

Editor's note: This was taken from the February 1st 1864 Edition of the Earthen Vessel Pages 29ff

It offers a rare picture of the personal life of James Wells and his family. From this, his sermons and some of his other writing was learn that he was tender hearted toward his family and that he had tremendous desire for the salvation of souls. Multitudes were (and currently are being) brought to full and free salvation through his ministry. - Richard Schadle

The Joys of Salvation in the Christians Dying Hour

A Brief Outline of the Departure to A Better World Of

MARY ANN WELLS,

Daughter of Mister James Wells

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Dear Mr. Editor,

The announcement in this month's Vessel of my *eldest* daughter being married is not correct: it was not my eldest, but my *second* daughter who was married at the Surrey Tabernacle on Dec. 5th. My *eldest* daughter had been for many years heavily afflicted with spinal affection. And this, my eldest daughter, departed this life on Munday morning, January 18th, 1864, at twenty-five minutes past eight And I will, by your kind permission, give an outline of her living and dying testimony. And I will do so as a word of encouragement to everyone who is seeking salvation; and as a word, I pray, may be blessed to the thoughtless and careless; and as an evidence of the grace of Him whose mercy endures forever.

My daughter Mary Ann was 33 years of age. Her mother died twenty-nine years ago the 6th of last June. It will not be out of place just to say a word concerning her mother.

When her mother and myself in the order of providence, were brought together, neither of us knew, or desired to know, the Lord. I was first brought into deep soul trouble; but she despised my religion, and made sport of it for about two months. But one afternoon when I was from home, she, from some unaccountable cause, was smitten with a locked jaw. This she solemnly felt to be a judgment upon her, and she felt as though the Judge or all was saying to her, If you cannot open your month without despising God and godliness, you shall not open it at all; but before the medical attendant arrived it came right. The arrow of conviction had, however, effectually pierced her heart. When I arrived home, I wondered what was the matter with her. On my entering the room, she burst into tears, and related to me what had occurred. From that hour she was glad to kneel down with me day by day, and join in my poor broken, but earnest prays to God for mercy. We were both of one mind, and both in all but black despair. Some few weeks after this, we were both greatly blessed by being brought into the liberty of the Gospel. As I was engaged in reading the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, and on coming to the words in the eighth verse, which read thus, "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, we were both

completely overwhelmed with peace, and Mrs. W., bursting into tears, spontaneously exclaimed, "*O! how happy I am.*"

At this period neither of us hardly knew what it was that thus gave us such peace and comfort; like Peter when he believed not that it was true which was done by the angel, but *thought* he saw a vision (Acts 12:9); but as Peter's deliverance was real, so was ours spiritually. In this faith, at the end of little more than nine years, consumption took her to her heavenly rest: her end was solid peace. A cold struck her chest while bathing in the sea; from this she never recovered. A better wife, or a better mother was simply impossible. Such was the hope and the end of the mother of my dear departed Mary Ann, who from a child was convinced of her state as a sinner. That conviction commenced as I had her when a child upon my knee, which I was very fond of doing. I always delighted greatly in my dear little ones. I was thus holding her with one hand on my knee, with the Bible in my other. I do not now remember what the remarks were that I then made to her; and not only on this but on other occasions also, the word spoken wrought conviction on her mind, although I knew it not until years after, when affliction brought it out. Still, it was not until recently, comparatively, that she joined the Church; and I believe all who heard her testimony at the Church-meeting, were well persuaded of the work of grace in her soul.

It was her lot to be afflicted from her infancy; and though surrounded with every earthly comfort, life at the best was to her but a *bitter cup*. I can form no just estimate of her bodily sufferings; and yet those sufferings were borne with a resignation none but heaven could give. Deep sometimes were her exercises and desponding's; more before she was entirely confined to her room than afterwards. Pondering over her afflictions and miserable state, she felt she must put an end to her life. This, of course, I did not know at the time: but the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee," put the adversary to flight, and she was again strengthened and made strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. She was able to sit down at the ordinance only twice. On the last of these two occasions I dwelt chiefly upon the twenty fourth Psalm, from which she could and did again read her title clear; and being thus afflicted she was driven to the Word of God.

