

# The Rock on which the Church is built: by Mr. James Wells, at the Opening of Jireh Chapel, Brighton.

To the Editor of the Earthen Vessel.

Dear. Sir,—A great number of books have been printed, and sermons preached, of late, attempting to prove that the end and summing up of the Gospel dispensation is close at hand—that " the Judge is really close at our doors;" that the elect are nearly all gathered in; and that " yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come; and will not tarry." Unto all such as are savingly built upon the Rock of Ages, these must be joyful tidings; but whether the Master shall come in the second watch, or the third watch; whether he shall very shortly make up his jewels, or whether it be some hundreds of years hence; whether there is to be a spiritual Millennium, or a thousand years personal reign; these are things which I do not feel much concerned about, or very deeply interested in; all that my soul is really seeking to be established in, is that the Lord Jesus Christ is himself my treasure; that my whole heart may be set upon, and my whole soul be found going out after him; that my loins may be girded about with that living and eternal truth which is in Him; and that while I am traversing this desert land, I may be a follower of them who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises.

But, dear Sir, there are two things among us Sussex people which seem much against the doctrine of a speedy Second Coming. In the first place you would be astonished to see how dreadfully Ephraim doth here envy Judah, and Judah doth here vex Ephraim. Oh, Sir, many times when I have heard ministers and people professing godliness, envying one another; backbiting one another; going as far as they could to send one another to perdition—I have been tempted to fear that the Spirit of Christ was not in them at all. You never saw such a place as Brighton is for this. And yet with all, I am persuaded that we are highly favored with some of the real sent and sanctified servants of God—who preach unto us " The Way Of Life:" and I am also as firmly persuaded that there are many righteous souls here too, who are taught to Know the difference between the clean and the unclean; between the living and the dead. The second thing to which I referred above, is the mania among ministers for building new chapels. I have thought, as I stand sometimes looking at the churches and chapels which are springing up in all directions—" Certainly; these builders are not looking for a very speedy arrival of that great day, when the Master of the House will rise up, and will shut to the door." (Luke xiii. 25.)

Last Tuesday, the 20th January, one of these new buildings was first opened; it is called "Jireh Chapel." It is situated in Robert Street; and has been erected by the friends and congregation of Mr. William Tant. This new structure is capable of holding, I suppose about 400 persons: it is a lofty, well ventilated, and exceedingly neat building. Deal forms, with open backs, occupy the whole of the ground floor; at present, there is neither gallery nor pews.

I must say that I feel thankful that William Tant, has, at last, found a little rest for the sole of his foot: a little city to dwell in: he has been subject to some adverse winds since he has been preaching amongst us the gospel of Christ; but none of them have yet been strong enough to blow him away. I believe the Lord

has made him useful to some elect and redeemed sinners; and, notwithstanding all the opposition that there has been against him, and the many dark prophecies uttered concerning him; still, I do hope, it is the Lord who is saying unto him— "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace - for I am with thee, no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." And if this be so, you know dear Sir, that the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hands. I have long been convinced that when the Lord God of heaven and earth really sends a servant of his to "receive the fruits of the vineyard,"—(Matt. xxi. 34.)—there will be plenty of husbandmen to beat him, to throw stones at him; and if possible, to kill him. But oh, Sir, what a question is that—oh, how careful it should make us, as to how we attempt to knock the servants of God about!" When the Lord of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen," Oh, I say Mr. Earthen Vessel, do you beg of the watchmen and the workmen that are now employed in and about our Zion, to read the 5th. 6th. and 7th. verses of the fifteenth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans; and may the Lord help them to practice it as well as to preach it.

But my object in writing to you, is to inform you that we have been favored to hear one of your good men—I mean Mr. James Wells: he preached both morning and evening at the opening of William Tant's little Jireh; and I can assure you that he came down here in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ; his bottle seemed to be ready to burst; for, I would really hope, the dear Spirit of all Truth, did, by him, bring forth some of the most precious things of the lasting hills; and many living souls were much refreshed by the joyful tidings which he proclaimed.

