flower, portrait, ca. 1925

# J. Roswell Flower: Pentecostal Servant and Statesman

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By David Ringer

J. Roswell Flower, elected at age 25 to serve as the first General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, was one of the most prominent leaders in the Fellowship in its first four decades. Flower came to the United States from his native Canada at age thirteen. Six years later he became a Christian, fell in love and married his first and only sweetheart, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and started a life of ministry. During his forty-six years in active ministry in the Assemblies of God, Flower served in nearly every local, district, and national ministry position (except as general superintendent). He also provided leadership to national and international evangelical and Pentecostal associations, and he served his community as a civic, humanitarian, and political leader. When Flower died in 1970, Thomas F. Zimmerman declared, "... the name of J. Roswell Flower was synonymous with the Assemblies of God."<sup>1</sup>

## Childhood

Joseph James Roswell Flower (he later dropped the name "James") was born in Belleview, Ontario, Canada, June 17, 1888, to a Methodist couple, George L. and Bethia A. Flower. J. Roswell's parents longed for a deeper walk with Jesus Christ and desired to find a community of like-minded believers who sought holiness and the power of God. They heard about Zion City, Illinois, a city founded on Christian principles by Scottish faith healer John Alexander Dowie. They moved to Zion City in 1902 but soon grew disillusioned with Dowie and his followers. They relocated to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1904.<sup>2</sup>

While the family was in Zion City, J. Roswell played cornet in the local band, took a stenography course, had a rowboat adventure with a friend<sup>3</sup>, and was baptized in water. He did not, however, give his heart to Christ.<sup>4</sup> In Indianapolis, his parents began attending a Christian and Missionary Alliance congregation. Like the Flowers, members of the church sought deeper communion with Christ and desired to become more useful in building the Kingdom of God. The Charles Reynolds family also attended the small church. Charles Reynolds' daughter,

Alice Marie Reynolds, would later play a significant role in J. Roswell's life. In January 1907, many in the congregation welcomed Glenn Cook, who had just arrived from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, which was a focal point of the emerging Pentecostal movement. Cook proclaimed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which would make a deep impact upon the Flower family.<sup>5</sup>

## A Spiritual Awakening

When the Pentecostal message came to Indianapolis, J. Roswell was approaching his nineteenth birthday. His parents' moves and changes in churches, combined with a growing disinterest in spiritual matters, left him careless about church attendance. However, the reports by his parents of the Pentecostal meetings piqued his curiosity, and one Sunday afternoon he dropped into the meeting on his way home from a photography job. He later recalled that believers at that small mission "found themselves prostrated, seized with strong weepings as their souls were laid bare."<sup>6</sup> What he witnessed convinced him of the reality of God. By the middle of April 1907, J. Roswell had accepted Christ. While his salvation experience was a quiet act of faith, one week later he had a powerful experience when he decided to surrender everything to Christ. He described this experience:

A week later I went down to the altar – for sanctification, I thought – laid all on the altar as best I knew how. When I claimed Him as my sanctifier, something dropped down into my soul! I was filled with ecstasy such as I had never known before. I ran home and retired – fearful lest it should be gone in the morning. But it wasn't! In the morning the assurance was still there. The peace, the satisfaction of being truly a blood-washed son of God.<sup>7</sup>

Over the next two years, Flower sought to grow spiritually. Pentecostals commonly taught that the Christian life included three important experiences — salvation, sanctifi-

cation, and baptism in the Holy Spirit. Teachings concerning the latter two experiences varied. Sanctification refers to the believer becoming more Christ-like. Pentecostals also recognized that Scripture identified a separate experience, called the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which gave believers a supernatural ability to witness. Charles Parham's position that speaking in tongues is the "Bible evidence" (later termed "initial physical evidence") of Spirit baptism came to be widespread through its acceptance by William J. Seymour and promulgation through the Azusa revival.<sup>8</sup> It was this doctrine that Glenn Cook preached in Indianapolis and which was accepted by J. Roswell Flower.

Now that he was "saved" and "sanctified," J. Roswell began to seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He continued to be active with other young people in evangelistic activities, but he seemed unable to receive the "baptism" with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This caused the young Christian and budding preacher great angst. He recorded in his diary his emotional ups and downs as he struggled to yield to the Lord and how he longed for the fullness of the Spirit.

