

Ducker, John (1818-1842)

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

MEMOIR OF THE LATE MR. JOHN DUCKER, P. M. PREACHER. BY HIS COUSIN, MR. PARKIN WIGELSWORTH.*

MR. JOHN DUCKER was born at Epworth, in Lincolnshire, on Oct. 1, 1818, of parents who were members of the Methodist society. His father held a small farm, and John, being the eldest of the family, was, at an early age, employed on his father's farm in the minor tasks of husbandry. His mind, however, was not much "attached to the soil;" and hence, after his conversion to God, nearly all his leisure time was devoted to study; and I have heard his father say, that, considering the smallness of his library, he was astonished to find him so advanced in knowledge, and so well versed in the various points of doctrine, as he appeared to be when he began to preach.

As I consider that parents have more to do in framing the mind; and character, and disposition of their offspring than is generally admitted, I shall here mention his pious. mother. At an early age she became a decided christian, and joined the Methodist society. Her thirst for spiritual knowledge was great, but her father, being a strict churchman, did not sympathize much with those religious feelings (called by some, enthusiastic) which led her, at all leisure hours, to read the scriptures, and those few good books which composed their scanty library. That the wasting of midnight oil might not betray her, she read for many an hour (when the rest of the family were in bed) by the light of what were called in the Isle of Uxholme, "spells;" a kind of reed, which, when dried, burns slowly, and emits a light somewhat resembling that of a rushlight. When one of these was burnt out, the "hob" supplied another, as page after page was thus stealthily devoured. Truly, this was "the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties." She kept a diary for some time, whose pages show that her christian experience was of the most delightful character. She also wrote some fragments of poetry, whose sentiments give evidence of her earnest desire to praise and magnify the Lord. Having a good knowledge of the holy scriptures, which were her delight, and being unashamed of the gospel of Christ, she was always ready to give a reason for the hope that was in her; and, sometimes, by the force of arguments, based on the word of God, she put the scoffer and sceptic to confusion. Need I add, that she taught her son early to seek and serve the Lord; and need we wonder, that one wish, which he expressed before dying, was, that his body might be conveyed to Burnham, and laid beside the mouldering body of his departed mother!

It pleased the Almighty to remove her to her heavenly rest, before John was ten years old; not, however, before he was sensible of her worth; for (as appears by a diary which he afterwards kept) he prayed earnestly "that the Lord would spare her useful life, that she might be a guide to him in his youthful days, and lead him in the way to heaven." This bereavement made a serious impression upon his mind; but, time, which mellows down the grief that youthful bosoms feel, gave to the impression a less sensible character. When he was about thirteen years of age, he was more fully awakened to a sense of his condition and danger, through sin, and of his need of a Saviour. The Primitive Methodists, at this time, visited Burnham, a village near Epworth, where John was living with his father. Mr. G. Lamb preached a sermon, by which John was much blessed, and speedily after which he formed the resolution, concerning the Primitive Methodists, "this people shall be my people, and their God my God." His devoted attachment to this section of the church of Christ continued thenceforth to his dying hour.

Shortly after this, a pious female of the society instituted a class in the village, purposely for the young, and John at once joined it. The young require a peculiar kind of training, and are observed to be much more open and free in stating their christian experience when among those whose age and attainments are similar to their own. And it is much to be regretted, that too few religious females, who have the ability, do not, like the female referred to, exert their talent in teaching youth the service of the Lord. Who can tell how great a blessing such "labour of love" may be rendered to the church and to the world?

In April, 1833, John was brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and remained therein to the period of his death. At the age of fifteen, he became a local preacher; and when he was about sixteen, I heard him preach a sermon which would have been creditable to a man of many years experience in the work of the ministry. His manner, though not vehement, was energetic; he evidenced an extensive knowledge of the scriptures; and his arguments were clear, forcible, and convincing. In prayer, he had great freedom of access to the throne of divine grace; his style was good; and in pleading with God, on behalf of perishing sinners, was solemn, fervent, and impressive.

