

A GOOD “FEAR NOT” TO BEGIN THE YEAR WITH  
OR,

The Editor’s Address to his Readers (for 1852)

“And his servant said, Alas! my master! how shall we do? And he answered, FEAR NOT *for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them.*” 2 KINGS 6:15, 16.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, AND READERS ALL,

In opening the eighth volume of the EARTHEN VESSEL, we feel desirous of saying but very little. Apologies for our numerous faults will not remove them; and as to promises of anything better, we have so little confidence in ourselves, that we are more concerned to be found doing better, than merely talking about it.

Our position in the church is by no means a sinecure. We have more labor in our various methods of promulgating THE TRUTH, than we can possibly perform with anything like comfort to ourselves or satisfaction to others. This state of things has been brought about, perhaps, by an over-willingness on the one hand, and a want of ability, strength, &c., on the other. However, to speak in the most careful manner, we may say the ALMIGHTY has permitted us to struggle on for upwards of seven years. That our existence has been most powerfully opposed, both directly and indirectly, but very few would deny. Still, it has been a progressive existence; and, to a certain extent, it has been a successful one. Although no man could have labored under much greater difficulties than has the responsible conductor of the EARTHEN VESSEL, when he reflects upon the apparently dangerous path through which he has travelled, and the many, the merciful, yes, the marvelous deliverances which have been wrought for him, he desires to be overwhelmed with gratitude, adoration, reverence, and godly fear, and to be fired with fresh courage, nerved with more zeal, and sustained by new supplies of heavenly power onward to march to the end of his earthly career.

Readers of, and subscribers to, the EARTHEN VESSEL, we ask you, one and all, minutely to review our past, and then as carefully to consider, our present position; and, if after you have done so, you are satisfied that the employing and directing hand of GOD has been with us; that he has been and still is, making use of us, then, we ask you to endeavor to make our position, in a temporal sense, a more safe one, and our sphere of usefulness, a more extensive one. You are from six to TEN THOUSAND in number. Every month during the past year 1851, we printed upwards of six thousand copies of the EARTHEN VESSEL: some months are so completely sold out, that we cannot perfect volumes until we reprint, while of other months some few hundreds are on hand. We may safely say that SEVENTY THOUSAND of the EARTHEN VESSEL were sent out among our churches and people during the year 1851; its readers, no doubt have been considerably above ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND.

Some of our venerable standard bearers may, perhaps, sneer at this amount of influence assigned to us; but no unbiassed mind will treat it with contempt. It is an influence which may be used to great advantage to the churches of Christ in our land; and the most prevalent desire of our soul is, that our covenant God and father IN CHRIST would, from time to time, anoint our eyes, enlarge our heart, strengthen our hands, and make more than ever willing our feet to run; and so to labor, as to be increasingly useful unto the never-dying souls of the heirs of grace, whether as yet uncalled, or as fighting hard in the path of tribulation.

In coming to solicit the co-operation of our numerous readers, we must first very plainly describe our position then, secondly, we must look back a little, and consider what the Lord, we trust, has made us instrumental in accomplishing. And lastly, we would briefly anticipate the future only for one moment.

One single circumstance will do for our text and furnish us with a starting point in this branch of our address. Most of our readers are aware that a public meeting on behalf of the Earthen Vessel was held in London last November. At that meeting a committee was appointed to enquire into the actual expenditure and income connected with the publication of this work; and to adopt, if possible such measures as should set the editor free from all financial embarrassment, and remunerate him a little for his onerous labor.

The first time the brethren forming that committee assembled, it was proved to them by a disinterested and practical publisher, that nothing under a sale of eight thousand copies per month could ever cover the expenses of producing so heavy a work as the Earthen Vessel now is. Consequently the editor was advised either to increase the price, or very considerably to lessen the quantity of the matter given; but as he was persuaded that the adoption of either the one or the other of these suggestions must tend, at least, to check the circulation of the Vessel, he frankly informed his brethren that he could not accede to their wishes; at the same time thanking them for the very kind manner in which they had looked into the matter. The committee, we suppose, have since concluded that the difficulty was too great for them further to grapple with.

