



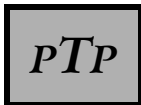
A Visit Tunbridge Wells, England

by
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1910



*Made and
reprinted in USA
1999, 2010*



Present Truth Publishers

825 Harmony Road, Jackson NJ 08527 USA
www.presenttruthpublishers.com

A VISIT TO TUNBRIDGE WELLS, ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

Having heard it said and repeated that the Assembly at Tunbridge Wells was in a bad state, that one was not able to accept it without associating oneself with iniquity, the decisions it had taken in the Name of the Lord, and on the other hand knowing that some Assemblies and some individual brothers, submitted themselves to these decisions (judgments) as I myself did, I felt pressed by the Lord not to accept without proofs the accusations of iniquity which were circulated, and not having found any proofs among the various brothers which put forward these accusations, I believe it my strict duty before God to go to the place (T. W.) to find out for myself the true state of things, in conversing on the one hand with the brethren at T. W. and with our brother Lowe of London on the other, who had openly taken a position in separation from the Assembly at Tunbridge Wells.

It was for me a deep exercise of heart and conscience to dare to take in hand such a task. Who was I to accomplish it? The last of those who were able to think it, and this cast me entirely on the Lord Whose interests and glory were only in question in this matter. One thing however sustained me a little, it is that several brothers in Paris to whom I had spoken, among those who are not clear on these things, had asked me to undertake this journey, so that I had the mind that I did not walk of my own will or in independence, although my aim was before all to get clear my self.

I bless the Lord that He has Himself made the way clear for this journey, which was accomplished amid much anguish of heart and tears. One cannot be occupied with things so grieving and humiliating without being often constrained and broken, in the face of all the dishonor which has been brought upon us by our own fault, on



the glorious and blessed Person of our dear Savior; may He have pity on us and on all the beloved saints.

FIRST PART

HISTORY OF THE TROUBLES OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Within a little all the brethren know today that the Assembly at Tunbridge Wells was engaged in discipline on the 16th. Oct. 1903, with respect to a brother, Mr. Strange, refusing his ministry, which for a long time was the cause of discussion and trouble in the Assembly, and following several years after, on the 16th. Sept. 1908, had declared him out of fellowship, for having given up the Table of the Lord at Tunbridge Wells, during nearly five years in these particular circumstances. At last, the 22nd. June, 1909, because Mr. S. was still received at the Table in various places, the Assembly at Tunbridge Wells announced that they broke bread now in separation from those who broke bread with Mr. Strange, and that it was not able to receive the saints (in future) from those meetings where Mr. S. was received, nor those who supported him and were in communion with him. Of this number eight persons were specially named in the notice (decision) and living at Tunbridge Wells.

These are the three judgments given in the Name of the Lord which have raised the questions (troubles) which exist today.

The difficulties raised with reference to these judgments will be indicated and brought out further on.

SECOND PART

VISIT TO TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Arrived at Tunbridge Wells Wednesday 26th. Oct. 1910, I went first to see Mr.

Sibthorpe, I found him at home, 5 o'clock in the evening, and remained about two hours with him. I was received without difficulty and he was willing to answer all questions that I put to him. I explained to him notably all the anguish (sorrow) that we had on the Continent with regard to these circumstances, so painful and so humiliating, which had their birth at T.W., and which commenced to divide the saints in various places, and notably in England. I explained to him the thought that they must have suffered much and that I should like to learn from him that the saints at T.W. were in the same mind as to humiliation as ourselves, to be deeply afflicted in consequence of the dishonor done to the Lord, and that he personally was of the same mind to be at the feet of our blessed Lord in humiliation and in tears in consequence of all this trouble which is the consequence of our poor and low condition.

I received at once the assurance, and he said to me that although they had suffered for years, and already before 1903, they have been attacked on all sides and covered with reproach, they had committed to the Lord all that which they had done and suffered, desiring before anything to maintain the great truth, the unity of the body, and to hold fast the presence and the authority of the Lord in the midst of His saints. He believed that it is a special attack of the enemy to get the saints to give up these precious truths, which is the reason for the existence of the testimony which has been confided to us in the midst of the ruin of christendom.

