

LAST REFLECTIONS of James Bolton

(copied by Anne Merrill from M S loaned by Mr. N. Bolton

Being "last writings" of James Bolton of Bolton Village,

1837, while in swamp in Peel somewhere between

Bolton Village and Holland's Landing)

If some friendly and human person should find this book, they may herein read the thoughts of an unfortunate man, who for anything he knows, may have justly incurred the hatred of all his friends and kindred and, by the laws of his country, forfeited his life. He has in sight of God been guilty of many delinquencies and failed and come far short in all his duties, yet nevertheless his will has been for the most part, to do good to all and to injure none.

His heart has bled to see the poverty, ignorance and misery which a high and unfeeling hand is bringing upon his wretched country and posterity, and notwithstanding his life of toil, he has used many opportunities and borne an honest testimony in speech, and in many writings against these oppressions with the hope to promote better measures by peaceful means. At length despairing to do this, has been betrayed into the belief that force might be resorted to and that resolution and union existed in the people to affect their emancipation with little or no loss of life or waste of property. Alas, too late, is wakened up to the fatal opposite conviction. Oh my God forgive him. Man never can.

Seeking the abode of a beloved sister, passing creeks and swamps, bewildered and lost so as never to see her again, not even to see her sorrows and receive her scorn. Within sound of the axe and flail, yet dare not approach the habitation of man, lest he should deprive me of making this last sad detail, and thus to permit of my last reflections.

Reader, whoever thou art, whether rich or poor, I intend this for thy good and for the good of all, if the Lord in mercy to others would vouchsafe to use so vile an instrument. My own time is at an end. Eternity only remains for me. Happy only to die unseen. I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity. I believe in Jesus Christ and had I followed his divine breathings more and my own less, I had not come to this end. But I have not, like some, put him to open shame, for I belong to no professing church. I am persuaded, and I die in the conviction, that those who preach and profess his name and power, will be seen to be guilty above all men. Their unfaithfulness had permitted an unholy power to bind down and enslave their minds as well as the bodies of us all and pride and deceit has claimed them as brethren and honoured them for so doing. I believe that if Christianity was free from the control or support of the rich and those who rule in the world it would soon universally prevail, but by this means it will forever be kept down unless infinite mercy shall see fit at once to illuminate the minds of men, in respect to this evil.

True religion is love and good will to all. This love is wherein the principle consists, not in human notions and forms. Outward ordinances, so long as in esteem, will only keep men in

subjection to the powers of Mammon. Religion does not permit of war and violence...not even for righteousness sake, much less for any worldly consideration. I have myself been convinced that going to law is contrary. And this is according to my own reason. By this may be measured the immense depth of my guilt, brought on by false reasoning and a departure from God's better counsel.

If even Reformers should carry all before them and although when I perceived the sanguinary character the assault of the city was destined to take, and used what powers and arguments I could to prevent it, yet how can I lift my face to the remnants of those families of my friends and neighbours letting alone my own, who will now be left in mourning and tears, and if they fail, the most dreadful ruin and desolation. Oh, God soften my heart to feel the misery to which I have been accessory. Oh, Parent of mankind, do Thou be their never-failing and support wherever they may wander. May they feel Thee to be the only true friend, helper and counsellor, in time and eternity.

Even the lives lost on both sides stand, and must stand, eternally against me, unless Thy mercy is boundless. Oh God look down in compassion upon the chiefest of all sinners. Do Thou soften Thy mind to undefended misery and permit me to die in the best manner for those whom I must now leave forever. Lord let this fall into the hands that will not think it the less worth. Oh let me not hope for life upon terms which might endanger that of others who may yet live to do Thy will and promote true happiness on this now wretched and divided world.

Christianity does not take life in any case. Oh, how have I wandered. I would now give the whole world could I command it, only to spend my few remnant days in solitude if so I might write my thoughts and that my views of life and its duties might go forth to the world.

When Christianity ever prevails to any advancement, a place of solitude will be the greatest and highest punishment. I now feel the condition of a man deservedly cut off from every social tie and benefit, and his share of the cost to society for a continued existence in the state. Some might redeem, in a measure, the consequences of their crimes which consigned the punishment.

No horn has blown for me this day. No friendly fire can again warn my benumbed fingers. May God, in mercy extend my life through the coming night and another day if this writing might extend his Glory.

Reader. I have wandered another day, and found my earthly home. My few minutes of liberty I would improve in stating my humble and constant impressions in regard to Government, which in all forms intends punishment only to evil doers.

(1) Government by force may be, and is, warranted where people are barbarous and ignorant of its nature and duties.