In March 1909 he visited the Faith Home in St. Louis operated by Mother Moise and Mother Barnes.<sup>9</sup> This was a stopover on his way to Kansas City to help another Pentecostal pioneer, A. S. Copley, with evangelism campaigns. There in St. Louis, Flower had an unusual experience. In prayer, he sensed that he was traveling a parallel path to the Lord. If he were to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he would need to face the Lord and by faith receive the gift. He stood up from his kneeling position, turned to "face" the Lord, and claimed by faith the baptism, just as he had claimed his salvation and sanctification by faith. However, he did not speak in tongues as he believed he would — tongues being the physical evidence of having been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Two or three weeks later he spoke a word or two in tongues, and then nothing

for months. He became discouraged and later in the summer replied to a questioner about his baptism that he had not received it.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after his denial, Chicago Pentecostal editor Anna Reiff rebuked him in a prophetic declaration saying, "You have received the Holy Ghost. You cannot tell the Lord what to do, when you should speak in tongues." Repenting of his unbelief, he received a great blessing of joy and overflowing praise — but no tongues! Reiff's word steadied him, and Flower held on to the experience he had in St. Louis in March as his Baptism.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1910 a woman had an epileptic seizure while J. Roswell was preaching. He immediately left the pulpit and prayed for her deliverance, which was answered. Sometime later when he replied to yet another ques-

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— J. Roswell Flower in  
his diary, about  
Alice Reynolds**

tioner that he had the baptism but had not spoken in tongues, some people who had heard his prayer for deliverance for the woman with the epileptic seizure told him he was wrong. To J. Roswell's surprise, they told him that his prayer had been in tongues. He accepted their witness, but discounted it for himself as he was not conscious of praying in tongues.<sup>12</sup>

In July of 1910, some sixteen months

after he claimed his baptism by faith, he heard himself pray in tongues. It came at a summer camp near Indianapolis as he prayed with a burdened woman. In intense intercession for her, he suddenly became aware that he was praying in tongues and as he did so, glory filled his soul with unspeakable joy.<sup>13</sup>

Flower's unusual experiences did not change his theology. He steadfastly held to and taught through the years that speaking in tongues is the *biblical* initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Bible, not experience, establishes doctrine. Flower warned the Fellowship not to "let down" on this Bible truth.<sup>14</sup>

### Love Blossoms

One of the first persons to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Indianapolis was Alice Marie Reynolds. J. Roswell's parents were with her at the mission at that event on Easter Sunday, 1908. When J. Roswell met the 17-year-old high school senior some weeks later, he was smitten and began falling in love with her. After his conversion, he joined the young people at services and various activities, including evangelism and outings to area parks. He felt much inferior to Reynolds because he was not as well educated as she. Nonetheless, they shared a love for poetry and nature. Together on one of the young peoples' outings, they experienced a deeply mystical union with nature and reflected on the significance of nature for human life.<sup>15</sup>

On more than one occasion Alice read poetry to J. Roswell, and they sometimes quoted poems to each other from memory. Two years later he was hopelessly in love with her but did not know how to proceed. He confided to his diary, "I love her! I love her! I simply cannot help it. Every time I come in her presence I am a goner. I am up against it and dare hardly think where it will end."<sup>16</sup> By this time, Alice was in her second semester at Butler College (now Butler University) and J. Roswell

had discontinued reading law with a local attorney in order to engage in full-time ministry.

J. Roswell traveled to minister in Greensburg, Indiana, in early 1910. Alice and some others came to assist in the effort. On the morning of February 22, 1910, as J. Roswell and Alice ate breakfast together, he asked for her hand in marriage and she said, “Yes.”<sup>17</sup> Approaching his twenty-second birthday, he wanted to get married that summer. However, Alice’s father urged caution, as neither had jobs nor much experience in life. Mr. Reynolds wanted them to postpone marriage one year and first prove themselves in ministry and life, to which Alice and J. Roswell reluctantly agreed.

### A Budding Minister

J. Roswell did not mope over the delay in his wedding plans; he instead began to engage in evangelism and Bible teaching in various parts of southern Indiana. When Glenn Cook left the mission in Indianapolis, the members received J. Roswell as their pastor. After a few months, he left the Indianapolis area and traveled in Ohio, West Virginia, and western Indiana for four to five months as an itinerant evangelist. Alice also stayed busy, actively engaging in ministry with other young people. Mr. Reynolds believed that the young couple had proven themselves and allowed the children to marry on June 1, 1911. That morning J. Roswell went to pick up the marriage license and the clerk asked him what source of income he had to support a wife. Flower answered, “Philippians 4:19,” and explained that he was trusting God to meet their needs. The clerk passed the story on to one of the Indianapolis newspapers which ran a brief piece that evening, quoting the verse in full for its readers unfamiliar with the Scripture!<sup>18</sup>

Just over one year after his conversion, Flower began another key element of his life’s ministry — writing and editing. He began publishing a small maga-



**J. Roswell Flower standing outside with his wife, Alice, at Stanton, Missouri, July 1927.**

zine, *The Pentecost*, in August 1908. He later gave the magazine to A. S. Copley, who changed the title to *Grace and Glory* in 1911. J. Roswell and Alice, two years into their marriage, began publishing another paper, the *Christian Evangel* (now *Pentecostal Evangel*).<sup>19</sup> The first issue was dated July 19, 1913. This publication joined the growing ranks of the Pentecostal press; other periodicals such as *Word and Witness* (published by E. N. Bell) and the *Bridegroom’s Messenger* (started by G. B. Cashwell) already had broad circulation. However, the *Christian Evangel* was the first weekly Pentecostal periodical.

