

NOTES

ON

PASSING EVENTS, ETC.

1862—1871.

THIS is a trying time for Beloved Brethren who have been gathered in, and for the NAME of the LORD JESUS, for the claims and energies of man are being put forth largely. It is no easy thing to be satisfied with being simply what we *really* are before God. Times of “Revivalism” discover the thoughts of many hearts; but to learn to be still, and know that God is God, is utterly beyond the education of the flesh in a day of Grace.

The spirit of the age is affecting many, so that they are busy seeking to restore former things for God's use, instead of being broken before Him about their own failure. I do not question their sincerity, but I do question their self-judgment, and knowledge of the actual state of ruin around them ; hence we find there is no adequate reckoning upon the living God alone, in the scene, as the God of all resources, when man's have all failed.

We never need be afraid of the whole truth. To confess fully what we are, whilst He is what He is, continues still the way of peace and blessing. Let but two or three get before God thus, there are no disappointed hopes then. If the wells digged in the days of Abraham are stopped up and filled with earth, still we have to do with a God who can make the water spring from the smitten Rock itself, and

flow over the barren wilderness to refresh
His weary wandering people.

But I envy not their work who are digging channels in the sand for the streams, which, after all, may not flow their way.

God's way of action in all times of blessing, is ever to set forth the glories of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The darker the long night of apostacy becomes, the more distinctly is the Light of Life seen: the word for the Remnant is, "Sanctify the LORD GOD in your hearts." He is the only gathering Point. Men's confederacies together can be formed around many things, but the Communion of Saints can only be known as every line is struck from this living Centre.

The Holy Ghost is not gathering the saints to mere views (however true) of what the Church is, has been, or may be in the earth; but He is gathering still to

that Blessed One, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 20.) This work and way of the Lord, Satan and the flesh are certain to seek to resist or subvert.

We want to be kept from the boastings of the day in the quietness of God's Presence. There is so much "*we* will-ism" abroad. "*We* will do great things," is a cry most unseemly to be heard at a time when light has discovered how *little* has been done. And that, that little has been in the closest proximity with the most terrible *evils* and errors that ever beclouded the consciences, or shook the affections of the Saints of God. Yet God has granted deliverance in *mercy*, the freest mercy, or we had all been swept away, I know not whither, long ago.

God makes us to know His Truth as liberating us, "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." *This is no liberty for the flesh*, for it deepens in our hearts all the reality of known Separatedness to God, who is Holy.. We are broken, humbled men, directly we get there. If any should speak of Separation from evil without being humbled about it, let such beware, lest their position stand only in that which has in every age constituted sectarianism, and produced heresy in doctrine also.

As to our service, we have seen our blessed Lord and Master wash His disciples feet, in all lowness, giving himself as an example—to whom? Surely to us. Now I know of no Service at the present time that can possibly be of Himself, or acceptable to Him, if it be not done in Humiliation. It is no time to be talking about a

place for ourselves. If the Church of God, so dear to Christ, is put to shame in the earth, rent, scattered, untaught, distressed, he who has the mind which was in Christ will take the lowest place always. True loving Service will seek to impart what is needed, and not think of *shaming the objects of the Master's love for needing it.*

Men taught of God come out of a place of Strength where they have learnt their own Weakness, their own Nothingness. They find Jesus everything in the Presence of God, and He is everything to them wherever they go. Such in the hands of the Holy Ghost are the real Helpers of the children of God; nor can they think of contending for place, distinction, or authority among the scattered flock.

A man's Communion with God in his thoughts about the Church is shewn by his readiness of mind to be *nothing* in it, and

yet willingness of heart to spend, and be spent for it. Some such we still see, but, alas ! they are very few.

IN personal recollections we have lessons to learn with fear and trembling. Never let the thought of power occupy the mind, for "POWER BELONGETH TO GOD." A third part of a century ago was a time of much excitement ; men were enquiring after power everywhere, willing to traverse the earth to find it. Thoughts of the Church were filling many minds, but it was the Church in power they thought of. Power was lost they felt and said, how was it to be regained ? hence they became occupied again with earthly things, as if *they* were enabled to work deliverance in the earth.

