

Clara Dodsworth

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Jeremiah Dodsworth

Clara Dodsworth was born at Eastington, in the county of York, in the year 1805, and departed this life at Wakefield, on the 22nd of August, 1866. Though her youthful days were spent after the course of this world, she nevertheless was early convinced of the necessity of securing the salvation of her soul; and about the year 1830 she was converted to God in Mill Street chapel, Hull. Being zealous for the salvation of souls, she was soon called to labour in the capacity of a local preacher, and, at a subsequent period, she was appointed to the work of a travelling preacher along with the late Rev. W. Howcroft, in which capacity her name appeared on the plan of the Patrington branch of Hull circuit. But the unexpected illness and somewhat sudden death of her beloved sister, who had engaged to take her place as housekeeper to her uncle, prevented her entering on her anticipated new sphere of labour.

In the year 1836 she was united in marriage to the writer, whose sorrows and joys she shared for about thirty years. As soon as we were appointed to the itinerancy, she entered heartily into the work, in which she performed a conspicuous and noble part, adapting herself to the varied circumstances of the different stations on which we were called to labour. From the first of our public life she adopted a plain, neat, and becoming mode of dress, and except when speaking in a lovefeast or praying with penitents, she would have been taken by strangers for a member of the Society of Friends. Being naturally of a strong constitution, and having more nervous energy than the majority of her sex, she could exercise in public meetings as only few women can. In revival prayer-meetings she was successful in leading sinners to Christ, and hundreds of times she has stood clapping her hands, and shouting for joy, over the young believer in Jesus. She was exceedingly diligent, and remarkably successful in visiting the sick and the dying. Often she has left her bed at their midnight call for spiritual help; and a bright crown of rejoicing on this account, I doubt not, has been awarded to her. For, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." And, as to her ministerial appointments, in her palmier days I have known her, assisted by a female friend, carry her infant daughter in her arms, and walk sixteen miles, and preach two sermons on a Sabbath-day! a feat that would make many a stout young man turn pale in these days.

From the beginning of our public ministry she seemed to feel

"We want but little here,
Nor want that little long."

Twelve shillings per week only was allowed to us at first, but she had counted the cost, and not a word of complaint about our small salary and allowances ever escaped her lips. When we arrived in London, our first station, then only a mission of Hull circuit, we had but one room for kitchen, parlour, bedroom, and study, &c.; but with brothers Flesher and Procter in the next, with whom we had frequent intercourse in prayer and praise to God, we were so happy that we called the name of the place "Calm Cottage." It is now occupied for the business of the Book Room. When we arrived in the Bedford mission, our next station, we found the house so empty, that not so much as even a Lucifer match was left to us in the shape of furniture, our predecessor, who soon afterwards left the

connexion, having sold all the household goods, We slept happily and sweetly on the floor, and she rose up in the morning in the true spirit of one who in difficulties and trials, for Christ's sake, had learned to say that "Heaven would make amends for all." When we arrived in the Barton branch of Hull circuit we had neither house nor furniture, but she was content in lodgings until a house could be obtained, and the necessary furniture provided. Such was our early Primitive Methodist history, and blessed and happy is the recollection of those holy places and sacred times.

Notwithstanding her public engagements, she was most exemplary and regular at the means of grace. It mattered not to her whether the service of God was a class-meeting or a prayer-meeting, or whether a travelling or local preacher conducted it; whether held in the chapel or in the open air, she made haste to be there. For thirty years I never knew her carelessly neglect a meeting at which it could reasonably be said, "It was her duty to be there." For she "loved the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth."

So she lived and laboured in all the circuits where we travelled, comprising London, Bedford, Halifax, Leeds, York, Burnley, Bradford, Keighley, Malton, and Wakefield, where, without excepting a single station, it is only simple justice to her public character to say, "Her praise is in all the churches." In the year 1864 heavy afflictions arrested her in her career of usefulness. About Midsummer in this year it became painfully manifest that she was the subject of inward and incurable cancer. Her sufferings were long and sometimes very severe; but she was fully resigned to the will of God.

On the 30th of July, 1866, she ceased to take either food or medicine, and from that time it was evident that the hand of death was upon her. Twenty-three days and nights were occupied in her final passage from mortality to life. During almost the whole of this time she was alternately the subject of heavy sickness, or strong convulsions, and other agonising pains; but in patience she possessed her soul; "her bow abode in strength;" her faith never wavered; her peace remained unbroken. She was "more than conqueror through him who loved her." Her death was not simply and only victorious, it was triumphant and glorious. On one occasion the writer said to her, "Do you think that you are passing through the valley of the shadow of death?" when she replied "I don't know, my dear, you know I have never travelled it before; but I think I am, and a blessed path it is. On several occasions she viewed her blanched and sickly countenance in the looking glass, saying, "Now," as she sank back on her dying pillow, "O death, where is thy sting?" and then uttering the words, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

She had no doubts or fears, but calmly and cheerfully awaited the coming of her Lord; and while the wheels of his chariot were delayed, she made all her own funeral arrangements with as much apparent composure as that with which she ever prepared for an ordinary journey. She uttered no murmurs nor complaints, but spent her last conscious moments in prayer to God, in praise to her Saviour, and in expressions of gratitude to her family, her nurses, and medical attendant, all of whom, at her request, knelt around her dying bed; and while her physician engaged in prayer we felt as though we were at the gate of heaven, and that such a death was better far than the best of life on earth.

Whole pages might be written of remarkable sayings that she uttered, of her pious quotations of Scripture, and of the psalms and hymns that she rehearsed; but time and space would fail to insert

them all in this brief memorial of her moral excellence. More than once while nearing home, she said to her beloved son, "Now, my dear Jeremiah, just before I enter through the gates into the city, come to my bed-foot, where I can see you, and recite me the hymn, -

"Beautiful Zion built above,
Beautiful city that I love,
Beautiful gates of pearly white,
Beautiful temple, God its light," &.

During his recital of those heavenly lines, she was enraptured with the prospect immediately before her, frequently interrupting him with motions of her upraised hands, expressive of the happiness which she felt in her heart; now she broke forth in the words, "Oh dear! oh dear! Oh dear!" and when the last line was enunciated, she continued to repeat the word, "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" Three weeks and two days we watched and waited for her exit, and thanks to God it was calm at last, -

"Night dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary worn-out winds expire so soft."

On the eve of her departure she said, "He is giving me an easy passage at the last;" and in the morning she fell asleep in Christ. Without a sigh, or a struggle, or a groan, she reclined her languishing head on the bosom of her Lord,

"And sweetly breathed her life out there."

Much more might be said of her holy life, and her unusually lingering and indescribably painful, yet peaceful and happy death; but perhaps some may think that I have already said too much in her praise. But when the reader remembers that I write of the pleasant wife of my youth, of the affectionate mother of my children, and of the faithful and cheerful companion of all my tribulations in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, perhaps he will "forgive me this wrong." I have no earthly object to gain, and no private purpose to serve, as inducements to make exaggerated statements concerning her. Her moral excellence and spiritual attainments were no work of mine. Grace made her what she was, and in thus speaking of "departed worth," I desire to magnify the grace of God. It is my daily and fervent prayer that all her dear children and beloved friends, with the sorrowful yet rejoicing writer of these lines, yea, and the reader too, -

All may "triumph so,
When all our warfare's past,
And dying, find our latest foe
Beneath our feet at last."

And now "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

References

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