The *Christian Evangel* featured articles about doctrine, news reports, and other church matters. J. Roswell believed that the story of the modern-day movement of the Holy Spirit should be made available to all Pentecostal saints. Toward that end, he collected and published testimonies and reports from Pentecostal workers around the world. The *Christian Evangel* also included the earliest known weekly Pentecostal Sunday school curriculum, which was written by Alice.

Following the organization of the General Council in April 1914, the Flowers and Bell turned their magazines over to the Assemblies of God. Both papers continued in circulation and

became the official magazines of the Fellowship. The two periodicals merged in January 1916 under the title *Christian Evangel*.<sup>20</sup>

In the summer of 1913, J. Roswell helped to form a regional Pentecostal fellowship of churches in Indiana and in other Midwest states called the Association of Christian Assemblies. David Wesley Myland, a longtime friend and former leader in the Christian and Missionary Alliance, was the primary leader of this new group. Flower realized that cooperative fellowship among the multiple and fragmented Pentecostal groups would enhance their ability to support missions across the world. Many saints opposed the creation of a denomination, so the key to uniting the various Pentecostal believers was to maintain local freedom while providing some centralized guidance on questions of doctrine and practice, in particular for ministers.<sup>21</sup> Flower also was deeply concerned that Pentecostals maintain a scriptural standard for both faith and behavior.

### Early Leadership

Flower’s experience as a publisher, minister, and organizer, in addition to his high regard for Scripture and local church autonomy, placed him in good stead at the April 1914 organizational

meeting for the General Council of the Assemblies of God, where he was elected the first general secretary at the young age of 25. E. N. Bell — the first chairman of the Assemblies of God (the office was renamed general superintendent in 1927) — differed greatly in age and background in comparison with Flower. Bell was 48 years old, he was a graduate of the University of Chicago School of Divinity, he was a Southerner, he married late in life (at age 43), and his ministry was basically that of an individual. Despite these differences, Flower and Bell shared remarkably similar perspectives on the Pentecostal movement and the nature of a “cooperative fellowship.” Their early leadership set key principles and policies that guided the Assemblies of God for several decades.<sup>22</sup> However, a theological dispute over the doctrine of the Trinity strained their relationship greatly.

Bell initially threw his support to the emerging Oneness movement before it rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. In the summer of 1915, Bell was rebaptized in water using the formula “in the



**J. Roswell Flower (left) and E. N. Bell (right), ca. 1920.**

name of Jesus” rather than the traditional Trinitarian formulation. Bell also submitted an article for publication in

the *Pentecostal Evangel* which included the phrase, “Jesus Christ, rediscovered as the Jehovah of the Old Testament.”<sup>23</sup> Flower edited the article, replacing the word “rediscovered” with “being exalt-

**J. Roswell perceived early on that careful Bible study was crucial to the growth and stability of the Pentecostal movement.**

ed” so that it did not seem like Bell discovered a new truth.<sup>24</sup> Soon after this time Bell’s Trinitarianism became clear, but it was Flower’s staunch support of Trinitarian orthodoxy that helped the young Fellowship to weather the doctrinal storm. When Bell died in the spring of 1923, J. Roswell eulogized him as “the sweetest, safest and sanest man I had ever met in Pentecost.”<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, Oneness doctrine spread widely in Pentecostal circles and came to a head at the 1916 General Council held in St. Louis. The Assemblies of God, up to that point, had not crafted a statement of faith. The Oneness challenge to historic Christian orthodoxy spurred Flower and others to more carefully define the faith. Delegates adopted the Statement of Fundamental Truths, which affirmed the Trinitarian view of the godhead. Oneness advocates departed from the Assemblies of God, and Bell, Flower, D. W. Kerr, and other church leaders could breathe a sigh of relief after months of upheaval.

J. Roswell and Alice decided they needed a change. They felt significant stress induced by the Oneness controversy, combined with the time and financial pressures of his other work responsibilities and the birth of their third child.

