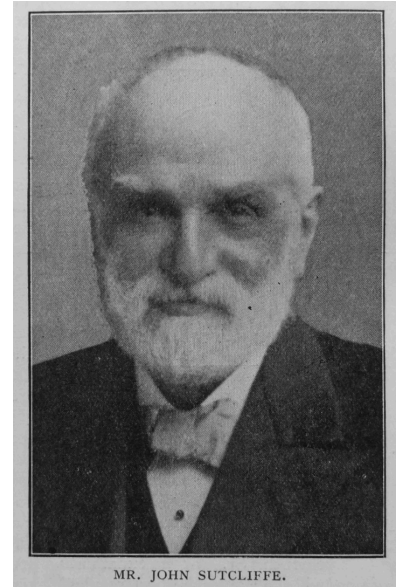


John Sutcliffe of Manchester

Transcription of article by "West Yorke"

THE final test of a church is found in the quality of character which it produces. Not the organisation it creates, nor the buildings it erects, nor the modes of worship it adopts, but the kind of men it makes, will decide its value for, and its permanence in, the world. Primitive Methodism. will abide this trial. It has produced a distinct type of Christian character. Having many things in common with other Free Churches, it shares with them many characteristics of a common faith and time; but withal it reveals an idiosyncrasy all its own. Its peculiar product has been the man in whom enterprise, steadfastness, and a fearless faith in God and man have been combined. In the individual it has appeared as a robust, virile, somewhat assertive and self-sufficient personality. Perhaps more of strength than sweetness has been manifest. More statesmen than philosophers, more evangelists than theologians have arisen in the ranks of her ministry. Our Church has shown the defects of her qualities. It would prove an interesting study to trace cause and effect, to note the action and reaction of character and circumstance upon each other in the evolution of the Church's life. The hard conditions, the meagre equipment, the almost insuperable difficulties experienced in the formative period, have had a marked effect upon organisation, doctrine and character. That these causes, in combination with others both local and general, have produced a race of stalwarts of whom any church might boast is undeniable. No community has been served by its sons and daughters with more ardent devotion and self-denying zeal. Whilst lack of this world's goods has been proverbial, the wealth of consecrated energy placed at her service has been phenomenal.



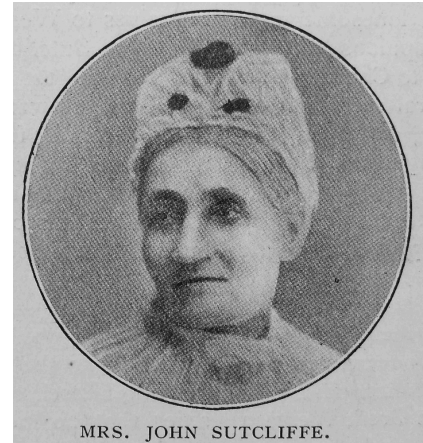
And what an infinite range of talent and temperament is represented in the official life of this Church of ours. If Primitive Methodism has done something to create the shape in which her sons have been cast, the material placed within her hands has been of most richly varied quality. Drawing her members and officials very largely from the wage-earning portion of the community, she has awakened and developed powers and abilities which otherwise had remained dormant and been lost. Giving a new impulse and an enlarged opportunity to the talents of her converts, she has reaped a rich harvest whilst offering a wider field for the exercise of growing power. Whilst an active, ambitious, aggressive spirit has inevitably characterised her members as a whole, it by no means follows that her stalwarts have conformed exclusively to one type. Her life is too rich and her ministry too varied to exhaust itself in any one direction. The growth of the Church, and her widespread success, involved such changing conditions as necessitated a difference of treatment. A difference of emphasis—a changed atmosphere—a broader outlook—a newer point of view emerged. The new need



and the new vision combined with the new circumstances to produce another kind of man. Let us call him the twentieth century Primitive.

And thus it has come to pass that we have seen the: emergence of a new type of official—the *quiet*, safe, strong, steadfast man, the man who never seeks the limelight, but never shirks a burden. Of this type, and one of the earliest of the type, is the subject of this sketch. Mr. John Sutcliffe, of Manchester, is representative of a class to whom Primitive Methodism owes an incalculable debt, the men who are bearing the burdens and nourishing the life of the Church in comparative obscurity.

Giving themselves whole-heartedly to the service of their local society, they are unknown to the vast majority of their fellow Churchmen.



MRS. JOHN SUTCLIFFE.

Great Western Street Church, Manchester, is one of the most widely known and influential of our sanctuaries. Ever since the opening of Hartley College it has been the Church with which the students have been most closely identified. Successive generations of embryo ministers have worshipped and preached within its walls. But it is doubtful if more than a fraction of those who have so ministered ever realised that in the serene and modest treasurer of the Trust was one of the worthiest stalwarts of the Primitive Methodist Church. Circuit steward and local preacher, too, he is, and a model steward in the care and courtesy with which he has discharged that honourable office, but it is in caring for and conserving the interests of Great Western Street Church that the most fruitful and abiding work of his life has been done.

