

“Thus saith the Lord :—

Set Thine House in Order.”

(2 Kings, 20, 1).



Some Reflections on 1928 Conferences
and other matters.

FOREWORD.

This booklet is designed to awaken real apprehension preliminary to real exercise of soul among God's dear children concerning the state of the churches of God (the members of which form the Body of Christ) in the evil day in which our lot is cast.

There is very real danger lest we "build again the things that once we destroyed" (Gal. 2, 18), and therefore it will be all to the good if as a result of the prayerful reading of these pages there is born in upon us, firstly:—the divine injunction to Abraham, "Walk before Me and be THOU upright" (Gen. 17, 1); and secondly:—that we observe to do "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28).

May the Lord the Spirit be pleased to make increasingly plain to us the importance and the significance of the various scriptures enumerated, that there may be a truer adjustment of our ways to Him, and that the reader may be spared from any feelings of resentment such as are a natural product of the flesh when holy things are brought into review.



“Thus saith The Lord:—

SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER.”

(2 Kings, 20, 1).

“How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts, my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psalm 84, 1-2).

“THUS SAITH THE LORD, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and YE SHALL find rest for your souls. BUT THEY SAID: ‘WE WILL NOT WALK THEREIN.’

“Also I set watchmen over you saying: ‘Hearken to the sound of the trumpet,’ BUT THEY SAID, ‘WE WILL NOT HEARKEN.’” (Jer. 6, 16-17).

Acting by expediency is a common rule in the world, and alas, in these last days is found in unhappy association with the work of God among the people of God. The spider weaves its web secretly and noiselessly, and the creatures caught therein find themselves helpless to regain their freedom, and it is sadly to be feared that something approaching this is the lot of many of the people of God to-day.

Ecclesiasticism has largely replaced apostolic practice in the gathering together of believers to the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that the divine mode of gathering together set forth in the Scriptures of Truth, and mercifully recovered to us nearly 100 years ago at tremendous cost, has to a great extent gone by the board, and the palpable lack of spirituality among present day Christians is a matter that calls loudly for the deepest exercise of soul before God.

Two minutes prayer and two hours talk in the gatherings has been largely the experience of the writer and others during these summer months, and those to whom God has graciously given the spirit of discernment (which all might have if they would) are only too woefully aware of the absence of the power of the Lord the Spirit and

the failure to apprehend the presence of the blessed Lord in the midst of His church.

In Deut. 8, v. 3, it is recorded for our admonition that it was God Himself who was compelled to humble His people and suffered them to hunger that they might know what was in their hearts (v. 2)—that they might also know the infinite provision of God's bounteous hand, and a sense of absolute dependence upon His matchless grace. As one has rightly said "It is a sorry business when God has to do what He has expressly commanded His people to do" (1 Pet. 5-6).

These particular dealings of God with Israel were the sorrowful experience of some five hundred gathered in annual meetings quite recently, and we were allowed to reap that which we had sown (Gal. 6-7) to our humiliation and to our discomfiture. Albeit we were ostensibly gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus, and presumably acknowledged the lordship of the Spirit and the blessed Master of Assemblies, yet—"HE suffered thee to hunger, HE humbled thee" became the fact; and we had to own the melancholy failure of what for 60 years within living memory has been generally regarded as "the cream" of ministry, dispensed as only God is able. We were given in a measure a stone for bread (Luke xi, 11-12).

There are numerous contributory causes that have led up to the present solemn conditions which the members of His body find themselves called upon (but not by God) to support. The world is rushing on, and in the whirlwind of events transpiring around us we have in some degree allowed ourselves to become unwittingly the mere tools of Satan, and the suitable material through which the countless hosts of fallen spirits are able to exert much of their venom in the insistent object of harming the Christ of God through His body, the church—formed of living stones (1 Peter, 2-5), of those who—having been convicted of their sinnership before the thrice holy God—turned in faith to the once bleeding, once crucified, but now risen and highly exalted Lamb of God at God's right hand, whom God hath set far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also

in that which is to come, and God hath put all things under His feet and given Him to be the Head over all to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1, 20-23).

To-day we gather to meetings controlled by a chairman; we have a time table; we are asked to subscribe to a series of arrangements that Scripture does not countenance; six or more missionary servants of God are crowded into two hours, with other items. These brethren must look straight ahead, not turning to the right hand or the left; they must speak very loudly and therefore in an unnatural tone; and, under the penalty of being regarded as covetous of another's time, must not exceed the allotted and prescribed (oftentimes) fifteen minutes. (Con. Acts 14, 27).

Yesterday (I am writing on the second day of a large conference), the chairman gave out all ten hymns. I ask in all humility, where is the "fellowship" in the things of God, in which we so much boast?

Again, a prayer meeting is announced for "confession and humiliation before God," but this is passed over in supplication and the giving of thanks. Again, a brother opens with Christ-exalting ministry in a meeting confessedly waiting upon the leading, guidance, and control of God the Holy Spirit, but the brother who follows extracts from his pocket the subject notes of an address entirely unconnected with what has gone before, and while the emotions get stirred the soul is left barren, and the blessed Lord is obliged to witness solemn, sad, and heart-depressing scenes, during which time the Holy Spirit is grieved and room is not found for Him who is waiting to ravish all hearts with Himself. Another brother at another meeting had to get away early and informed his brethren he must be the first speaker.