Many remember how largely at that time,

Satan was enabled to put *man* forth, *and the result everywhere*. Whatever forms such efforts after power adopted or invented, in that day of confusion and excitement, they invariably agreed in leaving as they receded (for all failed to compass their object, and only ended in pretending sects) some deadly mark of hostility against the Lord Jesus Himself; or, if His name was allowed to stand untouched as yet, they prepared the way for the same fearful result by disannulling the presence of the Spirit of God, who alone can glorify Jesus.

The great chief Shepherd is not unmindful of such as labour in His name, with a willing heart among His poor needy ones. An unfading crown of glory and abundant praise shall be theirs in the day of His appearing. God will own all that He can own, none shall lose their reward. But I am not surprised at the disappoint-

ment which has followed every attempt among Brethren to introduce any merely formal system of ministry, authority, or government. God will not suffer men to come in and patch up the ground of weakness whereon he has been pleased in these last days to meet and bless His saints. Yet how strange it is to think that, that which will do for God, who, if it please Him, has power to change the whole scene with a word, will not satisfy the children of weakness. It is a saying among men that "A prince will be happy at a table which his servants would disdain to behold." And we well know that it is the way of the flesh, utterly unmindful of the Church's failure, to still seek to maintain a place for men, where God has none given to Him.

There is much instruction in the conduct of Zerubbabel, as related in the Book of Ezra. Son and heir of David as he is,

yet he takes his place with the Remnant returning from the Captivity, and is contented to labour at Jerusalem without a Throne or a Crown; building the Altar of the Lord, and the House of God, he simply serves God and His generation. Inheritor of the place which Solomon had once filled in days of prosperity and glory, he reminds no one of his Birthright, nor for his own claims is his voice heard in the streets. Yet how faithful is Zerubbabel in all the path of separation, sorrow and conflict, which he has to tread. How simple, how devoted in all his ways !

The Lord make us all more quiet and confident in Himself in these trying times.' "When I am weak then I am strong," is a lesson that Paul himself required to be taught by a very humbling process. If we talk about "*Our Testimony*" in the earth, it will soon be seen that it is all utter

weakness ; and like the seed perishing in the ground, " testimony " will end there, to *our* shame. But if the living God has a testimony in the earth, to his own *glory by us*, then the sense of weakness will only bring us more constantly to the place of power. An Apostle with a sharp thorn in his flesh learns the sufficiency of Christ's grace. A little Remnant are gathered together having nothing whatever for the flesh to glory in, and such are enabled to stand faithful to His name, when all that seemed somewhat before men has utterly failed.

Neither the policy, prudence, or pretensions of men can do anything with the state of confusion the Church is now in. I freely confess that I have no hope in the efforts many are making who boast that they intend to secure *for themselves* " right ecclesiastical position," &c. In the day of

~~In~~ earthquake, when the house is rocking to its foundation, it matters little to a man what room he shall try to set in order. We had better remain where the first discovery of the failure of everything in our hands brought us, with our faces in the dust. That is the place which rightfully belongs to us, and it remains the place of blessing to the end.

In the Apocalypse John learns the “actual state” of the Churches, as one having himself fallen at Christ’s feet. He may be taken up into Heaven afterwards, to be shown from thence the judgments of the Earth, but the evil in the Church can never be safely known but as we are humbled at the feet of the Lord JESUS. Those blessed feet of the Son of man, who so walked through the world that God was glorified by every step that He took down here !

I have read of a time when many came together in such brokenness of spirit, that for a long season not a word could be uttered, but the floor of their meeting-house was *wet with their tears.*

If the Lord again grant us the like meetings it will be true wisdom to frequent such houses of mourning. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,” is not only true of the remnant for the earth, but it is written for us also. I think I could willingly travel many miles to join such sorrowing bands, when I would not cross the threshold of my door to receive from the best of men power into my own hands, to put everything down here in place and order to-morrow.