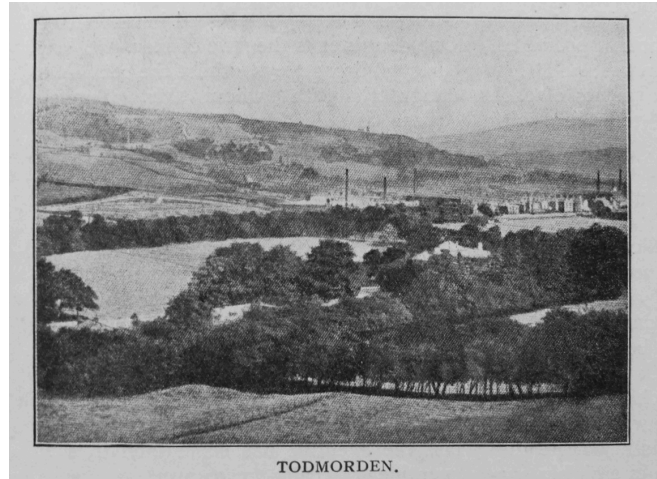
It was so far back as July 29th, 1829, at Knowl, near Todmorden, on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire, that Mr. Sutcliffe was born to a life-long association with Primitive Methodism. With what keen delight he tells of his early experiences! He recalls that when a boy of six, as he played on what were known as "the Ranter's steps," Rev. John Oscroft came up to him and said, "I want an orange; do you know where to get some?" "Yes," said the boy eagerly. "Take this penny then," said the preacher, and very speedily it was changed for two golden globes of luscious fruit. Hurrying back with them to Mr. Oscroft the latter said when they were offered to him, "Oh, no, I don't want them now; they are yours." This made the boy a friend for life. It reads strangely that he began to attend the official meetings of the Knowlwood Circuit, going with his grandfather to carry his lantern along the dark lanes and over the rough and hilly roads. He declares that he never remembers the time when he did not go to the services, and often when the meetings were prolonged he was carried home asleep on his father's back.

John Sutcliffe has never forgotten his native circuit. He has a list of all the ministers who have been stationed to the Knowlwood Circuit since its formation in 1835. He keeps among his treasures the first rough draft plan which he made for the Knowiwood School erected in 1854. His grandfather gave the land upon which the first Primitive Methodist chapel stood in Knowlwood, and through all the long years of his life his interest in his native circuit has never slackened.

But this is a world of change, and a necessary removal to Manchester in 1863 changed the surroundings of his life, though it could not affect his zeal and devotion to the cause. He had already

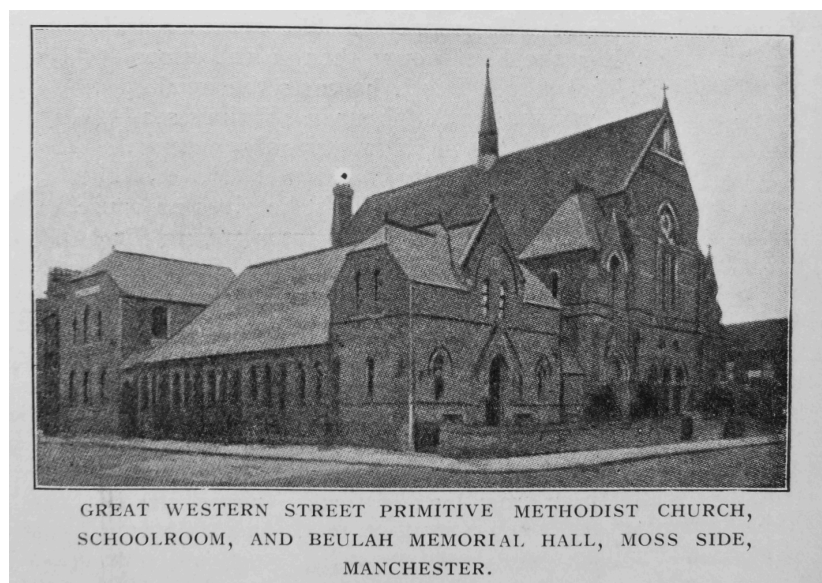
come into contact with Manchester Primitive Methodism, for in the year 1855 he had been delegate to the District Meeting held at Moss Lane. A friendship was then formed with his host, destined to be vastly important in future days. When considering where to settle in the city, he decided to locate in Moss Side and join the church of his friends at Moss Lane. It was a very different Moss Side then. There were no dwelling houses on the south side of Boston Street. St. Mary's Church, whose beautiful spire forms a landmark for all

South Manchester, had just been built and stood lonesome in a field. The great and populous district which now stretches away to Chorlton and Fallowfield was still a rural retreat from the town. Very speedily, however, the growth of population changed the character of the whole district. A great residential development took place, and it became evident that some provision ought to be made for Primitive Methodists who came to reside in the new suburb.