Her knowledge of the Scriptures was truly wonderful; and scores of hymns were as familiar to her as the letters of the alphabet. It was remarkable, also, how as affliction dried up other comforts, she drew water with joy the more largely out of the wells of salvation. She not only well knew these things, but was favored with such a gift of utterance, that she could and did speak freely of them to others. It mattered not who the individuals were that were by her bed-side, vital godliness was her theme, always with a Scripture at command to prove and establish what was said. Those Christians friends, who are well taught (being well taught of God), members of the Surrey Tabernacle, who have conversed with her, always readily expressed their full satisfaction that her religion was of God.

She has a great love of language. I scarcely recollect her ever making a breach in grammar. She was well versed in the construction and powers of the English language; and could also read the Holy Scriptures, and converse in French language with nearly or quite as much ease and fluency as in her own language. I hope the kind reader will forgive my weakness (perhaps vanity) in naming these mere natural acquirements.

Her chief watchword under her affliction was, "Is there anything too hard for the Lord!" But to write one half of what she has said during her deep affliction, would be to write a volume. Her eye was indeed keen as the eye of an eagle to distinguish truth from error: whether in books or persons she would discover it in an instant, and roll in from the Scriptures such a tide of testimony against it as would swallow it up quickly; and from a consciousness that God and truth, was on her side, she would glory in her victory, seeming to say with Deborah, "O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength?" It seemed as though I could teach her nothing; her heart was indeed fixed, trusting in the Lord; and, as he said, "Pain has kept me from sleep, but it could not keep me from the Lord, nor could it keep the Lord from me."

After a life-time of affliction, and several months confined to her bed, she was, on Sunday, January the 10th, taken much worse. Yet I still hoped this would go off. But on Friday evening, the 15th, as I was just going to Bartlett's Buildings to preach, I went into her room again to kiss her dear infant lips (for they were as infant lips to me). I then clearly saw death in her countenance. My heart sank within me. But even after this she revived a little, and I again began to feel a hope. This hope was soon destroyed. I went and preached on Sunday the 17th; but how I got through the day I know not. Glad enough when I reached home on the Sunday evening to find her still alive; and though intensely suffering, yet calm and perfectly sensible, and could and did speak up to within a quarter of an hour of her death. One of our deacons had called, and kindly engaged in prayer with her.

On the Monday morning, as her end drew near, the light was the brighter. Truly at evening time it was light. Softly I said "My dear, are you afraid to die?"

The answer was,

"I am not so much afraid to die as I have sometimes been afraid to go to sleep." This suffering is not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed."

The candle being placed near to her (it not yet being daylight), she said, I shall need no candle there. Here it is all night; there it is all day. God and the lamb being the light thereof."

"Complete in Him. I long to be gone." I said, "Your life has been but a bitter cup to you dear."

"Ah, but the Lord," she said, "has made all up."

"Then you do feel that the Lord is yours?"

"Ah, yes," And then when a power that none but those in the same circumstances could equal, she said,

"My God, my portion, and my love,
My everlasting all;
There's none but Thee in heaven above,
Nor on this earthly ball."

“What empty things are all the skies,
And this inferior clod;
There’s nothing here deserves my joys,
There’s nothing like my God.”

She then desired the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation to be read, which I did as carefully as I could, without word or comment I then said, “My dear, shall I pray with you? She said, “Yes” And in that prayer I truly felt that I was at the gate of heaven, and that her redeemed spirit would soon be there.

I said, “You will not be long now.”

She answered,
“I would be absent from the flesh,
And present Lord, with thee.”