He has been himself formerly among the Baptists, but brought by the word on the ground of the Truth, he desired to rest faithful to it. I asked him if there had been personal reasons of enmity or jealousy between himself and Mr. Strange, and if their trade put them in competition in a manner to favor these thoughts. He answered me that his trade had nothing to do with Mr. Strange's, and that on his side there had been no reason for jealousy. As regards his personal feelings towards Mr. Strange and his family, the thought that one was able to attribute to him enmity provoked a flood of tears. I was myself deeply moved.



I ought to say that in crossing the Channel I had read on the boat a book of more than seventy pages written by him and having the title "*A Defense of the Truth*", provoked by "*History of the Plymouth Brethren*" by Neatby, in which he refutes the false accusations directed against the brethren and principles of Christianity, such that we profess today. This reading (of the book) had edified me and had shown me in advance with what brother, well established in the truth, I was going to have to do. In order for information I will add that this brother already previously brought out a book entitled "*The Ways of God With Man*". I was not then surprised in my conversation with him to find not only a man distressed and broken, having bodily been proved and weakened in the struggle, but a preacher knowing the cost of the truth and desiring to maintain it in all its interests. I simply say that in order to know who is the man that one has covered with so much reproach, that one has treated as a liar and not to have his place in the fellowship of brethren; without doubt we cannot read the heart of our brother, but we can however discern the manifestation of the life of God in a soul deeply exercised and approved.

The conversation in the evening was obliged to be shortened in consequence of the hour of the meeting at 7:30 and I was obliged to return before to the Hotel to dine. Here I ought to mention a detail which has its importance. Although presented by him to his family, Mr. Sibthorpe held himself in reserve in a dignified way (or with dignity) not ever offering me even a glass of water.

At 7:30 I went to the meeting, 41 York Road and I found seven or eight brothers and a dozen sisters. They were studying quietly a part of Ch.. 8 of the Epistle to the Romans. Many brethren, at least five, took the word to explain the thoughts or asked questions. It was in general Mr. Sibthorpe who answered the questions. After the last prayer, this brother announced that I had come to make the acquaintance of the brethren, and engaged the saints to wait a moment. The persons who were not of the Assembly went out then.

Seeing myself in the presence of the brothers and sisters I said to them that

which I had already said in particular to bro. Sibthorpe, to let them know that the gatherings on the Continent were very distressed and troubled and very exercised as to the position to take because of the accusations reported against the Assembly at T. W.; well knowing the principle one ought to act upon, submitting to the authority of the Lord in the Assembly in every place, because of the unity of the Body. I added that many were in grief and in tears, seeing the efforts made by the enemy to divide the saints, having already succeeded in doing it in many places. To finish I explained the wish to have on their part the assurance that they were also distressed and desirous of humbling themselves for the dishonor done to the Lord in this trouble, which is the consequence of our poor, low and miserable spiritual condition. As I spoke I saw signs of the bowing of our brethren to what I said, approving it, and when I had finished Mr. Sibthorpe came and sat himself down by my side and echoing the mind of the gathering assured me that they were in the thoughts I have expressed.

I took occasion to add some more words, to say that if we all ought to submit to the Assembly because of the presence of the Lord in the midst of it, and for the things done in His Name, that gives us to understand how much the Assembly and its acts, ought to be on its part above all, deeply exercised before the Lord, to have the certainty that what it does is the mind of the Lord, so as to be able to do it in His Name, without fear of being disowned by Him, and that the guarantee given by the Lord against an error of judgment - always possible, was His Word, on which all judgment should be founded.

This thought was accepted by all. They expressed their approval by signs. Brother Sibthorpe added then a thought, observing in the face of a decision thus given in the fear of the Lord and in His Name, it was not possible that another Assembly should rise up to judge of this decision to approve or reject it; not having been themselves in the exercise produced by the special circumstances which had determined the decision. He admitted every desire of explanation to put the conscience at ease in those things which did not appear clear, but not that one



Assembly judges another, raising itself up against that which is above it, and despising the presence of the Lord in the Assembly, in Whose Name the judgment has been given. I could only adhere to this thought.

Time being advanced we separated, after that I had asked if I should be able to see some other brothers in particular on the morrow. As every one had to be at their work that day, my desire could not be realized and I appointed again an interview with Mr. Sibthorpe for the morrow at 9:30.