In the morning, Mr. Wells preached from Matt. xvi. 18.—" Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He commenced his discourse, which occupied an hour and a quarter, by reading the passage of which the text forms part. "I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever [thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In several instances where God had called sinners by his grace, he had given them a new name, expressive of the change which was wrought; and this was the case with Peter. His previous name was Simon, and when his brother Andrew brought him to Jesus, our blessed Lord addressing him, said "Thou art Cephas," that is Peter; for the word Cephas signified a stone, and the word Peter also signified a stone. Thus then Christ gave Simon his new name, "Thou art a stone," denoting the new state into which he was brought, that he should be a living stone; and when he called Peter to the apostleship, he said, " And upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Some say Peter is the foundation upon which the church was to be built; the answer which has been given by some to this is, that the Lord calls Peter, not a rock, but a stone—not upon this Stone, but upon this Rock will I build my church: and this answer would at first sight appear to be sufficient; but then it so happens that in the original the word is the same in both cases, (Petros, Petra and stands therefore in a similar position; as in another place the word temple stands—destroy this temple and raise it again in three days—not the literal temple, but the temple of his body. So here—not upon this lively stone, Peter; but upon this living stone, Christ, will I build my church: "and other foundations can no man lay than that which is laid Christ Jesus the Lord." The keys of heaven were said to be given to Peter, but not to the other disciples. Some thought that the reason of this was that he was the appointed person to preach on the day of Pentecost, when the kingdom of heaven was in a peculiar manner opened, and thousands went in; and therefore on that occasion Peter had a commission which the other disciples had not, he had to open the kingdom of heaven on the day of Pentecost. Hence the words, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven;" there was an analogy with something magisterial. A magistrate having a case before him, had to consider the circumstances and the law, and pronounce accordingly, sentencing the man to punishment, or setting him at liberty. But the magistrate had no power to make or

alter a law. So with the apostles, they neither made nor altered laws, but being led by the Holy Ghost, their sentences were truthful, and God Almighty would ratify all they did. No other foundation, then, was to be laid except Jesus Christ; and if any claimed to be master over another's conscience, let him be told, "Call no man master, on earth; one is your master, even Christ, and ye are all brethren." In reading the text, the following things naturally present themselves: first, the foundation; second, the building; third, its stability; and the fourth, its purpose. First, then, as to the foundation— "Upon this rock." Here were two ideas involved, strength and duration. We must admit that the Lord well knew what was needed for our salvation, and therefore he would not appoint for a foundation, that which had not sufficient strength to bear up under what must rest upon it. In order that we might have a right foundation for our hope, we must have something stronger than sin; sin had shown itself to be stronger than angels, for they fell from their first estate; it had proved itself to be stronger than-unfallen man, for when it attacked man, man fell; it had proved itself and continued to prove itself, stronger than man. When man found how far he was involved in sin, and how closely he was connected with sin: when he found this out and began to try to get away from his guilt, and impenitence, and unbelief, from the terrible threatening's of heaven, from the miseries that are come upon us by sin, when he felt this, he found out feelingly and experimentally that sin was stronger than himself, that after all his strivings, sin remained unmoved in all its fierce and deadly power. Therefore, in order to have a foundation on which safely to hope, we must have something stronger than sin. Christ met sin in its worst possible form, in its terribleness as it stood in the immediate presence of the majesty of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ met sin here; and all our sin was laid upon him, but not a particle of sin could be found in him. In his dying hour, the Father and the Holy Ghost laid all the sins of the church upon Christ. Would they have done so if he had not been able to bear them and prove himself stronger than sin? We ourselves were only stronger than sin, when we were in fellowship with the Father: through his Son Jesus Christ we had a Savior infinitely more able to save, than sin to destroy. Again, not only was Jesus Christ stronger than sin, but he was stronger than the curse of the law. This he knew was included in what he had already advanced; but he illustrated this minor point by dilating on the expression, "Awake, O sword against my Shepherd," which he contended meant the sword of justice directed against the Savior; Jesus Christ was also stronger than the world, with all its attractions, joys, hopes, sorrows, miseries. All these sought to entangle him; but he defeated them all. Jesus Christ was also superior to death, stronger than death. The pains of death wore out man; but he (the Savior) wore out the pains of death. He laid down his own life. But he (Mr. Wells) went further, and contended that Jesus Christ was stronger than the law of God. They might say the law of God was infallible, and being infallible nothing could be stronger. But the law was a creature, it was dependent on God; whereas Jesus Christ was self-existent, and independent. The law could not exist without God; but God could exist without the law; and Jesus Christ being self-existent, lived in his own-entity. He was then stronger than the law; nay, the law depended for its existence, on his power.

