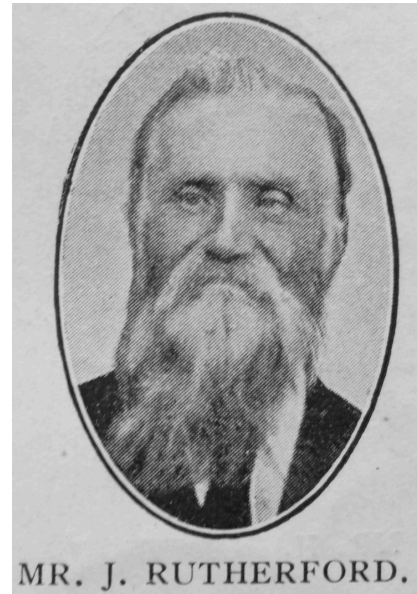


Joseph Rutherford

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by The Editor

On June 1st, 1909, death robbed the lay ministry of Primitive Methodism of one of its most remarkable men. In the very best sense of the word Joseph Rutherford was one of the saints of our Church. He was a seer as well as a saint, a Christian of rare attainments, a preacher of marvellous insight, unction, and spiritual power. To know him was a spiritual education; to sit under his ministry a benediction and a joy.

Born August 11th, 1837, at West Black Dean, he was associated with Wearhead Chapel till he was some twenty-two years of age. He could not give the date of his conversion, and seems to have been a Christian from early childhood. As he grew in years he grew in grace, and steadily ripened until in his seventy-second year he passed into the light and glory of heaven.



His early life was a struggle, for he was never robust and often ailing, and it is marvellous how in toil and service the spirit triumphed over the weakness of the body. For more than twenty years he has been associated with our Witton-le-Wear Society, Bishop Auckland, where he was an official and local preacher. He travelled hundreds of miles, and though preaching was a passion it was not a picnic; often Monday found him unable to attend to his ordinary duties. The Evangel was as a fire in his bones, and its proclamation was a relief to his surging heart. Not long before his death he remarked that he thought he could preach a month from the Prodigal Son, though we are not sure that he ever did preach on the subject. It was not merely his marvellous insight into Scripture or the freshness of his conceptions that made his ministry so unique; it was the indescribable aroma of a rich and Christlike personality that made you feel the reality, the beauty, the strength, and simplicity of the man. We have never met any man who could talk with such naturalness, such utter reverence, such absolute sincerity, such insight and wisdom of the things of the inner life. Not a few will for ever praise God that it was their privilege to know him. What a student of the Word he was and what a hearer!

A Dalesman, he knew all the notable men of Northern Primitive Methodism, and was keenly interested in everything connected with our Church. We have heard men like Hugh Gilmore and John Gill speak of him in the warmest terms. Said the latter, "Joseph Rutherford possesses the most extraordinary insight into the counsels of the Eternal of any man I have ever known."

He was a great reader, and keenly interested in intellectual pursuits. As opportunity came he would browse in many and varied intellectual pastures, gathering something from all for his own mental and spiritual enrichment. But before everything was the Book. He knew his Bible as few men know it, and while welcoming light upon its teaching from every quarter it remained unique and supreme as the revelation of God. He quoted Scripture with an ease, an aptness and insight, and easy familiarity and naturalness unequalled in our experience. Passages linger in the mind still as he quoted them nearly twenty years ago, flashing upon them a new spiritual significance.

It was something that such a man should call one friend, and to know that one's name was in his last audible prayer will ever be a precious and inspiring memory. Great indeed is the heritage of the memory of such a man to the brave, devoted wife in her lonely widowhood, and to the sorrowing children. "The memory of the just is blessed."

References

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