When he was about seventeen years old, he received a request to become an itinerant preacher, and, after much deliberation and prayer, was willing to comply therewith; but, for a time, could not obtain the consent of his father. His case was "spread before the Lord," the father surrendered him to the church, and he entered upon the solemn duties of a minister of Jesus Christ. In doing this, he had no unhallowed wish, no personal vanity to gratify. Those who enter the ministry, among the Primitive Methodists, are not allured by prospects of respectable ease, and abundant pecuniary remuneration. Among them, the piety of the preachers is put to the test, by continued labours in scattered towns, villages, and hamlets; by toilsome journies, chiefly on foot, in all sorts of weather; by preaching almost every evening throughout the week, and generally three times on the Lord's day; —(sometimes in comfortable chapels, but not unfrequently in small heated rooms, in cottages, and in the open air), filling up the intervals by visiting the brethren, the sick and dying, and conferring with the leaders, regulating their classes, administering quarterly tickets, and performing other labours, to say nothing of the study and preparation necessary in their arduous vocation.**

To return to my subject: John was first employed as a travelling preacher in the Scotter circuit, where he laboured one year. Next he was appointed to the Hull circuit, in which he travelled two years; and afterwards to the Halifax circuit, where he travelled also two years. In April, 1841, he was married to Miss Ann Middlebrook, of Swinefleet, Yorkshire, whose exemplary piety amply qualified her for her new station. He was then appointed to the Leeds circuit, where, however, his health began soon to suffer so much, that he would have relinquished his work, had not renewed strength, for a time, flattered him, and impelled him to persevere. It is probable, that continued exercise in those arduous labours in which he had engaged before his bodily powers were sufficiently matured by age, brought on the hoarseness which ended in an ulcerated windpipe, and finally closed his eyes in death.

He was advised, at an early stage of his indisposition, to retire from his work for a season, that his health might be restored. In writing to a friend, he said, "I tried to take this advice, but found I must either take a considerable quantity of work, or give up altogether: I did not like to do the latter, so I continued in my work." How far this was right or judicious is questionable, but his conduct certainly evinced his willingness to spend himself in his Master's service. As the year 1841 rolled on, his bodily strength wasted, and occasionally obliged him to take rest; and, in the last week of the year, had so far failed, that he could no longer take his journies, nor scarcely could he walk across the room. His appetite now failed, sleep forsook him, and he was compelled to ask the circuit committee to allow him rest and change of air.

These were cheerfully granted; and he removed to Swinefleet, where his wife's mother resided. Here he tried those remedies which are usual in cases like his, and was aided by the kind and soothing attentions of an affectionate wife; but all efforts to effect his restoration were vain; and, after about three months sickness, borne with much patience and resignation to the Divine will, he was called to his heavenly home, to share in the glory of the saints of God.

The death-bed scenes of those who die in the Lord possess deep interest, and afford many solemn lessons to living christians. When the dying believer rejoices in the "full triumph of faith," we have evidence that his religious life has not been professional merely. Of all the inquiries respecting a man, that of "How did he die?" is the most important. What he was—who he was—how great—how talented—how famed—how rich, are inquiries which sink into nothingness, compared with that of "How did he die?"