Before going to this interview I believed it useful to prepare on paper a series of questions in English, dealing with points which came up ordinarily as to objections. I had left to the right of each question the place to answer by writing and I was with this at Mr. Sibthorpe's. I immediately put before him the paper and prayed him to answer it, which he quickly did. I re-read the questions with him, and completed them. I give under the translation of the questions and answers:

QUESTIONS

Some brethren said that the decision of 1903, explained by the letter of Nov. 20, 1903, being founded in part on the sentence, "We receive all our blessings from the Devil" we could not receive, for they say the sentence has never been pronounced. Who are those who have heard it?

Is it true, that for this decision of 1903 there were ten brethren against eleven, therefore they say the Assembly at T. W. was in a state of

There are three at Tunbridge Wells who have heard Mr. Strange pronounce this sentence. They are Mr. G. Gower, Mr. and Mrs. Sibthorpe.

It is not true that the Assembly was divided in 1903. No question was raised at the Assembly meeting as to the discipline exercised against Mr.

division?

Is it true that you have limited the extent of the decision of 1903 to your own Assembly, when you have written “For the protection of the saints gathered at T. W.” leaving Mr. S. free to go elsewhere to exercise his ministry, therefore that the Word does not give the Assembly any authority to act thus?

In 1903 you said that you had neither the thought nor a passage from the Word permitting you to put Mr. Strange outside. At what date has he been considered as being outside? I suppose it is before the letter to Acton, dated Sept. 1908?

Why do you say in your decision of 22nd. June, 1909, that you break bread in separation from those who break bread with Mr. Strange, or those who support him? In this

Strange.

This is not true. See the explanatory letter addressed on the subject to M. Packer in Paris. The Assembly at T. W. acted for itself, under its own responsibility, leaving to the others the care to act in their responsibility, in the Spirit of the Unity of the Body: T. W. was not able to force, or permit it.

In 1903 the discipline exercised was in view of restoration, not to put outside. It was the 17th. Feb. 1907, when Mr. Strange came to the meeting at T. W. that the door of fellowship was publicly closed on him. In consequence that day he did not break bread, but sat behind. The letter to Acton was addressed later in the name of the Assembly. It would constitute really an Assembly decision communicated outside.

We wish to say by the word “separation” that we were no longer able to break bread with those who supported Mr. Strange but the eight who were identified with him



decision you give the names of the eight?

To what Assemblies outside of England has this decision of 1st. July, 1909 been sent?

Is it true that the eight have broken bread by force after their exclusion, and at what date?

Which are the Assemblies which received Mr. Strange after his exclusion?

insisted on breaking bread by their own will, be it in the Assemblies which received Mr. S. still after his exclusion be it at Tun. Wells.

Decision sent to all the Assemblies in England and to some foreign places.

That took place the 4th. July, 1909, but only by three of them. The previous Lord's day all desired to break bread, be it with Mr. S. in the gatherings which received him after his exclusion; be it at T. W. A daughter of Mr. S. took the word (spoke) in the Assembly, saying that she wished to break bread and that she would do so. The 4th July the brethren having broken bread without giving it to those who were outside, one of them rose up, came and took the bread and the wine from the table and gave it to two others after himself. The 11th July everything was again in order.

Brighton, and two other Assemblies received Mr. Strange, and his family wished to be free to break bread at Brighton and T. W. This it is which



explains the extent of the decision as to the separation from the gatherings which received Mr. Strange.

Are you not disposed to receive brethren from the Continent who would come to solicit of you explanations on the points which appear to be obscure?

We will receive them personally as we have received you, and also an Assembly, but we cannot receive delegates from a crowd of brothers, having already judged us and coming with the thought of reopening the question and to make us revise or destroy (nullify) the decisions given in the Name of the Lord.

After examining all these things we prayed together, Mr. Sibthorpe first, and I following, and I remember that I had above all on the heart to ask the Lord that He would make us to feel the need to humble ourselves, and to the brethren at T. W. in particular to understand if God has permitted that all these sad things passing in their midst, it was to bring them to judge themselves still more deeply. Brother Sibthorpe said "Amen".

THIRD PART

VISIT TO MR. LOWE IN LONDON.