We come now to the circumstance referred to, which we said should form our text.

A Christian brother, some few days since, (who, by the bye, was one of the before-mentioned Committee,) called upon us; we were much cast down at the time; owing to the pressure of business and domestic trials. He said "Well how are you getting on? We could make no direct, no definite reply. We answered him as honestly and as promptly, as we could; but, no doubt, he saw a cloud was over our spirits. He said, "Ah, I fear you will never get through. You will bring yourself and your friends into trouble." This was as a dagger; but we bore it as well as we could. When he left us, we turned to the throne; and then to the Word: the first Scripture that met us was that in Luke 14:28, "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him."

"This is your position," said some secret spirit within; "you have laid the foundation, but you cannot proceed." We were not altogether in despair. We prayed again; then looked into an old book; and the words which we have placed at the head of this article, were fastened home, "And his servant said unto him, Alas my master! How shall we do? And he answered, FEAR NOT; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them." Elisha prayed, and the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

This Scripture most exactly depicts both sides of our position; for, many times, when we have surveyed the land around us, and looked at the difficulties meeting us; and sometimes, actually

fearing that the heavens were frowning upon us, we could not help exclaiming. "Alas! alas! how shall we do?" Shall we abandon our post? Must we really be dashed to pieces, and our labors all be lost? Ah, my reader, many and many a time, while you have been quietly, and it may be, comfortably perusing one month's Vessel, we have been in the deep waters of mental affliction, and beat about by the rough and contrary winds of external embarrassment, crying out, "Alas, Master! How shall we do?"

Elisha's "FEAR NOT" his assurance that they that be with us, are more than they that are against us, and, his mountain full of horses and chariots of fire, have most wonderfully helped us, in the day of trouble. We have looked back, and have thought upon some of the things which the Lord has permitted and enabled us to do in his name; and every one of them have appeared to say to us: "FEAR NOT."

We shall a little recapitulate; not for the sake of boasting, not because we wish to blow our own trumpet, but for the glory of God, and as a sort of foundation on which to lay our appeal for your co-operation. During the past eight years, we have been employed in a variety of ways in serving many of the ministers and churches in our highly favored land. If ministers have needed pulpits, or if vacant pulpits have cried out for pastors, we have used our utmost endeavors to help them; and in very many cases have, under God, been successful; and our present gratuitous amount of labor in that particular branch, is no trifle; it is not easy to say what number of letters even this trifling service occasions us to write. Well, this has given us fellowship with many good ministers; rendered us useful to many churches. We hope the hand of God has been in it. "FEAR NOT."

"The Society for the Relief of Faithful Gospel Ministers, and for Assisting Destitute Churches," originated with us (as instruments;) and through the medium of the Earthen Vessel, it has been nursed; and a little helped on its way. We can boldly declare that the Society, (almost buried in oblivion, as it is,) has conferred essential help on many a dear servant of Christ in the hour of sorrow. It is still holding on its way. We attended one of the Committee meetings lately; and heard some precious letters from ministers who needed help. The struggles through which that Society has passed, and its present useful position, says to us again, "FEAR NOT."

"The London Gospel Mission" held its first district meeting at Cave Adullam Chapel, Stepney, (brother William Allen in the chair,) on Monday evening, December 15th, when a District Committee was formed; an excellent spirit in favor of its operations manifested; and a good hope entertained that it will soon be effecting good, under the blessing of the Great Head of the Church. We shall not fear to say, that we humbly trust God put that matter into our heart and employed us to bring it before the churches. May the richest mercies accompany the efforts of that little band; and as they fight on through dangers, difficulties, and discouragements, may they often hear a voice from the Great Master in Israel, saying, "FEAR NOT."