Flower did not stand for reelection as general secretary in 1916. He remained as Gospel Publishing House manager until 1918, when he resigned and moved his family to a farm at Stanton, Missouri, bringing his parents to live there also.<sup>26</sup> J. Roswell engaged in itinerant ministry and began a church in their home. Alice led services for the new congregation when he was away on the evangelistic circuit. J. Roswell was sometimes called back to the Assemblies of God headquarters in St. Louis to assist in various ways. One of his tasks was to visit Springfield, Missouri, and to appraise the proposed site for the new headquarters of the Assemblies of God. In 1919, Flower was chosen to serve as the first Foreign Missions Secretary.<sup>27</sup> The Flowers moved to Springfield, where they would remain until 1925.

Flower emphasized the importance of evangelism ever since his conversion. As Foreign Missions Secretary he admonished missionaries not to allow benevolence work to overshadow evangelism.<sup>28</sup> Still, he recognized that some forms of compassion ministry helped to lay a foundation for the long-term development of the church. For instance, in 1922 he urged *Pentecostal Evangel* readers to support a school in India as the best way to secure “greater and more permanent results for God.”<sup>29</sup>

Flower grew concerned that many missionaries going to the fields under General Council approval were unknown to national leaders in Springfield. The Missions Committee often approved missionaries based only on a local church recommendation and brief written correspondence with the missionary. In 1923 he proposed that all missionaries be required to spend a term at the recently formed Central Bible Institute in Springfield. This would give Council officials an opportunity to know the quality and character of the prospective missionaries, and those who were headed to the mission field would become better networked within the Fellowship.<sup>30</sup>



**Summer Bible school group at Maranatha Park, Green Lane, Pennsylvania, 1935. Alice and J. Roswell Flower are sitting in the second row, center.**

This proposal drew a storm of protests from West Coast leaders, especially those connected with Glad Tidings Bible Institute in San Francisco. General Chairman E. N. Bell stepped in to the fray to ameliorate the situation. Eventually, of course, Flower's concern was recognized and missionary candidates had to undergo a more thorough evaluation at the national level. But it was too late to save J. Roswell as Foreign Missions Secretary; he was not reelected at the 1923 General Council and instead became the Foreign Missions Treasurer. He was not reelected as Foreign Missions Treasurer in 1925.

### Pastoral and District Ministry

J. Roswell Flower spent the next decade in pastoral ministry and district leadership in the Northeast. In 1925, a few months after the birth of their sixth and final child, the Flowers left Missouri for pastoral ministry in Scranton, Pennsylvania.<sup>31</sup> J. Roswell practiced a full-orbed Pentecostal ministry: encouraging evangelism and revival; nurturing the spiritual growth of believers; practicing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including divine healing; and promoting and supporting missions. In 1927 he became a member of the Eastern District Council executive committee and the following year was elected district secretary. Two

years later, he became district superintendent and moved his family to Lititz, Pennsylvania, as a neutral location which had no established Pentecostal church.<sup>32</sup>

J. Roswell perceived early on that careful Bible study was crucial to the growth and stability of the Pentecostal movement. Even before the inaugural council, he and A. S. Copley planned a summer camp focused on the study of the Bible and its proper interpretation. The camp failed to materialize. J. Roswell supported the establishment of a "general Bible Training School with a literary department" as proposed in "The Call to Hot Springs" (the published invitation to organize the Assemblies of God).<sup>33</sup> He was part of the original faculty of Central Bible Institute, the national Assemblies of God school founded in Springfield in 1922.<sup>34</sup> During his decade in the Northeast, he became a regular lecturer at Bethel Bible Training School in New Jersey. Most importantly, he worked with Alice to establish a summer Bible school, located on the Eastern District campground, which was the forerunner of Valley Forge Christian College.<sup>35</sup>

Many people questioned the large sums of money being expended on the construction of new buildings on the campground as the Great Depression deepened and as the Lord's imminent