Oh, the sadness and sorrow of it all. To be occupied with self and one another when the blessed Spirit would have us occupied with the Christ. Plenty of fleshly energy but little divine power.

Many of God's dear children can recall gatherings of the past, before conferences (an objectionable, because inaccurate word), or set speakers, or restricted ministry such

as obtains to-day, were in vogue, and individually we cry:—

“Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to THE ROCK that is higher than I” (Ps. 61; 1-2).

“Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5, 21).

“SAVE NOW I BESEECH THEE O LORD;
O LORD I BESEECH THEE, SEND NOW
PROSPERITY.” (Psalm 118, 25).

One with whom I talked these matters over met them with the rejoinder: “If it wasn't for these annual meetings we would get nothing at all,” disclosing a most lamentable state of soul that makes it appear necessary that an annual meeting can supply the soul with what it needs. Another said, “If the Town Hall were not hired hundreds of us would be unable to get into the Gospel Hall;” to which I reply, “If all our fellowship meetings were characterized by the leading of the Spirit very many who now quite readily gather in a municipal building would find no inclination to gather in a Gospel Hall, on account of 1 Cor. 3, 3, ‘ye are yet carnal.’”

We are undoubtedly faced with this:—That men (some the most eminent among us) are endeavouring by human arrangements to make failure impossible and success assured in meetings for the ministry of the Word. Let us at once cease inviting speakers (who as a consequence presume they must be heard); let us be gathered together by God the Holy Spirit, owning and acknowledging the Lordship of that Spirit and the Headship of Christ; let there be a “taking forth the precious from the vile,” and collectively it will come to pass “then thou shalt be as My mouth” (Jer. 15, 19).

I make no pretensions to be anything more than any other of God's children; indeed I would in humbleness of mind desire to know myself “as the least of all saints,” for Paul is nothing, Apollos is nothing, but Christ is all and in all. Only with God-given ability can anything be

accomplished for God, and I would urge the extreme importance of obeying the divine injunction repeated at least five times, "See that ye do ALL THINGS according to the pattern showed to thee in the Mount." (Ex. 25, vv. 9, and 40, c. 26, 30, c. 27, 8, and elsewhere).

The Devil is mightily alive these days, but in a seductive way, especially where there are intelligent minds upon which to operate; and the lamentable thing is this, that many of those most eminent in the church of God to-day are those who are the more exposed to the wiles of the Adversary, and some have sadly departed from "the pattern."

The Fellowship meetings at———recently were marred because of the inroads of worldliness on the part of some gathered, and of the flesh rising up and asserting itself on the part of others desiring to be seen and heard, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing and practising Gal. 5, 13, "Brethren . . . use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

"Without ME ye can do nothing." (John 15, 5).

How solemn it is that we may be engaged even in the things of the Assembly, engaged reading God's Word, absorbed and permeated with its doctrine, and alas, *un*engaged with yon Lovely Man at God's right hand.

O Lord, deliver us from intellectualism, from exclusivism, from sensationalism, that the blessed Master of Assemblies may be honored and glorified in our coming together!

Beloved, let us ask for the old paths and walk therein, that we may no longer dishonour our God by gathering unscripturally, but that in exercise of soul before God we may confidently raise the cry, "Wilt THOU not revive us again that Thy people may rejoice IN THEE?"

(Psalm 85, 6).

How thankful I am to know that that which man has not joined he cannot separate, but we all need to be deeply exercised before God lest we commit the mistake of thinking that largely attended conferences are a sign that God

is blessing His people. The motor car, the motor bicycle, the char-a-banc (to name only a few), are powerful weapons in the hands of the Devil when misused, and in that case will be an evidence that the Lord has not been consulted in the matter.

An esteemed teacher of the Word said, "I know a young woman in an assembly to whom a push bicycle became a snare, and the blessed Lord was accordingly robbed of His portion."

It may be that the penning of these convictions before God may lead to criticism on the part of some, but there are many whose spirits cry out for the collective enjoyment consciously to faith of the living God (Psalm 84, 2), and who are solemnly raising the warning note of the trumpet (Jer. 6, 17). One beloved brother whom God greatly used from 40 years ago and onwards said, "I am afraid the evil has gone too far to be arrested;" yet "With God all things are possible." (Mark 14, 36).

I, perhaps more than any, need to remember the divine exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10, 12).

Shall we not all heed the divine command in Isaiah i, 16, 17, 18 :

"Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow."

"Come now, let us reason together saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Let us not overlook the divine principle implied in Luke 9, 14: "Make them sit down by fifties in a company." Also Mark 6, 40: "And they sat down in ranks of hundreds and fifties;" for deplorable results have followed some too large gatherings. Friends have made real sacrifices to get to meetings, only to be sent away barren and unsatisfied. It is high time

to call a halt, and to review our position, and for all exercised souls to seek the abolition of all things not according to the pattern, then we might expect and be assured of the blessing of God among us.