She then stretched out her dying hand to me; and it seemed a degree of comfort to her that I was with her. To the nurse who so kindly attended upon her, she was much attached, expressing the deepest affection to me, and to all the house, all having been kind and sympathetic to her. To her youngest sister (the only one at home) who sat up all night with her, and in deepest affection did all she could to soothe her dying hours, she felt deeply indebted. I said,

“We shall not part forever.” “

Oh, no! oh, no! my dear father; I shall see you again.”

I said, “You will soon be happy, dear.”

She said, “I am happy now!” And then quoted those beautiful words, only with a little alteration, to make them speak in the present tense.

“Jesus makes a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are.”

Very affectionately, she then referred to her brother William, (son of the same mother) and prayed that he might be brought savingly to know the Lord. She then said, “I long to be gone;” presently adding, “I shall not be long here. I feel I am going.”

She then tried to say something more of the care which had been taken of her, and of the holy triumphs of her happy heart and soul; but her breath grew gradually shorter, and in about ten minutes, without a sigh, or struggle, or a groan, she sweetly fell asleep in Jesus.

I shall never forget my feelings. Just at the moment of her departure, a peace and holy calmness rested upon my soul that I seldom or ever experienced before. Then said I to myself, What is this but the presence of God and the Lamb?

“A mortal paleness on her cheek,
But glory in her soul”

And some of that glory reached to me; and in a moment I was filled with love and gratitude to my dear covenant God. For what more could I desire than such mercy as this? As I came down stairs this morning (Wednesday, January 20th,) with my heart almost broken, these words came with great power, “I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof.” But I said, He has come under my roof; and will He ever leave any of his own? No! never.

In what little I have thus said, I have fallen very, very far short of the depth and height of the glory of her departing hours. For how can one write or speak that which is unspeakable? To realize the real power could be only by being with her, when she, with great power, testified of her own eternal salvation. She had spoken highly of a Christian friend with whom, some years ago, she resided; not forgetting that she had in the present Mrs. Wells, the kindest of mothers. But

Mary Ann Wells is gone,
The conflict o'er; the victory won!

The following is a copy of an entry written in my note book on the occasion of two of my daughters being baptized: “Wednesday, March 2nd, 1859. Baptized at the Surrey Tabernacle forty-five persons: twenty-nine women and sixteen men; and among them my two dear daughters, Mary Ann and Elizabeth Selina. I felt very happy in baptizing them, there seemed just at those moments a special smile from heaven into my soul. Was that a token for good? It must be; for the smile of heaven cannot be token for evil. O, thou God of my life, my hope, my all, Thou art become the God, and Father, and Savior of two of my dear children. Yes, Jesus died for them. They are His. Oh, lead them, guide them, bless them! and let Thy servant rejoice in seeing the others brought also. Hast Thou not promised Thy servant that he shall see greater things yet? Bind, Lord, my heart and soul more and more to Thee; for Thou knows that I love Thee. And, though less than the least of all Thy children, and the poorest creature that ever lived, yet Thy grace is sufficient even for me. Thou hast taken the mother of one daughter to Thyself; the mother of the other daughter is also Thine; and thus, have I, Thy servant, a place among Thy children. And now, Lord, what is my request and petition but this? that Thou would still keep me walking and working in Thy blessed ways; Bless all that last night publicly owned Thy dearest name; and bless all Thine every-where; feed them also; and lift them up forever.”

The above note, which I have copied-verbatim, was, as you see by the date, written nearly five years, ago, merely for my own reference, without the least thought of its ever being thus brought into public.

And now dear Mr. Editor, may the Lord bless you and yours abundantly; and all who love His name; and yet gather harvests of souls to Christ Jesus the Lord, is the earnest prayer of

Yours in the Gospel, James Wells.

2, Ampthill-place, North Brixton, London, 8.
January 20th, 1864.

THE FUNERAL.

After reading the foregoing most blessed testimony, we resolved to witness the internment of all that remains of one who was indeed chosen in the furnace of affliction, but, having come out of great tribulation, having washed her robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, she is now before the throne, enjoying and uniting in a worship sublime in its nature, and more pure and precious in its realization than can be imagined.

