

THE following original and encouraging testimony in favor of the *Earthen Vessel* came to hand very seasonably. We do rejoice in being furnished with such undeniable evidences of what the grace of God can do. Ed.

One of Mr. James Wells' Seals.¹

DEAR BROTHER BANKS:

Four years have now elapsed since I first took the *Earthen Vessel*; and I believe, at times, whilst perusing its contents, I have enjoyed the soul-refreshing presence of the Lord. Conscience has often smote me for not writing to you before, relating how the *Earthen Vessel* was the means (in the hands of the Lord) in conveying to my soul that rest to which I before was quite a stranger.

I have again and again attempted to live in London, but all to no purpose; I am now (for the fourth time) in the country, as a consequence of ill health. I will endeavor briefly to relate my experience in divine things, in which I shall include the circumstance referred to.

It was my lot to be born of Christian parents (particular Baptists) in the town of Beccles, on July 1, 1827. At an early age I was placed in a Sabbath school, and sat under the heart-searching ministry of Mr. George Wright, who still labors here in holy things. Notwithstanding all this, I grew up hardened in sin; at the same time having a circumcised ear, but very far from having a circumcised heart. I would at times most earnestly contend for the doctrines of free grace, whilst experimentally I was a stranger to them. Sometimes conscience smote me severely, so that I would hide me in a room, and vow before God, (alas, in my own strength) I would amend my ways and lead a new life; but this proved abortive.

As I wish to be brief, I pass on to the year 1849, when providence led me to reside with Messrs. Olney and Sons, in the Borough; and on the third Sabbath I went to the Surrey Tabernacle, and heard Mr. Wells, thought him a very eccentric minister of the gospel; still, I was attracted by his preaching. I well remember one sermon he preached having a great influence on my mind, it was from the following words “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” 1 Peter 2:24. Twas then I felt I was a sinner vile indeed, and unless Christ had “borne my sins in his own body on the tree,” I must forever perish, and reap the just reward of my own evil doings. I knew not what to do, or where to go. I felt I deserved hell, but yet desired heaven; I prayed most earnestly that the Lord might deliver me from this horrible pit and miry clay, and set my feet upon the rock Christ; but the Bible appeared to me a sealed book, and the heavens as brass; sometimes I would gain a little from Mr. Well's preaching, and would oftentimes peruse the *Vessel* to see whether or not any of the experiences of the Lord's people corresponded with mine; and never shall I forget reading “A brief review of the last illness and death of Caroline Morgan,” as recorded in the June number for 1849. She expressed herself to be very dark, and exclaimed, “There is no hope, there seems no hope at all.” Well, thought I, this is just my case; and her sister answered her, as some of the Lord's people did me, by saying, “I have a hope for you.” And whilst I was comparing her case with my own, the dear Lord gave me such a hope as never can fail.

¹ This was taken from the 1852 volume 8 edition of the *Earthen Vessel*: and *Christian Record*. January issue, pages 8, 9 and 10

The following words were most powerfully applied to my soul, "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It was rest indeed, such as I never before experienced. I was overcome with joy; and being alone in my bedroom, I laid the *Vessel* aside, bent my knees in prayer, and thanked the Lord for his goodness; told him the news seemed too good for one so unworthy.

I found your visits were blessed to Caroline, so that she died not without a hope; but in the agonizing hour of death triumphed in the God of her salvation. Blessed be God, I also have a hope, and I never for a moment doubt the perpetuity of God's work in the salvation of sinners, but when at times cast down and overwhelmed with grief, I ask the question, "Lord, hast thou ever really begun a work of grace in my soul?" and when by some kind token of his love he manifests himself unto me as my covenanted God and Father in Christ Jesus, I can then bask in the sunshine of his everlasting love, and at times have exultingly sung,

"Not as the world the Savior gives;
He is no fickle friend;
Whom once he loves, he never leaves,
But loves him to the end."

I still continued under Mr. Wells' ministry and found the glorious truths he advanced from time to time to be a "savor of life unto life;" and on Wednesday evening, 19th December 1849, I was the last of forty-four who were baptized in the Surrey Tabernacle by Mr. James Wells, in the name of the ever-adorable Trinity. I felt the Lord to be present, and almost wished I might often be baptized; for I truly found by keeping his commandments there is great reward.

Since then, I have been many times engaged in the work of the ministry, principally in village cottages, amongst the poorest of the Flock, but many of them (I doubt not) richest in the faith of God's elect.

I am truly glad the *Vessel* has weathered the storm through another year, and my heart's desire and prayer to God is, that you as the Editor, may still be encouraged both on the right hand and on the left, and be enabled, by the help of the Lord, still to send her forth from port to port, richly laden with the treasures of the Gospel of Christ, so that many a poor sinner's soul may be refreshed as mine has been; and especially in realizing the experience of those, "who are not lost, but gone before."

I firmly believe the *Vessel* to be one built by the Lord; and being his work, will most assuredly out ride every storm that may yet arise, and threaten to destroy.

With kindest feelings of Christian love, I remain yours in Jesus,
John Pells, Junior.
White Lion Street, Beccles, Suffolk, December 16, 1851