Let there be a cessation of pressure upon prospective converts. At one meeting I attended in London in 1926 the Missioner refused to close the meeting until some had stood up. How long is it to be expected that these artificial converts will stand seeing they have never been brought to the birth?

Let us abandon the spectacular. Let us be as those who wait for their Lord. Let us avoid "mass production," and believe in our hearts that God's way is best.

Ministers of the Word of God are booked up eighteen months or two years ahead, and preachers of the Gospel similarly. When one brother in oversight has the obtaining of speakers and preachers, partiality often results.

Subjects are advertised months ahead, removing the prerogative of the leading of the Spirit to the individual "billed" to speak.

Prayers are offered to God saying, "Bring in the people" when all the time God is saying, "Go! Go! Go!"

The "dead" prayer meeting is but a reflex of the "worldliness" of so many of the saints of God.

Oh, that we might realize true confession of our dismal failure in these things before the Lord.

We need to recognize the solemn fact that the Adversary is eager to wreck Assembly life in these days, and, alas, is only too successful in many cases; and the lamentable thing is this, that there are some who are only too ready to carry out, even if unintentionally, his nefarious designs. To name only one source of weakness among us, i.e.:—that of carnal, unloving criticism. When we so readily lend ourselves to this unwarranted course of action do we realise we are doing the work of the Devil, especially when it is through a third party? If it must be so, it is better to be "slain" before one's face than behind one's back.

The Lord help us all to seek grace to judge ourselves

and not another, that the positive harm resulting from the evil spirit of criticism may cease. "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4, 32).

The alarming conformity to the fashion of the age in dress, the forfeiture by women of their "glory," (1 Cor. 11, 15), and the consequent absence of becoming modesty, all betoken the power that the Adversary is exerting and the control that he is freely allowed to possess over the children of God, as well as the defiance of God's respective laws thereby expressed.

These criticisms are not written in any censorious spirit. We all need to be delivered from the spirit of unloving criticism so deadening to Assembly life in these days. May the evils that are rampant in our midst be overthrown by God Himself as a result of the priestly intercession of His beloved people.

We need to be reminded that the Holy Spirit carries out His work quietly and unostentatiously— that the Kingdom of God cometh not by outward show.

Some may quite naturally enquire what are the remedies for the evils abounding among us? They are simple and effective. Let us scrap the prayer list and not "straighten" the Holy Spirit and ourselves to seven or eight hundred missionaries, but embrace in our arms of faith all God sent servants at home and abroad. Let us dispense with the monthly publication of offerings, and let us return to the apostolic practice of communicating direct with those whom the Holy Spirit has separated and thrust forth. This would remove many heart burnings from many missionaries.

Let us avoid supplanting God's precious Word by the hymn book, but let the latter be secondary. Let us abstain from lending our support to meetings where there is the restraint of man made arrangements.

Many have been brought into captivity by the Devil, apparently unaware of the evil in our midst; but, setting our hearts to seek the Lord, let us cry:— O God, in mercy, grant us the experience of Psalm 126: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter

and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations, THE LORD hath done great things for them!" And we shall soon be able to add: "THE LORD hath done great things for us! we are glad."

Let us not fail to observe the next psalm. "EXCEPT THE LORD build the house, they labour in vain who build it; EXCEPT THE LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Let us avoid the evil of an occupied platform, and thus instead of looking to man we shall be looking to God for the message He sees we need. Then we shall discern the utterance of our blessed Lord bearing the hall mark of divine authority.

Let me add one word more respecting open and closed meetings. As a consequence of the disappointment of some this season at open meetings there will be a clamour (unless we are on our guard) for booked speakers where up till now this has not been permitted. Let me say at once that in my humble judgment this would be a fatal mistake. We can neither improve, or even approximate to, the divine pattern by the substitution of man-made arrangements. Let us hold tenaciously to what Scripture sanctions, and to that only. Speaking personally, the Lord has never taught me such solemn and searching, yet precious, lessons in closed meetings as He has been free to do in the open meetings of these summer months; and the lesson we all need to take to heart is this, that there is an increasing need to "wait only upon God," to hear what God the Lord would say unto us. This is an impossibility where a closed platform obtains, and consequently the hearts and consciences of God's people are to a large extent unreached.

If it be argued that blessing has been received in such meetings, I reply:—God is sovereign and blesses us in spite of what we are and do, as is instanced in the striking of the rock the second time, and the life-sustaining waters flowing out; yet Moses for this act of disobedience was deprived of entry into the promised land.

Warnings on these solemn matters have been administered in the past, and the rumble of distant thunder is

clearly heard by those who are able to discern the signs of the times. May the blessed Lord Himself lead us into deep exercise of heart to respond to the command to Hezekiah (2 Kings, 20, 1), "Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order."

With a confident hope that good may result, these lines are launched among the people of God, assured that the blessing of the Lord will continue to be upon those who seek His face, and who resort to and practice the injunctions of His most precious Word.

The Lord grant we may recognize His clarion note of warning. And may the Lord give us understanding in all things. (2 Tim. 2, 7).

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