

LEAVEN TO BE PURGED.

REMARKS ON A TRACT BY MR. T. WESTON

ENTITLED—

“HOW THE LEAVEN HAS WROUGHT.”

“Let us therefore keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread (or things) of SINCERITY and TRUTH.”—I Cor. v. 8.

THE wide circulation of a tract bearing the title “*How the Leaven has wrought*” has raised alarm in the minds of many of God’s children, especially of those who have not learned the necessity of waiting to hear the other side of a matter before forming a judgment. “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.” (Prov. xviii. 17.)

Anxious enquiries have reached several servants of Christ whose addresses are well known, and demand attention. Not a few were received by brethren at Bristol, as might be expected. Mr. John F. Stancomb, of that city, entered into correspondence with Mr. Weston, first of all to obtain information as to the titles of certain books and pamphlets referred to in the tract, and then to express his judgment of the latter in a letter that follows, which he allows me to make use of, and to which he has received no reply.

“Bristol, Nov. 21st, 1894.

“My dear Brother,—I duly received your letter with titles as requested and have been looking up Mr. Newton’s books, but by no means, as you suggest, in Bethesda’s lending library, for such an institution does not exist, any more than a certain *letter*, save in the archives of brethren called by some ‘*Exclusives*,’ but by our dear brother Mr. R. C. Chapman, of Barnstaple, ‘*Brethren beloved and longed for*.’

I stated in my letter to you that I shrank from the quotations given in your pamphlet, but I must now modify what I then said, for I find you have *misquoted*.

The second quotation you give in the pamphlet is from Flavel, one of the old Puritan fathers, against whom no suspicion of unsoundness has been ever raised. I find you quote his *first* and *third* clauses, but omit the *middle* one, which explains what the writer intended to convey, by no means imputing any sin to the person of our adorable Lord, and you have omitted it *advisedly*, as your ". . . ." between the clauses testify. I am sure you would not wish to be found in company with one who misquoted Scripture to our blessed Lord Himself, by withholding a part of it, thus turning truth into error, but have you not done the same with Flavel's quotation? Added to which, Mr. Newton did not quote it, but only inserted it in a foot-note, without note or comment. I consider your testimony is invalidated thereby, and you must really retire from the witness box.

Do, dear brother, another time, before rushing into print, communicate personally with the brother against whom you bring a charge, that he may have the opportunity of replying *in propria personâ*. Do not covet the post of a spiritual detective; be more ready to go backwards with the cloth than to expose defilement, to carry about the basin to wash saints' feet than to report their uncleanness; and *that* might keep the Leaven from working and spreading.

I am sure dear Mr. Müller might well say to many of his accusers, 'Physician, heal thyself.' I have listened to his testimony now for many years, have known him personally for half a century, but never has anything unsound as to the person of our blessed Lord fallen from his lips, so far as my knowledge goes.

I think you have placed yourself in a wrong position, stirred up the embers of strife, and touched the apple of God's eye, in thus charging His honoured servant, Mr. Müller, with evil doctrine. 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;' but, *thank God, through His rich grace*, the lump is not leavened yet, after nearly 50 years, and Mr. Newton's teachings as set forth in the 1848 tracts find no place in our midst, neither do any of the evil doctrines now so rife in many assemblies. *We are only safe as kept by Divine grace, either from moral or doctrinal evil.*

Yours sorrowfully for the course you have taken,

JNO. F. STANCOMB."

REMARKS ON MR. WESTON'S TRACT.

The evident aim of this tract is to leave upon the reader the impression that what in 1848 Mr. Müller declared to be "*fearful errors*," he in 1893 approved as *valuable teaching*, and that all who are known as *Open Brethren*, are having fellowship with those "*fearful errors*." But what is the evidence adduced in support of so grave a charge? Simply this, that whereas in 1848 Mr. Müller declared certain teachings of Mr. Newton's to be "*fearful errors*," he in 1893 speaks of *other* teachings of Mr. Newton's as "*valuable*." It is a well known fact that for forty years Mr. Newton not only has not taught the doctrines condemned in 1848, but his teaching has been *most* emphatic as to the holiness and perfection of the incarnate Son of God. I am not aware that he has ever definitely acknowledged with regret the error he *once* taught, and no lapse of time and no sound teaching can atone for a serious error, if that error be unjudged and unacknowledged. But it is not a godly man that "*diggeth up evil*" (Prov. xvi. 27), and it is not a just man who makes a charge which he cannot clearly prove; yet all the proof Mr. Weston can give of the above charge against an esteemed servant of Christ is contained in the following words of Mr. Müller's:—

"If Mr. B. honestly wishes to know what Mr. Newton's views are, let him carefully and attentively read some of his principal writings through, from which he will clearly see, not only that Mr. Newton is sound in the faith, but *also* that his teaching is of a most valuable character."

