

Transcription of 'Sketch' In the Christian Messenger entitled 'True to Principle' by Rev. T Baron

IN the early days of Primitive Methodism, Mr. T. Dawson, of the Ripon Circuit, was called into the ministry. He was a man of more than ordinary mental ability and was a powerful preacher of the Gospel. His relations were farmers in good social position, and he himself had been trained in the business. It was the consciousness of a Divine call, and an earnest desire to win souls for Christ, which led him to leave the comforts of home for the toils and privations which were the lot of the Connexion's pioneers. His career in the regular ministry was brief, for in the course of his missionary labours he was one night put into a damp bed, which resulted in a severe asthmatic affliction that continued to the end of his life, and in the winter season prevented him sleeping in bed, and obliged him to take his nightly rest in a chair or on a couch near to a fire. As farming had been his employment before he entered the ministry, he again began to follow it on his enforced retirement. He, however, continued his effective labours as a local preacher when and as long as health permitted. One of the farms which he occupied for a time was at the village of Watlass, in North Yorkshire. The land-owner was Sir E. Dodsworth, who had a farm cultivated for himself adjoining that rented by Mr. Dawson. In the village there were no religious services excepting at the Established Church. Vital religion was at a low ebb. The services at the Church were not distinguished for evangelical fervour. Mr. Dawson felt that there was need for a more earnest Gospel ministry; the burden of the people's salvation pressed upon him. This led him to announce his purpose to hold a preaching service on the village green. The tidings rapidly spread. A time was fixed, and farmers and labourers gathered to hear the new tenant who had come to live in their midst. The service was with power, and was followed by others of like character. Comparisons were drawn by the people between the preaching of the unordained lay preacher, and that of the parish clergyman, not altogether to the advantage of the latter. The news was not long ere it reached the ears of the clergyman, who, instead of rejoicing that an additional spiritual and moral force had entered the place, regarded the preaching as an unauthorized act to be prevented if possible. The readiest means which occurred to him to effect this object was to use the secular power of the landlord. Hence he made his way to Sir E. Dodsworth and laid his complaint before him, accompanied with the mandate, "You must stop him, Sir Edward." The baronet, however, was more reasonable and less inclined to act as the tool of the clergyman than has occasionally been the case with some members of his class. His reply was, "I do not do business in that way, we must consider it." Now it happened that Mr. Dawson had a fine young horse, which had attracted the attention of Sir Edward, so shortly after the interview with the clergyman, he sent his steward on a Sunday morning to Mr. Dawson to buy this horse, and to buy it that day, as he was going from home that week. Price was to be no object. The steward went, probably without any misgiving, as in the spiritual condition of the parish the sacredness of the Sabbath was not likely to be held in high estimation. Mr. Dawson, on looking through his window, saw the steward coming to his house, and, mentally questioning what the errand could be which was bringing him on that day, went himself to the door, and greeting the visitor said, "Come in sir, we are

just going to read the Scriptures and have family worship ; come and join with us." They entered and Mr. Dawson read in the Scriptures, and then prayed with his usual power. In his prayer, besides offering petitions for his family, he prayed for the people, for the clergyman, for the landlord, and for the steward. On rising from their knees, he asked his visitor what his business might be that morning. After the impressive service which had been conducted, he did not find it very easy to state it; he however with some hesitancy and an apology managed to do so. Mr. Dawson heard him courteously, but told him that he did not transact business of that kind on a Sunday. The visitor, waxing bolder, pressed his suit, and said, "You will never have such a chance; name your own price, consider your wife and children; you know that Sir Edward is going from home and the business must be done to-day, or not at all."

Mr. Dawson replied, " Give my compliments to Sir Edward, tell him I do not do business of this kind on the Lord's Day, but as soon as you choose to-morrow morning I shall be at your service." With this answer the steward had to take his departure, and report to his master. On being asked how he had succeeded he said, " I had never such a job in my life," and then told what he had seen and heard. On concluding, Sir Edward said, "Whatever the clergyman may say we must not interfere with Dawson, he is right." Had the brother yielded to the temptation, his landlord would have had little faith in the reality of his Christianity, but as it was he believed him to be a man of God, and allowed him to continue his labours without interference. In after years Mr. Dawson stood high in the confidence of the farmers and gentry of the neighbourhood. Fidelity and consistency win the respect of the right thinking.

It was in the year 1845, when the writer of this sketch first became acquainted with Mr. Dawson. He had then removed to a farm at Firby, near to Bedale. Preaching services were held in his house, and at his home the preachers always found a welcome hospitality. He had considerable influence in the Circuit in which he lived, and also in the wider circle of the Connexion through the Conference to which he was often elected a delegate by the old Sunderland District. He was, held in high esteem by those who knew him best. He loved the Church of his choice, and took a deep interest in its spiritual and numerical prosperity. In his last illness his chief concern was for the conversion of his young family. For this he prayed with the intensity of earnest faith. His prayer was answered for soon after his death all his children were converted, and in different places and spheres have served the God of their father.

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