All that we can do is to go on watchfully, but quietly, *minding the things of the Lord Jesus*; having nothing of our own “to regret or to lose,” in all things thus

seeking to please God is the path of peace—the place of testimony. We have need to be very watchful over ourselves, least having had much precious truth preserved from the corruption of ages, and revealed to us in our weakness, we should be snared by self-sufficiency or betrayed into “independency,” a thing God can never own. “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” is as much His word now as ever it was.

Yet His purpose is unchanged by all that has transpired, He will have the LORD JESUS glorified. If we are humbled before Him, nothing that is for Christ’s glory can become hopeless to us, and what can we wish for more.

July, 1862.

"THE servant of Christ, who in any measure pleases God, will at the same time displease many men much, the devil more, and himself the most. But this will not dishearten him : for the reward of his toil is the joy of his Lord, and the God whom he pleases is preparing heaven and earth for that.

"In the pathway of our beloved Master, the *Perfect Servant* through this world, we behold the lowly One, whose joy it was so to stand before men, that the glory of the Father might be seen in Him. It was always the Father's will that He sought. He never strove for a mere place over others. What He in Himself was, Lord and Master too, that He was in the lowest of places, as in the highest ; nothing could disturb the meekness and lowness of His heart. He did not cry that they should yield Him the homage which was His due ;

 was His voice ever lifted up in the streets of Jerusalem to affirm and assert His own authority.

“ Of course there was no *self-distrust* in *His* lowliness and entire dependence upon God. Such a thing in the Lord Jesus could have no room : for if He has taken the place of the Servant of God down here, He acts ever in the place He has taken. He had in Himself every grace that was fitted to adorn it, yet this it is which makes His words so intensely beautiful. “ I live by the Father.” “ I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me,” &c.

“ALL WAS PERFECT. In Him there was nothing to be judged. **NO WORD OF HIS LIPS HAD EVER TO BE RETRACTED, NO STEP OF HIS FEET RETRACED.** What honour to this poor earth that such feet should have trodden it ! What glory to God, what blessing to man !

"But this could not be the case with the highest of His servants, neither Paul, John, nor any other. Among the first steps Christ's servants must take will be those of *self-judgment* and *self-distrust*; any other way would be as unbecoming them as this path would have been IMPOSSIBLE to Him. They shall reach with their Master the place of happy lowly subjection to another's will; but they pass through many a disappointment of desire and judgment of motive into it. He comes thither from, and is the source of purest light, where no darkness at all is, or ever has been. "As for GOD His way is perfect," and the way of the Lord Jesus was perfect before Him. But whenever and under whatever circumstances men have sought to go on in service without self-judgment, the flesh sooner or later will so prevail as to cry out for its judgment by all.

"If we consider the Lord's faithful servants in other ages, we shall easily discern that they felt always unprepared, and in self-judgment were generally unwilling at first to step forwards into any prominent position of service, or testimony. Moses and Isaiah will plead unreadiness of tongue or uncleanness of condition before God. Paul, too, will allege his past persecutions of the Church of God, almost in justification of the unbelief of the Jews in anything he should be commissioned to set before them.

"On the other hand, the wretched Judas never makes a single objection to being sent forth. I know of no severer test of what is in man and of what he is capable of consenting to, than Christ commissioning "the son of perdition" to be an apostle and a preacher. He is invested with *power over devils* who is himself a devil, and he

makes no demur at receiving it, because *it is power*. Christ tells him to preach the glory of a kingdom which he hates, and he unhesitatingly does it, because it gives him *authority*, although he must well have known that if that which he did succeeded, the house of Beelzebub would come to an end, and if what he preached prevails, it will do so to his everlasting destruction.

"I no more deny the "call" of Iscariot and his authority to be an apostle than I do the call and authority of Peter; but I learn very distinct lessons from them. In the one, I am taught the weakness and unprofitableness of the flesh, and that nothing can be trusted to it, however true the affections may be; in the other, we are warned against the depths of deception and devilish delusions which can be carried on in the heart, under the seemliest outward aspect, and with the highest

[REDACTED] authority that has ever been presented to the notice of mankind.