Mr. Weston adds in brackets, "He gives the titles of three, which are better withheld"! But in a charge of heresy concerning which a solemn judgment has to be formed, those who have to form it need—not merely a few lines extracted from a book, but—an opportunity of being able to read it for themselves.

On page 6, Mr. Weston gives two quotations without the least indication of their source or date. But he implies that the *first* is not from any of the books named by Mr. Müller. On this quotation I would only remark that to speculate on what would have happened "under certain supposed circumstances" is not reverent, and must tend to erroneous conclusions. We are called to consider *what is written*, and as we do this with unshod feet we are led to worship.

We have, however, chiefly to do with the *one* witness—the only book of the three named by Mr. Müller from which Mr. Weston quotes, while withholding the title.* In this pamphlet Mr. Weston can find *no* statement of Mr. Newton's to help his case; therefore he makes an extract from a foot-note, which he says Mr. Newton "quotes approvingly as expressing his own views." This may be so, but Mr. Newton gives it without remark. This extract is from *Flavel*,† but how are we to understand Mr. Weston's words, when he says that he writes "from an honest desire to be loyal to our absent Lord and Master," yet actually omits parts from the middle and end to make Flavel mean what he *expressly denies*? The following are his words as given by Mr. Newton. The portions in italics enclosed in brackets show what Mr. Weston *omitted*.

"Moreover, Jesus Christ did not only assume the human nature; but He also assumed its nature after sin had blotted its original glory, and withered its beauty and excellence. For He came not in our nature before the fall, whilst as yet its glory was fresh in it; but he came as the apostle speaks, 'in the likeness of *sinful flesh*' (Rom. viii. 3), that is, in flesh that had the marks, and miserable effects, and consequents of sin upon it. [*I say not that Christ assumed sinful flesh, or*

* I learn that it is "Salvation by Substitution" (1865.)

† John Flavel was one of the clergymen who suffered for conscience sake and were ejected from their livings in 1662. He died at Exeter in 1691. He was known as a man of exemplary piety, and was much valued as a teacher, while his writings have ever since been esteemed by many.

flesh really defiled by sin. That which was born of the Virgin was a holy thing. For by the power of the Highest, that whereof the body of Christ was to be formed, was so sanctified, that no taint or spot of original pollution remained in it. But yet, though it had not intrinsical native uncleanness in it, it had the effects of sin upon it ;] yea, it was attended with the whole troop of human infirmities that sin at first brought into our common nature, such as hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, mortality, and all these natural weaknesses and evils that clog our miserable natures, and make them groan from day to day under them.

By reason whereof, though He was not a sinner, yet He looked like one ; and they that saw and conversed with Him took Him for a sinner, seeing all these effects of sin upon Him. [*In these things He came as near to sin as His holiness could admit*]."

I quite disapprove of some of these expressions, but is it not evident that Flavel, who wrote two centuries ago, only desired to set forth the condescending grace of the Lord in becoming man, guarding against the deduction now drawn from his words? My own thoughts on the manhood of our blessed Lord are expressed in vol. viii of the *Golden Lamp*, where it may be seen how I deprecate the use of the word *mortal* with reference to the sacred body of the Lord. But it should be remembered that only during the last fifty years, and only in certain quarters, has the word "mortal" been objected to, as expressing what is not true, and therefore serious error. It has been used for centuries, and is still used by many who would abhor the thought of using a word dishonouring to the Lord, and in their minds it simply signifies that He so truly became man that He was capable of laying down His life. Therefore, carefully as such a word should be avoided, it is a solemn thing to call a man a blasphemer who uses it.

It has been already said that from the only one witness Mr. Weston professes to bring forward, he does not quote a single word of Mr. Newton's. Why? Simply because he could only find what would disprove that which he asserts.