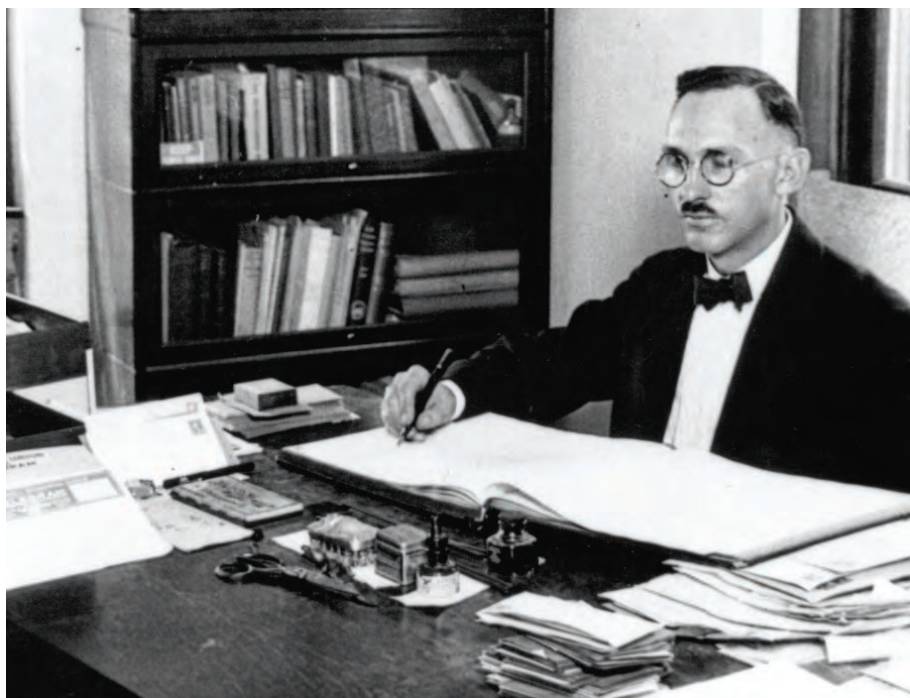
return seemed ever nearer. How could the district superintendent justify these expenditures? He responded that he was "led" to make these long-term plans even while he expected Christ's soon return. Furthermore, Flower believed that the camps would help to counteract a perceived decrease in dedication and an increase of worldliness among the saints. He believed that summer camps would provide an important venue for teaching, reviving, and directing new generations of Pentecostals.<sup>36</sup>

### Return to Springfield

In the spring of 1935 Flower publicly expressed doubts concerning whether he would continue as Eastern District superintendent. The financial strain on his family was great and he felt spiritually dry, finding little inspiration for continued leadership of the district. He was a non-resident Assistant General Superintendent, but he had no definite plan what to do next if he left the district office. It was with this unsettled



**J. Roswell Flower, portrait, with his wife, Alice Reynolds Flower, ca. 1935.**



**J. Roswell Flower as missionary treasurer, sitting behind his desk in 1924.**

frame of mind and set of circumstances that J. Roswell headed for Dallas, Texas, to attend the 1935 General Council. He preached the opening service of the Council, and delegates elected him to serve as general secretary-treasurer, the position he had held from 1914 to 1916.

The sermon that Flower preached at the 1935 General Council — titled “Back to Calvary” — grew out of his deep concern over what he perceived to be a spiritual decline in the Assemblies of God. The sermon was both a diagnosis of the ailment and a prescription for spiritual renewal. He feared that Pentecostals were in danger of neglecting Calvary, instead placing too much emphasis on things like spiritual gifts and eschatology. Flower was very clear — the heart of Pentecostal spirituality is not speaking in tongues or healing, but the power of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Election to national office obliged Flower and his family to move back to Springfield, Missouri. J. Roswell moved in January 1936. Alice and the two youngest children — Rossie and David, who were still in school — remained in Lititz for several months until the end of

the school year. The Flowers had four additional children who no longer lived at home — two boys and two girls. The two older girls were enrolled at Central Bible Institute. The next few months were emotionally and financially difficult for the Flower family. It was a joyful day when the parents and the two youngest children were united again in the same residence.

### Emergence of a Statesman

The Assemblies of God had grown significantly during the decade that Flower was away from Springfield. He was thrust upon a larger national stage as well as an international one. Flower traveled widely to Bible camps, district ordination ceremonies, and multiple speaking engagements. In the late 1930s, Europe moved toward war, Hitler and Mussolini rattled their sabers, and the Assemblies of God was rapidly expanding across the globe. In an effort to better understand the needs on the mission field, Flower and Missions Secretary Noel Perkin traveled aboard an Italian liner from August until December 1938, visiting Assemblies of God mis-

sion stations in Africa. When the United States was drawn into World War II in December 1941, Flower not only had to write numerous letters on behalf of Assemblies of God adherents who were conscientious objectors, but he also had to address the larger ethical and ecclesiastical issues raised by the war.

The ethical question about participating in the war effort, even as a non-combatant, had been present since World War I. Some Assemblies of God leaders were pacifists, others left the decision whether to participate in war up to the individual. In 1917 the Assemblies of God declared itself opposed to war and killing in war, which provided church members the basis upon which to claim conscientious objector status.<sup>38</sup> Flower made this distinction: the Fellowship was officially opposed to war, but individuals may choose as their conscience guided them. The absence of a tradition of ethical thought beyond the concept of personal sanctification hindered Flower and others from thinking carefully about peace questions.<sup>39</sup>

In 1940 J. Roswell started another periodical — a quarterly letter to inform ministers of news items, policy decisions, advocacy positions, and other General Council affairs.<sup>40</sup> It was through this letter that Flower informed ministers of the National Association of Evangelicals and argued that the Assemblies of God should join the new organization. Flower believed that the Assemblies of God should link arms with other Pentecostal, evangelical and Holiness churches in order to better address issues posed by the growing secularization of American life and the various government regulations attendant to the war effort. This was a principle Flower had noted from his early years in Indianapolis: cooperative efforts can accomplish more than individual ones. Flower opposed what he viewed as narrow sectarianism and instead worked to build bridges between believers with similar faith commitments.