The proposition to form, to establish, and to set in motion "The Free Grace National Tract Association," was first forwarded to us by its worthy originator, and zealous patron, Mr. W. Edwards, of No. 6, Mina Road, Old Kent Road. When we opened the packet forwarded to us by Mr. Edwards, and read therein his letter, and proposed plan, our soul rejoiced. We knew it was a machinery greatly needed; it seemed to spring up just at the right moment to assist in furnishing the London Gospel Mission with truthful, suitable, and powerful tracts for distribution. We took

time for consideration and consultation. Feeling the ground to be good, knowing Mr. Edwards's motive to be pure; and finding that there were a few faithful and judicious men ready and willing to unite with him, in so essential and interesting a cause, we promised (God helping and permitting) to throw in all the little energy we possess for the furtherance thereof. A respectable Committee and a good Editorial Board have been formed; Secretaries, Accountants, Collectors, Treasurer, &c., &c., have been appointed; and on Monday evening, January the 5th, the first public meeting on its behalf is to be held in the snug little Mount Zion, Nelson Place, City Road. Many of our provincial pastors have hailed the project with much delight; they bid us God speed. One godly minister says, "I rejoice to find that a 'Free Grace National Tract Association' has been formed, to assist in stemming the torrents of Arminianism, with which the press is now teeming."

At the last Committee meeting of this Tract Association, we were deputed to write the first tract. This seemed a task too much; but early one morning we were awake with the impression that we must be up and at it. We arose; we prayed; we thought; we commenced. The word came, "By the grace of God I am what I am." As we wrote on, the way was opened clearly; the oil flowed freely; we rejoiced, we wept, we prayed that a divine blessing might attend it. We headed it, "The Country Lady and the Christian Curate; A Narrative true to the Life" Christian friends, in the midst of so many mercies, although as poor in pocket as a church mouse, and often fearing the frowns of tomorrow, still, something says, "FEAR NOT."

In the ministration of the gospel, (although our feeble mind often seems as shallow as an oyster shell) God has greatly blessed us; and suffered us also to be severely tried. Yet, having obtained help from heaven, we continue to this day; and sometimes shout aloud, "FEAR NOT."

May we dare to say one word respecting our labors connected with the printing press? Who has not read the striking narratives of "Thomas Guy," "John Paddy," "Matthew Hepburn," and other works illustrative of the sovereignty and sufficiency of the grace of God? How many real Christians are now encouraged and comforted by the clean, the spiritual, the wholesome pages of "The Silent Preacher?" And what a multitude have been both pleased and profited by the little "Cheering Words for the Household of Faith?" Not to multiply; but when we think of the singular and unsought for providences whereby the above, and a host of other works, have been put into our hands; when we reflect upon the hundreds of thousands of books which we have been instrumental in sending forth into the world, we cannot, we dare not, but believe, that the hand of a gracious God has been on us for good to the heaven seeking sons and daughters of our spiritual Zion; and then again the heart cheering word comes, "FEAR NOT."

This is, then, a hasty glance at our position, and all this, principally, has been achieved through the instrumentality of "The Earthen Vessel." It has acted the part of a pioneer. It is true we have been compelled to throw all our receipts, and a great deal more, into the Vessel, in order to keep her from sinking; and in return, she has thrown all the interest she could obtain, back into our hearts and hands, to prevent us from a temporal wreck. Before us, appears to be opened an extensive sphere of usefulness; and we are more than ever willing and anxious to be found employed in enlisting fresh recruits, in warning unruly members of the household, in nourishing the babes, in instructing the ignorant, in comforting the weary, in a word, in feeding the church of God. Brethren, pray for us; that, in the midst of our work, we may often hear our heavenly Father's voice saying to us, "FEAR NOT."

Most earnestly do we beseech every reader of, and friend to, the Earthen Vessel, to help us in furthering the circulation; for unless we can increase it, we have reason to fear that a serious alteration must be made.

The Lord knows we covet no man's silver or gold. We have neither been idle nor extravagant; we have labored incessantly; and are willing still to do so; but when we find at the end of the labor, we cannot pay our way, it breaks our heart. Heavy, however, as the clouds around us are, we think we hear the small, the distant voice, still echoing: "FEAR NOT."

Remember, brethren, we stand alone, as regards creature responsibility. We have none but God to look to. The Lord constrain you, one and all, at the commencement of this eighth year of our existence, to arise once more for our help, and that we may be spared to spend the year in an increased devotion to the service of our best and most glorious Master, is the prayer of your poor servant in the fields of Boaz.

CHARLES WATERS BANKS.