Here I ought to say first, that I went to find this dear brother with a mind of the deepest grief; I could not forget how thankful we ought to be for all his devoted life,



and for all the good we had received through his ministry, and I expressed it to him affectionately, that I was one of his oldest friends.

Having written to him that I desired to see him Friday, 28th. Oct. after dinner, asking him if it would be convenient, I received a brotherly letter inviting me to breakfast with him that day. I answered that I was not able to do this, but I would be at his house at three o'clock. This is what I did. Mr. Lowe received me in a brotherly manner and introduced me into his office where we had a conversation together for one and a half hours or thereabouts. I commenced by telling him that I had been much pained to read that which he had written on the incompetence of an assembly to judge a question of doctrine.

Wimbledon, April 20, 1910

“We are under the impression that the greater part of the American brethren, if not all, have founded their action twenty years ago on the decision of Bexhill. Without doubt the Lord having had pity on our feebleness, but there is not one passage of Scripture which shows that an Assembly, or the whole Assembly was able to judge doctrine. History shows us that each time the Church has tried it, it has fallen into error. The Truth has been confided to the saints. Each saint is responsible to judge, (Jude 3; I Cor. 14:36, 37). Many other passages prove it. What would it have been if Bexhill had taken the contrary way? We have to thank God for the judgment pronounced by some saints at Bexhill which were called to give judgment with reference to any one coming from Greenwich. And I believe that when a question of doctrine is raised, if a false teacher appears with his false teachings, each saint, even a sister, as in the 2nd. Epistle of John is held responsible to reject him, because he does not bring the doctrine of Christ. I think that this explanation will suffice. . . .”

(Signed W. J. Lowe.)

That I have always learnt that an Assembly was not teaching, but was taught by

the gifts in the midst of it, as “pillars and supporters of the Truth” it should oppose itself to the invasion in its bosom of bad doctrine. I quoted in support of it Rev. II. Where the Lord walking in the midst of the seven Assemblies and taking knowledge of all that which is passing, praises the Assembly at Ephesus for not supporting the wicked ones, and proved those who said they were Apostles and are not, and found them liars, as well as that they hated the work of the Nicolaitanes. He blamed the Assembly at Pergamos, for it had in its midst those who hold the doctrine of Baalam, and others who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. He blames also the Assembly at Thyatira, because they suffer that woman Jezebel who calleth herself a prophetess and who teaches and seduces my servants.

Brother Lowe replies that he was agreed with me and that he had never thought otherwise, but that he believed that the teaching of the Word of God showed that the care of doctrine was confided to individual saints, and not to the Assembly. But then why write that the Assembly is not to judge doctrine and there is not a passage of Scripture that shows it?

I said to him that if evidently God was willing to act on the conscience of each saint individually in order to bring them to reject bad doctrine, or to flee from false teachers, or not to receive them, that did not take away from the Assembly “The support of the Truth”, and with it the authority to judge evil, the duty to reject bad doctrine, after that individual saints had been exercised about it. I showed him the extract from his letter above with reference to the subject of Bexhill.

I recalled to him at once the theory that he had exposed in his tract of 1909, entitled “*A Serious Word to all on the Troubles at Tunbridge Wells*” with reference to the subject of the incompetency of one Assembly to judge the exercise of a gift. He said in effect in this tract “The local Assembly is not able either to dispense a gift, nor to authorize its exercise”, and he adds “How would it be able to set aside that which it has not given?”



Evidently when a true gift is exercised by the Spirit, one has no reason to seek to stop it. The Assembly is happy to profit by it, and we ought to desire that there may be many in the Assembly, but one must be able perhaps in the face of a pretended gift to discern that which is not of God, or a gift exercised in a carnal way, and according to the passage “Let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge”, one cannot compromise the testimony, in giving liberty to such ministry. I told him that we had always been taught thus, that we had accepted this teaching as fully Scriptural, and that we were not disposed to give it up.

He said to me again that he was agreed with me on these principles - that which appeared to me to be a complete contradiction of that which he had written, and that I had quoted to him, but seeing that their application was made to the case of Mr. S., he commented himself to speak of it, seeking to show me that one was deceiving oneself with regard to it, and that there was no reason that Mr. Strange being under the censure of the Assembly at T. W. could not go into other Assemblies where his ministry had been formerly a great blessing; inasmuch as T. W. had given him the liberty - this was refuted above.