European and North American

Pentecostals made various attempts between the two world wars to promote unity within Pentecostal ranks. After the end of World War II this goal was revived, resulting in the 1947 organization of the Pentecostal World Conference (PWC). Flower played important leadership roles in the PWC. At the 1955 PWC meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, he delivered an address, “The Genesis of the Pentecostal Movement,” that was so in demand that the Filadelfia Church in Stockholm mimeographed it the following day and promptly sold all copies, requiring a reprinting.<sup>41</sup>

Flower became a noted Pentecostal statesman. He played a key role in the 1948 formation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. He also became involved in civic leadership. He served on the boards of the Salvation Army and other organizations. He garnered a “Service to Mankind” award from the Sertoma Club. When the city of Springfield created a city council, many residents asked Flower to run for a council position. Flower consented, was elected, and served for several years. Judging by the number and range of letters received after his retirement and after his death, his friends were countless and his influence broad.

## Reflection and Education

Flower had long been interested in the history of Pentecostalism. As early as the early 1920s he had identified phases within the Movement. He placed it in the framework of a biblical interpretation of the history of redemption. He traced its roots to Parham and attributed its breadth to Azusa Street. He argued that the varied theological backgrounds among first generation Pentecostals produced differing understandings of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but that the experience was the same. To Flower, Pentecostalism was primarily an experience, not a specific theology. He argued that one might have a genuine heart experience of the Holy Spirit even if his or her head held wrong doctrine. This

approach allowed Flower to argue that many Oneness Pentecostals, despite their unorthodox view of the godhead, were genuinely saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit. He could then urge tolerance toward those who differed from the Assemblies of God.<sup>42</sup>

As the unofficial historian of the Assemblies of God, Flower taught the Pentecostal history class at Central Bible Institute. He wrote an “Orientation Manual” that provided students with an



**J. Roswell Flower speaking at the 1953 General Council.**

overview of the history of the Assemblies of God and the broader Pentecostal movement. He taught the course using his mimeographed manual from about 1950 until his retirement at the end of the decade. During these later years of service, Flower hired an assistant, Curtis Ringness, to help shoulder some of his responsibilities. Flower hoped to write a history of the Pentecostal movement with particular focus on the Assemblies of God. However, there was too much on his plate to accomplish that task. He settled for editing histories by Carl Brumback and Klaude Kendrick.

Flower felt self-conscious of his own limited formal education, lamenting in his diary that Alice was better educated than he. She had a high school diploma and one year of college. J. Roswell had passed the entrance examination to attend a Canadian high school the summer the family moved to Zion City, Illinois. But his family moved and he

never was able to attend high school. As a young believer Flower was influenced by A. B. Simpson, F. B. Myer, and D. Wesley Myland, all well-educated men. He once felt a “fluttering” in his brain, which he believed was God renewing his brain power to be able to think and learn.<sup>43</sup>

Flower achieved a high level of self-education, and he also urged others to continue to learn. He maintained a substantial personal library and regularly used the research library developed at the Gospel Publishing House. Flower’s ministry as a part-time Bible school teacher, beginning in the 1920s, naturally flowed from the love he developed for the life of the mind.<sup>44</sup> Flower was astute enough to recognize that Assemblies of God young people would need higher levels of education as the twentieth century wore on. Realizing that most of these young people would not enter full-time ministry, Flower, along with Ralph Riggs and others, began advocating for the establishment of an Assemblies of God liberal arts college. Undaunted by certain prominent Pentecostal leaders who vilified him for his advocacy of higher education, Flower supported the formation of Evangel College, which opened its doors in 1955.<sup>45</sup>

## Final Years

J. Roswell retired as general secretary at the end of 1959. However, he did not retire from ministry. In the fall of 1960 he traveled to Charlton, Massachusetts, to preach for the Ministers’ Institute of the Southern New England District, where his son George Ernest Flower was superintendent. In a long presentation he noted the failure of the Fellowship to adequately provide its youth with a historical and doctrinal foundation for their faith. He then detailed a solution, urging ministers to teach their people faithfully and systematically.<sup>46</sup>

On June 1, 1961, J. Roswell and Alice celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary.<sup>47</sup> They were given a large cash gift that allowed them to travel





**J. Roswell Flower, ca. 1950s.**

to Spain, where their daughter Adele Flower Dalton and her husband Roy were serving as Assemblies of God missionaries.<sup>48</sup> The following year, Flower suffered his first heart attack; a more serious heart ailment hospitalized him in New Jersey where he was visiting his daughter Suzanne Flower Earle and her husband Albert in 1965. Flower's health remained fragile until his death on July 23, 1970, in Springfield, Missouri.