(2) As men and Governments advance in these respects, the demands of the multitude, and the relentations of the ruling party, usually cooperate in the establishment of progressive freedom

in their institutions. The first step is acknowledged in that the people have a voice and operative plea in forming the laws and regulations of society, as by our House of Assembly, etc. As knowledge advances and extends to the lower ranks, the steps of improvement are more and more acceptable and every new movement carries less and less of peril to life and property. Hence,

(3) A want of this extended knowledge is the great obstacle to human advancement in freedom and happiness to all. For the privileged class are less happy than those whom they oppress. They all along grasp at a shadow, they mistake the means and repel the end and the privation felt by the multitude, the wars and havoc, and the waste made to sustain and decorate this pre-eminence of wrong makes up an awful account.

(4) But Government is also a praise to those who do well. This most amiable function admits no partiality. It refers only to good and evil, to right and wrong, and to those only as they stand founded upon the most invariable and definite principles.

A well administered Government, of whatever form, will therefore countenance, encourage and protect the full development of the human mind in relation to all and every regulation of a social, civil and moral nature. It is not in the Government itself to decide, but for the people for whose advancement and happiness it was, and is, intended. Otherwise the compact is entirely worthless. The rich and the strong will continue to pillage the poor and weak, and under sanction of the laws they may thus ordain, and the Religion they may set up, they can more securely perpetuate an unholy claim upon the bread of their fellows, in the absence of letters, liberty of speech or power of reasoning, on the part and behalf of the multitude.

(5) But the names we give to things do not alter their real value. Some say that paper is equal to gold. To those who profit by the dissemination of this opinion, it has indeed the same virtual effect. A very common understanding might, however, unravel the fallacy, and were men to exercise their minds equally upon all the pretensions and privileges which distinguish one mere man from another, they would perhaps be found equally artificial and devoid of any, whatever, real utility such as cannot administer a balance of happiness to even the possessor.

(6) In regard to our House of Assembly, all eyes behold us scarcely advanced to the threshold of civil liberty. That our parliament is no index whatever to public opinion or, if it is, we are a people far void of discrimination requisite to the progress of both our Religious and civil rights for we do not sustain those already acknowledged.

But the last Election has unlocked a store of fraud never so visible before. The true principle of all human government has been shown to crouch before its own professed agents, and the fiat of wrong and misrepresentation is now our scepter and shield. This man is known to all. How to avert the consequences is known only to God. In our present position every inlet to light and knowledge will be closed, or modified, so as to mold its influence to the will of a party. Ministers of Religion, whose fears and hopes are referred to man instead of God, those (and they are many) who aided the strong hand to produce this state of things. These men will be the last to relent and the first to prevent utterance by those who would otherwise loudly and conscientiously deplore the dark night of pain and peril now passing the distant horizon, and soon to engulf us. I mean nevertheless to say, so far

only as pride, avarice and artifice can prevail, and as God for our dishonesty and sinful apathy shall permit.

(7) Most men know that oppression prevails in the land, that enormous fortunes are rapidly made by some individuals who live in splendor, and they know all must come from the laboring hand. But the powers, the artifices, the awe, the splendor, and even the profusion and waste, clothe and conceal the details, or elude the search of the most uninstructed, and although he knows himself to be wronged yet he cannot tell how, only by the total balance of privation and misery which falls to his own lot.

In regard to human action, many men of this class (a large majority) are deterred from what they know to be right, some times by others, and oftentimes by fears that such a course of conduct may, nevertheless, be unlawful when, indeed, it is both lawful and right. The man conversant with election, although he cannot over rate the effects of intimidation upon such minds, yet he can testify how readily interested men make use of it.

Many men, again, know not but law and right are one and the same thing, when, did they consider that men do not wrong by profession and that parliament repeal some laws, amend others, and even make new ones, and that without such work we should want no parliaments at all, did they exercise their reason this much (which is very little) this mistake would also be rectified.

Again, what is called a free Government, is a government of law. These laws form what is called a Constitution, which they really are, and yet, as we have just seen, may be altered or nullified by the powers that made them. Still many men are accounted disaffected and rebel to the general government when aggrieved by particular acts, they express their sentiments and endeavor to enlist the attention and sympathy of others.

Numbers are by this, and other forms of abuse, sufferers to a high degree and must finally cease to respect a system which requires and countenances such support. May God lead men, on both sides, to inform themselves better.

Inquiry can never endanger the truth, but greatly accelerate its progress and influence in the world.

(8) Knowledge is no guarantee of a right performance of such social duty unless those also who wield the powers of the realm rather protect its subjects thus qualified and disposed, nor can this ever happen when the administration itself is controlled by a party whose interests are inimical to that of the whole body. Thus, whenever a majority is found boldly to express their opinion in the teeth of power and intimidation, whenever this takes place, apart from all bribes, treaty, etc. Might convince.....

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