Now with Lancashire men "ought" means "must." Mr. G. Unsworth offered to the Quarterly Meeting at first chief rent the plot of land upon which Great Western Street Church now stands, and a committee consisting of Messrs. Meredith, Beales, Sutcliffe, Unsworth and others was appointed to view the site and measure the land. It was with no intention of leaving Moss Lane that our friend undertook this work, and it was only after repeated appeals, and when Mr. Unsworth beseeched him with tears that he reluctantly consented to become connected with Great Western Street, where a Society had been formed by the transfer of four members from Moss Lane. It was all a venture of faith, a characteristic example of Primitive Methodist enterprise, but among the records of circuit development there have been few more splendidly successful than this proved to be. From the beginning a bold and aggressive policy was pursued. Within two years a building project was initiated and the infant church found itself on the first Sunday in May, 1878, in possession of a magnificent building, with fifty members and a debt of £5,100. Upon the Manchester Second Circuit at that time there was new property in some stage of progress to the total value of £16,000. T'was a position for which men might well have trembled.

But "All's well that ends well," and the position of Primitive Methodism within the area then covered by the Second Circuit is undoubtedly far stronger than in other parts



of the city. How much is due to the steadfastness, the loyalty, and the sacrifices of our subject will never be fully known. Of course, there were other fine souls and splendid leaders, but, confining ourselves to Western Street we remember that Mr. Sutcliffe has been treasurer of the trust almost from the beginning. He has been steward of Manchester Sixth Circuit from its formation in 1886. To him, more than to any other individual, is it owing that the present enviable position of the church has been realised. When the burden was almost intolerable he grappled with it; obtaining helpers, seeking subscriptions, devising means whereby financial needs might be met, giving freely and cheerfully to the utmost of his power and denying himself of all but the barest necessities that he might have more to give. Through the years of struggle and strain he held on and held out with the grit and determination so characteristic of the sturdy hillmen of his native district. In all these years he was splendidly seconded and supported by his devoted wife. A commercial traveller journeying over the country from Elgin to Penzance, his heart was always set on the task that God had given him at home. Inspired by such an example is it any wonder that this church has a record almost unique in regard to the success of its financial schemes and that it is able to boast that in the first twenty-five years of its existence a sum of over twenty-seven thousand pounds passed through its various funds?

It is little wonder that in grappling with the financial burden of the trust Mr. Sutcliffe should find himself unable to give close attention to matters of Connexional import. His business duties involved long journeys and frequent absences from home during the week, so that the Sabbath brought almost the only opportunity for family intercourse and enjoyment. Still he did not altogether lose touch with the Connexional movements. Whilst no seeker after official distinction, and indifferent to the denominational honours, he has maintained a keen interest in all that concerns the well-being of the Church as a whole. He has followed the growth of the denomination with warmest interest, and knows almost every detail of the development of Connexional institutions during the past half century. He possesses a complete set of the Minutes of Conference—which he has had specially bound—from the first year of his full membership in 1848 to the present time. He cherishes a complete set of the Hartley Lectures, and has a variety of other interesting and important documents relating to Manchester Primitive Methodism. There's a pleasant half hour for the Connexional antiquarian in Mr. Sutcliffe's home. And really this stalwart *must* actually love financial affairs for, only think, he has complete accounts of *all* money raised on the station for *all* purposes. He has been so deeply interested in the Centenary Fund that he has made a complete record of the contributions promised and paid by every circuit in the Connexion. He has worked out the averages of the amounts promised, of payments for local purposes, and Central Fund, of the total payments of each circuit to both funds, together with amounts unpaid and the proportion of payments sent to Central Fund from every circuit and district—altogether the most complete and exhaustive account of this fund in existence. It is difficult to imagine the enormous labour involved in compiling such an account, and all of it purely a labour of love! A stalwart indeed this grand octogenarian must be!

And now that we speak of the sire it is a joy to know that his children share in his interest and love for our Church. His son, Mr. T.L. Sutcliffe, is in partnership with Mr. Joshua Longden in a highly successful business as estate agents. Both partners are officials at Great Western Street and deeply interested in its welfare. One daughter is the wife of Rev. W. Wilcock, of Cross Keys, whilst the remaining daughter, with whom Mr. Sutcliffe resides, is, with her husband and family, honouring the traditions of the household in the sanctuary her father has served so long.

As for the rest, John Sutcliffe's years are fourscore and three—years that have not been without trial and sorrow and loss— but graced always by an unswerving integrity, and an unselfish love for the cause and people of God. Glad to serve, ready to suffer, strong, steadfast, serene in time of stress and difficulty; that brave heart has ever responded to the call of duty. At last the eventide has come, and it is an eventide of calm retrospect, of quiet, happy light and rest and peace.

References

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