

Preface to Former Editions

by J. C. Philpot

I HAVE been asked to write a Preface to a new edition of the Mercies of a Covenant God. In complying with this request, it is not because I think either that the book itself requires a Preface, or that I am qualified to write one; but my respect and affection for the late Mr. Warburton, and my desire for the edification of the church of God, both combine to induce me to lend a helping hand, however feeble, to advance the spread of a book which will embalm his name and memory to future generations. The generation that heard the truth from his lips with that unction, sweetness and savour which so specially attended it will soon pass away. A few scattered sermons may remain, which were taken down as they fell from his lips, but these will indeed furnish a most inadequate idea of the peculiar power which attended their delivery.

Mr. Warburton's ministry was so peculiarly his own that the sermons reported in the Penny Pulpit, etc., no more resemble his preaching than a dead corpse resembles a living man. The shorthand writer could take down the exact words, and the printer could stamp them in enduring characters, but they could not breathe into them the breath of life as the Lord did when He spake by and through him to the hearts of the people. Nor, indeed, can any written words portray his venerable appearance, in the latter years of his life, as he stood in the pulpit; his expressive countenance; his voice so full and clear, yet possessing a peculiar pathos and feeling which went straight to the heart as I never heard any other; his simple, childlike prayers, so full of honest confessions, and yet breathing such a spirit of filial confidence; his solemnity of manner, and the command which almost every accent of his tongue exercised over the congregation, especially when his own soul was under the sweet bedewings and melting influences of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. These are things never to be forgotten by those who saw and heard him, but of which the very remembrance will in time pass away.

No word of God can ever fall to the ground, or return to Him void of the designed blessing. But the preached word, however it may be blessed at the time to the living family, has not, and necessarily cannot have, the permanency of the written Word. In a few years our dear friend and esteemed servant of Christ, the late Mr. Warburton, will only be known by the "Mercies of a Covenant God."

But this will prove his enduring and undying memorial, and live when every ear that heard him and blessed him, and every eye that saw him and gave witness to him, will have mouldered into dust. The Lord will always have a poor and afflicted

people upon earth whom He loves and who love Him. Severe trials in providence, heavy family afflictions, and heart-rending griefs are the appointed lot of some; deep exercises of soul, much inward distress of mind under the law and the pangs and fears of a guilty conscience, and an almost unceasing conflict with sin, death and Satan are laid in the path of others. Now for such as these the "Mercies of a Covenant God," when owned and blessed, is the very book to suit their case. It is a living experience of the trials and afflictions of forty years, written in the most simple, feeling and savoury way - not with wisdom of words, but in the very language of the heart itself. And not only is it a simple record of troubles and sorrows, trials and temptations, but it contains most marked and striking deliverances in the very hour of darkness and distress, when hope seemed well-nigh gone, and faith at its last gasp. Again and again it records the appearing of the Lord in answer to prayer both in providence and grace; and what a faithful, merciful, promise-making and promise-keeping God He was at all times and under all circumstances. How simply and yet how sweetly does he record the leadings, teachings, guidings, comfortings, chastisings, reprovings, supportings and blessings received from the hands of his gracious Father and Friend.

As we read the ups and downs, ins and outs, sinkings and risings, sighs and songs, groans and shouts, fleeings and pursuings, slippings and standings, fightings and conquerings of the dear man of God, we follow him from the first moment that the Lord the Spirit quickened his soul all through his tried and exercised life until, in a good old age, he at last left this vale of tears with the love of God in his heart, the smile of peace on his face, and the revelation of opening glory to his departing spirit.

Well was it named the "Mercies of a Covenant God." No one whom we have known more felt, first and last, his need of mercy. His first cry, when the arrow of God was shot into his conscience, was, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and "Begging mercy every hour" was more or less his experience to the very end of his course. He was, indeed, blessed with a sweet assurance of the everlasting love of God to his soul, and a firm confidence of his salvation. But few men knew or felt more of the dreadful evils of his heart, and what he was as a vile, polluted sinner before the eyes of an infinitely pure and holy God; and it was this abiding sense of his deep and desperate sinfulness that made him such a daily, hourly debtor to mercy. Mercies attended his path; nor were they viewed by him merely as mercies given every day. He looked higher, and saw their eternal spring, that they came from a covenant God, and were "the sure mercies of David," founded on "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." The covenant of grace was a sweet and darling theme with him, because he found all his salvation in it, and all

his desire. In this well-ordered covenant he knew that the number and measure of all his trials were appointed, the length of his days fixed, all needful grace promised, and an eternal weight of glory secured. His book is, therefore, a record of the "mercies of a covenant God" -of God the Father who chose him, of God the Son who redeemed him, and of God the Holy Ghost who taught, led, blessed and comforted him.

And now may this new edition of the "Mercies of a Covenant God" be owned and blessed as when the heart which indited and the hand which penned them were still in our midst. By it, he being dead, yet speaketh; and may we who loved him for his work's sake, as having spoken unto us the word of God, follow his faith, "considering the end of his conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

Stamford, May, 1859. J. C. PHILPOT.