“Men dwell much upon the gold of the temple, the gift upon the altar, and the throne of heaven; but our Lord calls attention to Him who sitteth on the throne,—to the Temple which is greater than the gold,—and to the Altar that sanctifies the gift.

“To sit upon Moses’ seat is always an object of ambition to the human heart. Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant; his name makes the seat of the Ruler what it is in honour. Yet Scribes and Pharisees may sit upon it in authority. The supremacy of God’s Word over the conscience, let who will affirm it, is unaffected, but Moses’ seat effects no change in the occupiers: they remain Scribes and Pharisees still, degraded and disgraceful, in the highest place in Israel, whilst the

Lord Jesus can take the lowest place man ever knew, and so speak and act in it as that men shall have blessing and God obtain glory in every word that He utters, and by everything that He does.

There is *that* that is greater than gifts, more precious than gold, and higher than the seat of authority ; even though that seat were a throne in heaven. IT IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD HIMSELF, His pleasure and joy being the strength of our hearts, and his power not only life-giving, but life-sustaining, gladdening, and refreshing for evermore.—*From "Occasional Reflections," by J.J.P. August, 1870. G. Morrish, 24 Warwick Lane.*

THE great Truth of the BODY OF CHRIST, baptised into unity with its Head in Heaven, by the action and presence of the

ONE SPIRIT, the Comforter, who abides in the assembly (the Church wherein this work is wrought) for ever, has for a long while past been brought before the Lord's people, and has been received by very many. I bless God greatly for this: it is a bright and cheering Truth for these last and gloomy times.

It is a separating one also, and wherever it has been scripturally apprehended, has caused the NAME and honour of the Lord Jesus to be cared for and clung to in a manner that all confraternities, or associations upon points of doctrine, or special testimonies for special truth, have utterly failed to do.

Nothing has been of more frequent occurrence in the Church, and certainly nothing more disastrous and distressing in their results, than the efforts of conscientious men to purge those around them

from evil, by constituting a centre of assembling together wherein it is understood that an especial care shall be taken to maintain some particular point of truth, which, it may be, has long been neglected; or the prominent bond of their unity is made to consist in the maintenance of some practice, the observance of which, in a godly and truthful manner, had been departed from in the circles from which they withdrew. For example: the Calvinistic Churches, as to doctrine. The societies of Methodists (especially as at first constituted), in general discipline, and the assemblies of Baptists, show the same thing in ordinances and modes (I do not say ground) of fellowship.

I freely admit most conscientious convictions, and desires to serve Christ, in men who have been very prominent from time to time in these, and other testimonies. I

as fully grant that it was needful that the attention of the Church should be directed to many a neglected truth and scriptural practice, and to many a despised or neglected gift from the ascended Head in heaven to His Body below. But in whatever assembly these and other truths may be revived, they are revived by the Spirit of God not for that assembly of saints, merely to distinguish them or separate them from their brethren, but for the Body's sake, that Body of which all who love the Lord Jesus Christ are eternally living members.

And this one Body is as real a thing in God's account as is the presence of the Holy Ghost down here, even Him by whom it has been formed. "There is one Body and one Spirit."

These good men who as founders or leaders of sects have gathered saints into

systems of truths as testimonies, or drawn them by their gifts or parts simply around themselves, have failed—first, in not apprehending the character of the Church below as the house of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth; and secondly, they have invariably failed to discern the Lord's Body

The consequences have therefore been as the Apostle warned us they would be, most disastrous. The Church has been scattered, and the Body agonized, and hindered in that healthy action of life which is so needed for the worship of God and the glory of Christ down here, whilst in the sight of all the Holy Ghost has been dis-honoured by the divisions which have been made.

May the Lord arouse His people's attention to these things.

January, 1868.

