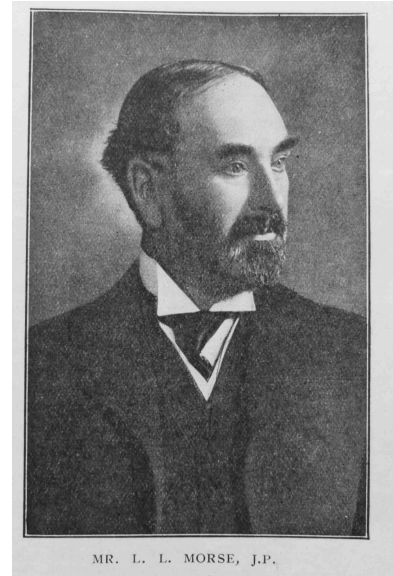


Levi Lapper Morse

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by S.A.B.

FEW men have been more widely beloved and honoured than the subject of this memoir. Both by men holding positions of high Connexional responsibility, and by those who constantly met him in the fellowship of the Church, he was esteemed as a brotherly and royal soul and a Christian gentleman. "Morse, of Swindon," has, for more than a generation, been a synonym for munificence to all good causes. His generosity was not confined to his own denomination. Locally he will be missed by all the other churches in the neighbourhood almost as much as by his own. The multitude of his private benefactions can never be known. He was "a succourer of many." A circuit leader for forty years, an active member of many Connexional Committees, and an ex-Vice-President of the Conference, he was numbered amongst "our Stalwarts." Not long ago, a fine tribute to him appeared in the "Aldersgate," from "One Who Admires Him." We have now to speak of his loss. After a lingering illness, he passed to his eternal rest on September 10th, 1913.



Great and many as were his good deeds, the man was greater still. His unobtrusive manner concealed a large fund of quiet strength. Prior to becoming a Connexional leader, he had made his mark in his own Circuit and District. While yet a young man in his native village of Stratton St. Margaret, he taught a Bible class of forty young men. "We almost worshipped him," said one who then belonged to the class. For many years his Society Class and his Bible Class in Swindon were similarly thronged. We consider these early indications of the power of his personality quite as striking as the eminence which came later.

He was the son of Mr. Charles Morse, who, eighty years ago, was the coadjutor and fellow-sufferer of John Ride, Thomas Russell, and others of our early missionaries. In missioning the countryside of North Wilts and counties adjacent, Mr. Morse endured much persecution, of which he left a manuscript account that casts interesting sidelights on our Connexional history. Levi Lapper Morse, who was born on May 24th, 1853, was one of the children of a second marriage, his mother being also a devoted member. He consecrated himself to Christ in his 'teens, and was always good, kind, studious, thoughtful, and useful. His father's note in the aforesaid manuscript reads:—"My son Levi is also a member and teacher in the school. He has for several years taken the lead of the singing, playing the harmonium, and training the children. He is very liberal to the cause. He has a taste for preaching; and, being pretty well educated, I think he will, should he live, be a useful preacher." How abundantly this anticipation has been fulfilled!

The foundations of what he came to be were thus early laid. The Rev. T. Mostyn Pinnock, his friend of forty years, said at his funeral:—"I have a distinct recollection of a conversation we had together when he took over his father's business, and started on his own account. We talked of God's claim, and I well remember his decision to devote a portion of his income to the cause of God and humanity. That resolution he carried out to the day of his death. We all know that that determination was no drag on the wheels, but rather an inspiration and force."

Mr. Morse found an ideal wife and helpmeet in Miss Winifred Humphries, the memory of whose father and mother is revered in the Brinkworth Circuit. It was after his marriage that he removed his business to Swindon. The locomotive and carriage works of the Great Western Railway have turned a quiet market town on the outskirts of the Vale of the White Horse into a populous centre, which is likely soon to be made a county borough. This growth Mr. Morse foresaw, and the small drapery establishment which he transferred from Lower Stratton to Swindon has expanded, adding new departments, until it is now one of the largest businesses in the West of England. So wealth came, which, in consecrated hands, led to princely giving. He made money, and as he made he gave. And all he did was for the love of God, and not for a name. When he gave there was no flourish of trumpets. In his gifts, as in everything else, he was quiet, unostentatious and sincere.

He was a man of the people. He came from the people; he loved the people; he believed in the cause of the people. He had joy in the friendliness to him of the humblest members of the Church, and cordially greeted them in the House of God. A sturdy Liberal in politics, he held fast to his principles, and died believing in the causes of social and moral reform which he entered the House of Commons to support. His county called him to all the positions in its gift. He was the Vice-President of the School Board; he became the Mayor of his town, a magistrate both of the town and county, and an alderman of the County Council; and, finally, its southern division sent him to the House of Commons.

But though his success and generosity and public position brought him into the main stream of English life, and showed him many attractive types of Church worship, his preference and veneration for his own Church never waned. He liked to converse upon things Connexional. It was touching to hear him say, when broken health kept him from the quarterly meeting, that he was glad his son would be there "to represent the name." He has been "a nursing father" to the churches. Our present standing in the town of Swindon, where we have nine Connexional properties and four ministers, is due to a band of able and devoted men and women, of whom he has been among the foremost. He was a man of God. His chief interest was in the things most high, Though at the head of a great business he was not absorbed by secularities. His topics were the services, the work of God, the enterprises of the Connexion, the progress of the churches, and the welfare of the people. Nor could ministers have had a kinder or truer friend.

His funeral was probably the largest ever seen in Swindon. Many tears were shed; all felt that "a prince and a great man had fallen in Israel." One of the comforts of his later years has been to see his elder son giving himself to Church and official work and civic service, and his younger son rendering valued assistance to a London mission. Mr. Morse and his sisters have been a legacy to Primitive Methodism handed down by one of its early saints and heroes. He now bequeaths to his Church a family whose desire it is to maintain a splendid tradition.

References

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