The preacher then glanced at the remaining subdivision of the first point in the discourse; the duration of the foundation. It was everlasting. All other foundations were temporary; but this was from everlasting to everlasting. What a contrast with time things did this present! Time things were really nothing. There was no other foundation that would last forever. Here was everlasting life and everlasting election. And John Careless, one of the martyrs of the reign of Queen Mary, said, "If I had as many lives as the hairs of my head, I would lay them all down for eternal election, for the mercy of the Lord which is from everlasting to everlasting." Oh how paltry was all in this world, what nothingness was there in the worldly history of those who had passed from the region of time to the unexplored regions of eternity? Having dwelled at great length on this, the first division of the discourse, the preacher touched with brevity on the remaining divisions. The building was illustrated by a subdivision—the severance of the stones from the quarry, that is the heart from sin; the squaring of them, i. e. making our thoughts and feelings and desires agree with

the will of God; and thirdly, their fixation in the church of God. In this part of the discourse he defined the word "church." It was an Old Saxon word, and meant simply a congregation. The original word ecclesia, from which we derived our word Ecclesiastes, simply signified an assembly, and answered to the old Testament expression "the congregation of the Lord." And in the Acts of the Apostles, where we found the word assembly, the original was ecclesias. Yet people wanted to make out that the word "church" meant an assembly of bricks and mortar. It meant an assemblage of people. Parkhurst said, it was a compound idea, denoting the unity of an assemblage under some superior authority: and this very well defined the church of God.

Next the preacher proceeded to illustrate the meaning of the "gates of hell," as opposed to the church. A gate was a place where the city took counsel as shown in Ruth. So the counsel of hell should not prevail against the church. It further meant tribulation, false religion, bigotry. He thought there were a great many people in Brighton who loved the Lord; but he thought also there was a great deal of bigotry. When the Lord wrought the miracle of feeding the thousands with the loaves and fishes, he made the multitude sit down in fifties. So in Brighton, the people congregated in fifties; taking care to sit a great way apart. This narrowness of feeling often vanished when we came to visit each other; for his own part, he loved all those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. The gates of hell also meant the profane world, and it meant death. Lastly, the purpose was to open the gates of heaven. Some time ago he offended the people of Manchester for using the expression "if the Lord will, I should like to see every town filled with the disciples of Christ, until the devil and sin be hunted out of the world." He offended some, because they thought he wished to encourage another cause besides the one that was there. Some people said, "You must come to my chapel, or you go to hell." What was this but popery? The Jewish law taught a better lesson; for it said "if a stranger cometh unto thee, let him dwell in any of thy gates that he liketh best." He wished the gospel to be spread to the uttermost. The characteristics: the gates of heaven were righteousness, plenty, suitability, preciousness, and these the gospel opened for man.

Mr. Wells concluded his discourse by a lively and suitable appeal to the congregation to lend their aid towards liquidating the building expenses. This appeal was not in vain; for I am told that the three collections produced thirty-five pounds, which certainly was a most noble and generous gathering.

Well, in the afternoon, William Tant preached from the words "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God." In commenting upon his text he referred to some of the trials they had been called to experience; and the hope they had, that the Lord was on their side.

Mr. Wells preached again in the evening from the last verse of the second book of Samuel. Altogether it was a happy and soul-comforting season. I will say, in conclusion, I am in no way connected with the cause at Jireh; but I believe the Lord was present on its opening-day; and, that great prosperity may rest upon it, is the fervent prayer of your's to serve in gospel bonds— THEOPHILUS

Note: Take from the Earthen Vessel 1864 Page 163ff