The following are Mr. Newton's own statements on the very page (14) from which Mr. Weston gives his mutilated quotation :—

“ It had been condescension and humiliation unspeakable for Him Whom the Heaven of heavens cannot contain, to take into union with Himself the nature even of angels ; but He descended lower in the scale than angels, and took upon Him *man's* nature ; and that, not whilst it retained the beauty and honour proper to it in Paradise before Adam sinned, but *after* it had lost its primeval strength and beauty. He came ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh ;’ being in all things made like unto His brethren, sin excepted ;’ of which He was clearly void, both in flesh and spirit. *Morally*, He was not in the likeness of sinful flesh. Though ‘made of a woman’ yet by virtue of His miraculous generation, there was in Him no sin ; no taint of sin ; no proclivity to sin.”

Again on page 22, Mr. Newton says with reference to some novel teaching :—

“ I scarcely need say to anyone who knows the truth, that if our Substitute in taking on Himself the imputation of our guilt did, in any sense whatever, take into union with His Person our old man, or our morally tainted life, He would then Himself have stood in ‘the actual condition of a sinner,’ and would Himself have needed reconciliation. But the whole system is false. Christ never took upon Himself our old man. In taking our flesh He did not take its corruption. He never took a life that needed, because of sin in it, to be laid down in order that another life might be taken up. The life that He had as man was as pure and morally perfect as that which He had with the Father before the world was. His flesh in all its connections was as the veil of the sanctuary.”

Reviewing these quotations of Mr. Newton's own words in the book from which Mr. Weston makes an extract *from Flavel*, and remembering how he mutilates that extract, can we escape the conclusion that Mr. W.'s aim was to convey to his readers the impression that Mr. Müller had become *leavened* with a certain heretical doctrine while Mr. W. well

knew that the full extract from Flavel, and still more the expressions from Mr. N.'s own pen in that book, would have utterly nullified his charge of heresy? *

A few words on the alleged working of the "leaven" at Bethesda seem called for. Mr. Müller writes (Nov. 5, 1894):

"My view regarding the two tracts of Mr. Newton, written before July, 1848, is unaltered. They are unsound. But his writings within the last 30 or 40 years, as far as I know them, I consider Scriptural, and some of them very good."

From the lips of two other elder and responsible brethren of Bethesda I know that the door would be closed now, as it ever has been, against anyone bringing the doctrine referred to. If it be true (*and who will question it?*) that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," it may surely be said that, had the leaven been allowed there, Mr. Weston (who in the title of his tract refers to this Scripture), would not have been driven after nigh fifty years to the necessity of seeking the leaven *in one person* and endeavouring to prove its existence by the—must we not say?—dishonourable means of which his tract gives evidence. What are we to say further as to his attempt on such ground to fasten a charge of heresy on *tens of thousands* of God's children who are seeking to walk before Him in sincerity and truth? Is not this an effort to sow discord amongst brethren and to prevent the reunion of numbers who are desiring to more truly keep the unity of the Spirit? (Prov. vi. 16, 19.)

* The library mentioned in Mr. W.'s tract is simply one at Ashley Down. On this point a word of explanation dispels clouds of unfounded suspicion against a large company of believers in Bristol. Similarly, without doubt, other points in Mr. Weston's statement, many of them mere hearsay, might be cleared; yet mistakes may have been made by some to whom he refers, as most of us would be ready to acknowledge if our words and the minute acts of our lives were searched out. My object, however, is not to defend mistakes, but to deal with the grave implications of heresy in Mr. Weston's tract. As to Mr. Newton's more recent writings, unprejudiced persons have said that those referring to Higher Criticism, Evolution, and other modern winds of doctrine are of undoubted value.

It may not be out of place to add that a few months ago, when I challenged a similar accuser to bring forward definite proof of his charge that we had fellowship with the doctrine now in question, and that of the non-eternity of punishment, he, having obtained the assistance of a well-known teacher, cited what I naturally presumed to be the clearest cases he could give. After full and careful enquiry I was able to reply decidedly to these two brethren, that they had been misinformed and that both charges were untrue, but the clear testimony I was able to bring was of no avail, as has also been found in other cases, where cherished evil traditions are preferred to *truth*.

I may, however, repeat two questions I asked during the correspondence : (1) Who is in the best position to *know* what we hold and have fellowship with—we ourselves, or they who keep aloof from us ? (2) Can it possibly be of any advantage to us to deny that we hold anything that we *do* hold ? or have we anything to gain by asserting that we do *not* allow that with which we would have fellowship ?

It seems right to speak plainly for the sake of those who *desire* to know the *truth* touching these matters ; but as to self-defence, we simply appeal from our accusers to the "Righteous Judge," before Whom we and they must soon be made manifest. We shall then learn the Lord's estimate of "the *unleavened* things of SINCERITY and TRUTH."

W. H. BENNET.

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