### Flower's Legacy

When J. Roswell Flower opened his heart to Christ in 1908, he had a desire to please God, which he believed required spreading the full gospel and nurturing believers through evangelism, missions, and discipleship. From his salvation until his home-going 62 years later, Flower discovered that God had prepared him to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ in many ways and places. He preached in small Midwestern towns, African villages, mid-century European metropolises, and teeming Asian cities. Flower wrote prolifically for fifty years.

He shared his knowledge of the Bible, administrative skills, and his wisdom not only with the Pentecostal movement, but, also, with civic, educational, and political bodies.

The legacy of J. Roswell and Alice R. Flower continues through their descendants. Six children were born to their union: Joseph R. (1913-2010), A. Adele (1915-2006), George E. (1916-1966), Suzanne G. (1917- ), Roswell S. (1920-1941), and David W. (1925- ). Joseph planted a church in New York, became superintendent of the New York District, and like his father served as general secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God (1975-1993). Adele spent many years as a missionary in Spanish-speaking lands in Central and South America.<sup>49</sup> She married Roy Dalton, a missionary to Spain where she served alongside him. Like her father Adele was a prolific writer in both English and Spanish. George became a high school teacher and coach before entering the ministry and serving as superintendent of the Southern

New England District.<sup>50</sup> Suzanne, a talented musician, married a Canadian pastor, Albert Earle; they served many years as pastors in New England and New Jersey.<sup>51</sup> She remained active as a church pianist until recently when she suffered a stroke. Roswell (Rossie) died at age 21 in his senior year at Central Bible Institute.<sup>52</sup> He had befriended and disciplined an older student who later went to Central America for work. That man became active in youth work in a church, guiding and encouraging local youth. Today, several of those men are pastors. Roswell S. died young, but not before he shared the legacy of discipleship he learned from his father. David pioneered a church in New York and later pastored in Maine and Massachusetts. After serving as superintendent of the Southern New England District, he pastored in Dayton, Ohio for two decades. He now lives in Maranatha Village in Springfield, Missouri. He teaches the Sunday school class begun by his parents at Central Assembly more than seventy years ago and preaches monthly at the Maranatha Village chapel. Many of J. Roswell and Alice's grandchildren and great-grandchildren are actively serving the Lord all across the United States.

J. Roswell Flower pleased God by proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to four generations — those of his parents, his peers, his children, and his grandchildren. The legacy of J. Roswell Flower is our heritage as Pentecostal saints. ✠



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**Kathryn, is a granddaughter of J. Roswell and Alice R. Flower. Ringer is working on a full-length biography of J. Roswell Flower.**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>AG News, July 23, 1970.

<sup>2</sup>Bethia A. Flower, "Grandmother Flower's Story," p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>W. O. Boyd, letter to J. Roswell Flower, February 24, 1940.

<sup>4</sup>J. Roswell Flower, *My Diary, The Fads and Fancies of a Foolish Fellow* IV, June 1, 1910. Flower writes that his water baptism was rather "a ducking than a real baptism and burial into the death of Christ and being raised in newness of life in Him."

<sup>5</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, "When Pentecost Came to Indianapolis, A First-hand Report of the Revival Which Began in 1907," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 5:4 (Winter 1985-86): 5-7; and Edith Blumhofer, "Indianapolis and The Assemblies of God: A Look at an Important City for the Pentecostal Movement," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 20:2 (Summer 2000): 14-15.

<sup>6</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "God Honors Faith," *The Pentecost* 2:3 (February 1, 1910): 1; and Dorothy Skoog, "Soldier of Faith," *LIVE* (June 2, 1957): 2.

<sup>7</sup>Skoog, 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, Gary B. McGee, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991); and Robert P. Menzies, Guest Editor, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*: "Initial Evidence" 1:2 (July 1998).

<sup>9</sup>Wayne E. Warner, "Mother Mary Moise of St. Louis: A Pioneer in Pentecostal Social Ministry," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 6:1 (Spring 1986): 6-7, 13-14.

<sup>10</sup>Flower, *Diary* III, August 21, 1909..

<sup>11</sup>Flower, *Diary* III, September 15, 1909.

<sup>12</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "How I Received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 21, 1933, 2-3; and Flower, "How I Received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit" *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 28, 1933, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Flower, "How I Received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 28, 1933, 7.

<sup>14</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The Evidence of the Baptism," *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 17, 1920, 4; Flower, "The Outstanding Effect of the Pentecostal Baptism," *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 29, 1936, 2-3, 5; Flower, "Brother Flower Tells of Heritage," *The Conference Chronicle* 4:4 (Springfield, MO: Sixth Annual National Youth Conference, August, 1945): 1-2; and Flower, *Is It Necessary to Speak in an Unknown Tongue?* (Toronto, Canada: Full Gospel Publishing House, [1954?]).