IF a Book be the expression of a man's thought upon any given subject so also is the Bible written by the Spirit of God, the expression of the Divine thoughts.* There is an immense difference between the

* I confess that I have a good deal of anxiety at the "free handling" of God's Holy Word, which is so prevalent amongst Christians everywhere. Of course, it is clearly the spirit of the age to hold everything an open question. Against erudition and devotedness I have nothing to say; where such exist there will, of necessity, be found Reverence and caution. Really learned men know so well how many mistakes have been made, and rash conclusions arrived at, that they wait patiently before they venture to pronounce positively upon questions affecting the integrity and inspiration of the accepted Canon of Holy Scripture. But it is also well that we should remember, if the mistakes of the ignorant have been many, and mischievous in their results, the mistakes of the learned, too, have in all ages been most numerous, and in their results most terrible to the Church of God. It has been well said that "Faith and Patience are wise readers of the Bible, and Time is an excellent expositor. How many instances might be quoted where even celebrated critics have said that the Bible was wrong, and all the while they themselves were wrong in saying so? Theodore Beza was a learned man, and he thought—on the strength of a passage in Strabo—that St. Luke had written carelessly in calling the Governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, a Proconsul instead of a Pro-prætor; and he actually substituted the word Proprietor in his own translation of the Acts; but prudent people

Theology of man, and the thoughts
God.—In the one I get nothing but con-
fusion and uncertainty, by the other life
and peace. In the one, I find the human
mind strained to the utmost in vain, for

waited a little, and soon afterwards some old coins of the
island of Cyprus and some ancient inscriptions were turned
up, which proved that Beza was wrong, and St. Luke was
right."

I give an instance of another kind. It has been my fate,
in common with other timid persons, sometimes to be
roughly reminded by certain critics in possession of a
"Pocket Tischendorf," &c., that such-and-such passages
are to be omitted. Among others, we are told with the
greatest confidence that the last twelve verses of St. Mark
are not to be received, for they are not found in the cele-
brated Vatican MS. Very true; but it is as well also for
us simple English readers to be made acquainted with the
fact, to which Mr. Burgon and the present Bishop of Lin-
coln—both good men, and of high reputation as scholars—
have called attention, that, in the Vatican MS., at the end
of the 8th verse of the 16th chapter of Mark there is a blank
column left, and it is the only one in the MS. That blank
seems to indicate that in the transcriber's judgment some-
thing ought to be supplied there, and that that supplement
would fill a considerable space; so that though this MS.
certainly omits the last twelve verses, yet it is not to be
cited as an authority for their omission, but may be used
rather against it. Many MSS. have them, I need not say.
May we be kept from all haste and heedlessness, learning
diligently the wonders of His Word with reverence and fear.

" who by searching can find out the Almighty ;" by the other, every difficulty is solved, and the soul, without wandering or perplexity, sits down in perfect peace, having the great problem of eternity settled, never more to become an open question. " Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Human religion never effected this. Systematic Theology is altogether insufficient to bring peace to the soul. The weariness of the effort is affirmed to the present hour by the groans of burdened and bewildered multitudes. One of old said " I remembered God upon my bed and was troubled," and this whatever may be the interpretation of the passage itself, is the inevitable result of all attempt to find out God. Here then is the great difference between the Religion of the Bible, that which is of God's Spirit—

and the Religion which is after the mind of man; the latter is full of the thoughts of man about God, not one of which can be of any avail to the satisfying even of his own conscience; the former is the Revealing to the soul in light and power GOD'S THOUGHTS ABOUT HIS CHRIST. All are perfect, all are peaceful. Then the Word of God does not pass by—but enters the heart; it produces neither darkness nor doubtfulness, but giveth light. Such as have received it may well be called, as they are “the children of the light:”

P.

(FENSTON)

The foregoing “Notes” have, from time to time, within the last few years, been put forth as circumstances transpired beneath the Writer’s notice. They are little more than fragmentary, and the circumstances need no detail here.

At the solicitations, often repeated, of many of the Lord’s people, they are now reprinted, with a few additions.

Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berks,

March 23rd, 1871.