I expressed to him my astonishment that he could thus speak; he a dear servant of God, who had until now sought to conduct souls in the Truth, and who now leads them in error. I sought then to show him in the midst of great emotion, the solemnity of this attitude. A bad thing at T. W., can it be good elsewhere? And where is then the unity of the Body, and the presence of the Lord in the Assembly?

These great truths which are the only reason of the special testimony that is committed to us in these days of ruin.

Our brother then sought to show me that one was not able to go with what had been done at Tunbridge Wells. I engaged him to weigh well his words, as I had documents and information absolutely on this subject, without telling him that I came from Tunbridge Wells.

He wished then to show me that the decision of 1903 of this Assembly was founded on in-exact statements and that the Assembly was then divided. This has been refuted above, and I reminded him of it. He quoted the expression attributed to Mr. Strange, "We receive all our blessings from the devil" as having been controverted. This has been replied to above, and I quoted to him three witnesses who had heard him. Following then he said to me, that the intention that they had charged to Strange to set up another table at T. W., and that it had been suggested to brother Bushell, was a lie.

To that I replied, asking him if he knew that Mr. Strange had actually set up another table some weeks since; he replied to me in the affirmative. This table set up on the part of a man who said "I shall make a division when I wish", is not surprising. I asked him then if he believed that Mr. Strange has done it in fellowship with those who are with Mr. Lowe; he replied to me, "Je le pense bien", (certainly), accepting this fellowship with the one outside.

I told him that an Australian brother, actually in Paris, Mr. Bertram, had been to see Mr. Strange about a month ago, and that he said to him that he broke bread in complete independence of brethren. But that which Mr. Lowe just said had shown that he was disposed to accept his fellowship. I said to him that his reply astonished me, for if there had been obscure points, and grieving to the minds of many brethren on the Continent, they all appeared however to agree on one point, and that is they would not be able to have any fellowship with Mr. Strange.

At this moment I said to him that I also had been to T. W., that I came from there the previous evening, and that I had been able to know how everything in this dear Assembly had been, and that they were deeply exercised and humbled by all these things, and how they had acted in the fear of the Lord, and for His glory in everything; and I added that it was equally the mind of brother Bertram after his visit. He asked me then if I had seen Mr. Strange; I answered him "No". He accused me of having been partial, having heard but one side. I answered I was not



going to see one condemned, but I came to see his defender (supporter) and that I thought in coming into close quarters with Mr. Lowe I was with the adverse party, as much as one could possibly be. I came therefore to hear from him what he had to say in condemnation of Tunbridge Wells.

He then proposed to me to go and see with him an old brother who had been at T. W. before 1903, to gather his testimony; I refused, saying, that the testimony of Mr. Lowe had much more weight with me than any other, and that it was sufficient.

He rose up, declaring that Mr. Strange had never been put out; I prayed him solemnly not to play on words in such a grave question - saying that Mr. Strange had been definitely declared out of fellowship with those who were gathered to the Name of the Lord in an Assembly meeting held in 16th. Sept. 1908.

As he contested it, I prayed him to search among his papers for the notice of this decision, and read it to him, twice, word by word. He commenced again, declaring all the same, he had not been put out, and accused T. W. of having accomplished a profane act in pronouncing its judgment in the Name of the Lord.

Having taken this part and not being willing to bow to the evidence of the facts, and in the face of this grave accusation against T. W. I understood that it was not possible to converse together any longer with him, so praying him to excuse me, I took leave of him, my heart filled with grief.

Such are the facts. I leave them to speak for themselves, not drawing any conclusion for others. As far as I am concerned they have cleared me completely, and I give thanks to the Lord, and I ask him that He may Himself clear those who desire to be faithful.

The whole question to know is if you are willing to hold fast the great truth of

the Unity of the Body, as also that the presence and the authority of the Lord is in the midst of His gathered saints; or, will you give it up.

1st. November. 1910

(Signed) J. Gregoire.

Copied August 4th. 1911.

Copy to Mr. Joh Gemmell, Bristol, Tenn-Va.

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{Translated from the French}

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