<sup>15</sup>J. Roswell Flower, the first entry in Alice

Marie Reynolds autograph book, "Faded Roses — From Life's Flower Garden," June 16, 1908. See also, JRF, *Diary* I, June 16, 1908.

<sup>16</sup>Flower, *Diary* III, November 8, 1908.

<sup>17</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace* (Springfield, MO: N.p., 1961), 47.

<sup>18</sup>"His Faith Is Strong," *Indianapolis News*, June 1, 1911; Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 49.

<sup>19</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 59-60.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 59-61.

<sup>21</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "A Closer and Deeper Fellowship for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Indiana and the Central States," *Christian Evangel*, July 19, 1913, 1-2.

<sup>22</sup>*Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, April 2-12, 1914, and November 15-29, 1914 (St. Louis, MO: Gospel Publishing House, [1915]), 4-5; and E. N. Bell, *General Council Principles* — Evangel Tract No. 914 (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.). No original copy of this tract has been found. A reprint was produced by Charles G. Weston sometime in the latter half of or after 1944 with his claim that "not a word is changed from the original." For a discussion of the approach of Bell and Flower concerning "General Council Principles," see: Darrin Rodgers and David Ringer, "Laying the Foundation for the Assemblies of God: Eudorus Bell and Alice and J. Roswell Flower," in *Servants of the Spirit: Portraits of Pentecostal/Charismatic Pioneers*, Andrea Johnson, ed. (Des Moines, IA: OBC Publishing, 2010), 3-9.

<sup>23</sup>J. Roswell Flower, *History of the Assemblies of God* [notes for Church Orientation Course at Central Bible Institute] [1950?], 25; E. N. Bell, "Who is Jesus Christ?" *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 14, 1915, 1.

<sup>24</sup>Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1 (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 232.25 J. Roswell Flower, "A Memoir of Brother Bell," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 30, 1923, 3.

<sup>25</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 65.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>27</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The Pentecostal Commission," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 12, 1920, 12.

<sup>28</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The January Missionary Report," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 18, 1922, 12.

<sup>29</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "An Important Resolution Affecting Prospective Missionaries," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 17, 1923, 12.

<sup>30</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 92.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>32</sup>"General Convention of Pentecostal Saints and Churches of God in Christ," *Word and*

*Witness*, December 20, 1913, 1.

<sup>33</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 86.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>35</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "Building for God," *The Overcomer*, August 1934, 4-5, 7.

<sup>36</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "Back to Calvary," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 5, 1935, 1, 10-11.

<sup>37</sup>In 1917, the executive presbytery adopted a resolution declaring the AG to be pacifist. Pacifism remained the official position of the AG until 1967.

<sup>38</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The Plight of the Christian in the Present World War," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 12, 1943, 6-7; and Flower, "The Plight of the Conscientious Objector in the Present World Conflict," *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 3, 1943, 2-3. For a comprehensive study of the Assemblies of God stance regarding war, see: Paul Alexander, *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2009).

<sup>39</sup>The first quarterly issue of the ministers letter was dated March 20, 1940. Now named *Called to Serve*, this quarterly letter issued by the executive offices continues to be sent to all credentialed Assemblies of God ministers.

<sup>40</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The Genesis of the Pentecostal Movement," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 29, 1956, 6-7, 28, 30; also published as "Historical Review of the Pentecostal Movement," *Pentecostal Testimony*, September 1955, 4-5, 13, 31.

<sup>41</sup>J. Roswell Flower, "The Present Position of Pentecost," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 13, 1925, 7-8, 13; Flower, "A Retrospect," *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 8, 1939, 4, 10; Flower, "An Evaluation of the Pentecostal Movement," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 13, 1945, 2-3, 5-6, 8. These are samplings of his repeated themes.

<sup>42</sup>Flower, *Diary* IV, January 8, 1910.

<sup>43</sup>Undoubtedly, the most unusual tribute to J. Roswell's learning was the conferring of an honorary Doctor of Laws degree upon him by Bob Jones College (now Bob Jones University) in June, 1946.

<sup>44</sup>David Ringer, conversation with Adele Flower Dalton.

<sup>45</sup>J. Roswell Flower, untitled address to Minister's Institute at Charlton, Massachusetts, September, 1960. Verna B. (Mrs. George) Flower made a typescript of this tape recorded presentation. The quotation is on page 1.

<sup>46</sup>Alice Reynolds Flower, *Grace for Grace*, 167.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 167-173.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 134-135.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 139-145.