We find, in pursuing our inquiries respecting this young servant of Christ, that there is a pleasing connexion between his religious life and his happy death: the latter was in sweet accordance with the former. When he had given up all hopes of living, (and the young generally feel a struggle in relinquishing these), his language was, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain!" He declared, that the only cause of his desiring to live was, "that of serving the church," and that he felt quite resigned to the will of his Father in heaven, who, he knew, could bury his workmen, and yet carry on his work. As death made nearer approaches, he was still calm, and the powers of his mind retained their vigour to the last. Feeling the pains of death, he desired a friend, who was sitting up with him, to alter his position in bed. "Help me over it," said he, "as well as you can, for it is finished—I am dying!" It is not within the limits of this brief memoir, that all the blessed words which fell from his lips, in this extremity, can be recorded. For three hours, nature struggled in the earthly tenement, but the soul was already above this world, and had begun its closer communion with the world of spirits. "It is hard work," said he, "but it is grand—the port is in view!" To his mother-in-law, who at this moment entered the room, he exclaimed with energy, "Mother, heaven!" and to a young woman who was standing near him, he said something similar. He then called his beloved wife, and said, "Anne, heaven! kiss me; good bye!" Next, he called his sister Martha, to whom he uttered the same word—"heaven!" and bade her also an affectionate adieu. "Heaven!" (Oh! what a volume of meaning was there in this one precious word! The worldling, dying unprepared, exhibits no such hope—such ecstasy as is here expressed. He may feel the pain, or the stupor, but not "the bliss of dying.") "Glory! halleluia!" many times burst from his lips. His sister, in a letter, describes the scene of his last hours thus— "It was a painful scene, but a sublime one! He exulted in his latest moments, and was quite rational to the last, which was a great consolation to us all. The scene was grand! and fully corroborated the sentiments of the poet—

"The chamber where the good man meets his fate
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life; quite on the verge of heaven!"

His young and afflicted wife desired him, when he should be too weak to speak, to give her signs of conquest with his hand. A little while before he died, he waved his hand in token of triumph over death, and, when he could no longer wave his hand, he raised his elbow a little, to give the same signification. Then he rallied a little, and burst forth in strains of holy rapture—

"Yonder 's my house, my portion fair,
My treasure and my heart are there,
And my abiding home."

He afterwards called his dear wife near him, and said with remarkable fervour, "It grows brighter and brighter! there, now it is all bright!" (How this reminds the christian reader of the happy death of Stephen, who was favoured with the sight, veiled to others' eyes, of heaven opened, and Jesus in the midst.) Yea, he

presently used the dying martyr's words—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" With his dying breath he shouted "Glory! glory!" and, with a smile, closed his eyes; then his happy spirit fled to the realms of eternal light and bliss, early on the morning of April 10, 1842, in the twenty-fourth year of his age.

The reader will gather the character of our young disciple of the Lord Jesus from the previous record. In his christian career, his constant aim was the glory of God, which he strove to promote by first seeking and securing his own salvation, and then by using the talents God had given him for the salvation of others. Jesus loves young disciples, and to such he is observed ever to be especially gracious. "I will be with you alway, even to the end," is his promise to his servants. The sublime manifestations of his love, and the strengthening and consoling influence of the Spirit—the Comforter, granted to his dying servant, were but continued proofs of the Lord's peculiar favour to those who devote their best, their earliest years to his service.

He is now a glorified spirit; labour, and pain, and sorrow, are done away. May we who knew him while on earth, and mourned his death when he was snatched away, so follow the Lord Jesus, that we too may hereafter enjoy that blissful sabbath which shall never end. What is our religion worth, if it be not the religion with which we can triumphantly die?

" Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord,
'Tis good to trust thy name:
Thy power, thy faithfulness, and love,
Will ever be the same."

* Mr. Wigelsworth will find that the inserted memoir contains many alterations, and several abridgments of the manuscript. These he must excuse: for they, and even more than they, have been required by the arrangements of the committee; and more would have appeared, only Mr. Wigglesworth's belonging to another community induced our sufferance. The itinerant part of Bro. Ducker's life, which is the most important part, is but briefly dwelt upon. We should have been glad to have read of the conversion of sinners, by his instrumentality, in the several stations which he occupied. Having been informed that he was instrumental in the conversion of such, we entertain no doubts on the question. Still, in the memoir of one of our itinerant preachers, the question should be rendered doubtless by the statement of facts. We beg that this view shall be set up as an important way-mark, by the writers of our future memoirs, who are desired also to read the remarks, headed Biography, in the leading article of the number for January, and those at the bottom of the first obituary of that month. ED.

* *The reader will please to bear in mind, that the writer of these remarks does not belong to the Connexion alluded to. He mentions this, that it may not be supposed that one of its own preachers is here offering any complaint. As far as he has known and observed them, a more devoted, laborious, and contented class of ministers are not to be found in any section of the christian church. May they continue such, and prosper!

References

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