

Extracts from letters.

J. G. Bellett.

Christian Friend, vol. 12, 1885, p. 25.

"The Church is the temple of God. Among its services it has to teach angels, to edify itself through joints and bands in the Holy Ghost, to lead those outside to own God in the midst of His saints, to exercise discipline, to worship as a holy priesthood, and to show forth the Lord's death. It is moreover 'the pillar of the truth,' and as such must keep itself erect and firm. The writing on it is to be large and legible. Nothing is to be allowed to shake or blot it. Some may claim a right to try their hand with it, and plead many pretences. They may talk of brotherly forbearance, the gentleness of Christ, the duty of not judging another man's servant. But the pillar must still hold itself firm and inviolate. No such pretensions or pretences, nor any other, can be listened to. And occasions will arise when the integrity of the pillar is to be guarded with increased vigilance because of the enemy

And let me say, I honour the service of those who keep watch in the camp. The trumpet is made, among other purposes, for sounding an alarm on the approach of an enemy. All we can desire is that it may be used with priestly skill, and when it has called the camp into action, that the action itself be conducted according to the mind or word of God; for the battle is to be in His name, and for His kingdom I hold, as at the beginning, the broken, ruined condition of the Church. I know, and still would testify as ever, that 'the great house,' with its different vessels, is around us. I will say, as before, that no gathering of the saints can assume to be the candlestick in the place, and treat as darkness all that is not of itself; such order and such authority are gone. This we have ever said and still say. But with all this, we avow it, that we are not together as a convention — a voluntary convention of believers, but as part and parcel of the Church; and we have to take heed, that the principles and testimony of the house of God be preserved among us, according to our measure in the Spirit.

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We have to take heed that the order and testimony of the house of God pass through our hands *without contracting defilement*. And indeed I would add, for my own admonition specially, dear brother, that we also have to take heed of heartless exercise of the mind over principles or doctrines. God is not to be so served. 'My son, give me thy heart.'

"September 18th, 1849. J. G. B."

Extracts from letters.

J. G. Bellett.

Christian Friend, vol. 12, 1885, p. 166.

"Israel after their return from Babylon was Israel still. They had not the ark, the glory, nor the Urim, nor did they affect that to which such things were needed; but they fully recognized themselves as God's Israel. As far as they could they did the services of such, and behaved themselves as such; but they never did anything in *any other character*, or what was *inconsistent with that character*. This is much to be remembered. Did they, I ask, bring home with them the customs of the heathen? 'The latter house' was not what 'the former house' had been, and the old men wept; but as far as conditions allowed it, the ways of the two houses were alike. They never brought in the customs of the heathen; and as simply and surely as ever they took knowledge of themselves as the Israel of God. Their circumstances

were changed; they were in ruins. Their fair things and their honourable things were spoiled. They were subject to the Gentile, but they were Israel still. This was their principle, and accordingly as soon as anything was discovered inconsistent with that it was judged. You remember the case of intermarriages, and the more pertinent one of Nehemiah revenging the act of Eliashib, who prepared a chamber for Tobiah the Ammonite in the house of the Lord. They owned their circumcision, their separation to God, as jealously as ever. They refused Samaritan brotherhood and communion with the Gentiles, while they were debtors to the patronage of the Gentiles, and were partaker of their bounty. Horonites, Ammonites, and Moabites were the same to them as ever they had been. No glory had entered the latter house as it had the former. This may have tried their faith. The ark had not been preserved for them as in another land of Philistines, nor had it returned to them as in victory from another temple of Dagon; it was lost to them. This may have tried their faith also. Nor had they their priest with Urim and Thummim. Thus were they in ruins, shorn of beauty and strength, and some of their brethren were still in Babylon. But in the presence and midst of all this, they avow themselves to be God's Israel as surely and simply as ever. They allow of nothing inconsistent with the former house, though they well knew, and were constrained to feel, that they had not all its glory in the latter house. This is for us, dear brother. We are in our way and measure to be 'stewards of the mysteries of God,' and that too under the holy sanction of being 'faithful.' And neither *love sake* or *brotherhood sake*, or any other impulse, is to prevail with us to forego the services which attach to so precious a stewardship. The peculiarities of the house of God are to be our peculiarities; and though we own Israelites in Babylon, we are not to own Samaritans or Chaldees in Zion; nor are we to own ways unworthy of Zion in a returned captive, though we see him the witness of ruins and weakness. This theme is worthy of our thoughts, and I confess I desire our dear brethren to take counsel upon it . . . I own saints (to be sure I do) where I cannot see Church ruins; as, for instance, in the Establishment. The Establishment is not a Church ruin; it is an important thing in the earth, which must scorn the idea of ruins. Nay, it denies the Church in her very first element; for it has not gone to Christ as a stone 'disallowed of men,' but has linked His name with the government and men of the world, but God's dear people are there. But even when an assembly is not of that earthly and important character, and takes a lowlier bearing, yet it may not be a Church ruin, I must still inspect it whether or not it own the peculiarities of the house of God. Christendom is not to be mistaken for Church ruins . . . The few who call on the Lord out of a pure heart form the Church ruins (2 Tim. 3), where I must be found. And it is a holy question for us, beloved, Are we upholding merely Christian fellowship? or are we dwelling according to the holiness of God within the precincts of a Church ruin? . . . It is needful to remember with increased care that the truth of God and the house of God have their blessed peculiarities; that not one of them is to be sacrificed to the morals, the politics, or the religion of man; and that we are not to mistake for them what man produces, be it as good as it may. *Ruins are weak things, but still they tell of the original building.* And so in our present weakness, we must still tell of the peculiarities of the Church. In the truth or mysteries witnessed by us, in the nature, subject, and purpose of our discipline, in the ways and ordinances of the assembly, in the whole process of our common edification, the peculiarities of the house of God must be seen. I avow ruins as simply as ever; but if it be necessary, I add that they are *Church* ruins, unlike either the old Roman temple or the buildings of the philanthropists and reformers of this our day.

J. G. B." *December 18th, 1849.*