On reaching Nunhead Cemetery (the earthly resting place of the mortal remains of thousands, and of many whose memory is dear to us) we found a large assembly of friends gathered in groups awaiting the arrival of the funeral cortege. Among them were many aged saints of God, dearly beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, and ministers of the Gospel, were mingling their tears of sorrow and of joy, while upon their staff they leaned,

“Till God shall call them home.”

We always think there is a grave and solemn sternness stamped upon the features of all the living vessels of mercy who really know and love the Truth as in our Savior it is found. They are a different people from all the people that dwell on the face of the earth; and this we noticed as among the groups we walked in Nunhead last Friday afternoon.

After long waiting, a hearse and coach drove up to the Chapel doors, but it was the funeral procession of The late Mr. Massie, who was for so many years the honored, the useful, and the happy deacon of good old George Francis, of Snows' Fields, and since his death, and the removal of the Church to Bermondsey New road, Mr. Massie has continued the faithful friend of the Church whose beloved and esteemed pastor is now Mr. Thomas Chivers. Mr. Massie died at the age of 85, or thereabouts, and his remains were laid to rest on Friday, Jan. 22nd, 1864, by Mr. Chivers, surrounded by an immense concourse of Christian friends. Mr. Chivers read Romans 4. and 5, and addressed the people with much feeling, and approached his God in prayer with much largeness of soul and boldness of faith and utterance. A solemn season indeed. We hope to be able to give of Mr. Massie's life and death some truthful record.

It was nearly dark before the hearse bearing the body of the late Miss Mary Ann Wells came up. The fact is, the mortality of London has, lately, been so great, that undertakers have found a difficulty in obtaining hearses, horses, carriages, and assistants fast enough. surely, death has done a mighty work among our three million of late!

At length the coffin was laid on the stand.

Mr. Henry Hanks, of Woolwich, ascended the pulpit Our brother, James Wells, and many of his family followed. All being seated and in silence, Mr. Hanks commenced reading 2 Cor. 5, and bore a blessed testimony expressive of the happy, the well-grounded, and the abiding confidence in God of the departed. In speaking and prayer, he was evidently strongly affected with a sense of the greatness of the mercy which God had granted unto his faithful servant, James Wells, in indulging him to witness his beloved child's departure so unmistakably safe and glorious.

When many ungrateful, iron-hearted men, whom our brother has served so many years, but now, in the effort to erect a new tabernacle, not only stand aloof, but speak unkindly; when they read this signal token of heaven's special favor, they will surely, with us, feel thankful to the Lord.

When they laid the coffin in the grave, and while Henry Hanks addressed the crowds of friends in the dark shadows of approaching night, we noticed our brother Wells' heart was overwhelmed; but he was sustained; and to see his worthy deacons, the brethren Butt, Carr, Attfield, Lawrence and Edwards, and a host of strong men, and of deeply affected godly women surrounding the grave, and to hear them sing.

“Why should we tremble to convey,
Their bodies to the tomb;
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume.
The graves of all His saints He bless'd,
And soften'd every bed,
Where should the dying members rest
But with their living head?”

To silent spectators, like ourselves, the scene was awfully, yet gratefully solemn. May God spare our bereaved brother yet for many, many years.

We sincerely trust Mr. Wells' letter respecting his beloved child, will be profitably read by many hundreds of thousands. There are two important features in it: first, therein is seen how wonderfully God's gracious presence and blessing can sanctify afflictions of the heaviest kind, as this dear sister in Jesus so abundantly proved. Secondly, the letter unfolds the keen and tender affections of a father's heart, and the holy joy of a Christian's soul in beholding the salvation of his offspring so remarkably developed. May the eternal Spirit make these two portions of the letter instrumental in convincing thousands that neither the truth we love, nor the ministers we defend are so dreadful as many would deciare.

The report of Mr. John Foreman's heavy illness, added much to the seriousness of the season.

The funeral was quietly and respectably conducted, by Mr. Hutchinson, of St. Martins lane.

Walter Banks