

## Rev. James Garner

### Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by W. Ward

James Garner was born on January 12th, 1805, at Lynn Regis, in Norfolk. Sweetness of temper, kindness of disposition, integrity of conduct, love and obedience to his parents, and deep-rooted affection to his brothers and sisters, were excellences which distinguished even the carnal portion of his life.

At a proper age, he was apprenticed to Mr. William Monement, a respectable cork-cutter, in Lynn, and during his apprenticeship he conducted himself with credit, maintained an irreproachable character, and was highly esteemed by his master, in whose service he remained till called to the ministry. At about the seventeenth year of his age, while sitting under the preaching of Susan Woodford, he felt the necessity of regenerating grace; soon afterwards he obtained the forgiveness of his sins, through faith in the blood of Christ, and he never lost his confidence in God, nor dishonoured his profession, but was a bright ornament to the Primitive Methodist Connexion as long as he lived.

The God of nature had adorn'd his child  
With cheerful mien, and temper sweetly mild ;  
Yet more was given by this God through grace:  
A light, reflected from the Saviour's face.

In the year 1825, a sabbath-school was commenced at Lynn, and our deceased brother was appointed to be the first superintendent, in which office he was diligent, successful, and much beloved. This school now numbers 500 scholars, and upwards of 70 teachers. Seeing that the Lord designed him for a still greater work, his brethren elected him to become a local preacher, and, as such, he laboured abundantly, acceptably, and successfully, until the year 1827, when he was fully consecrated to the itinerancy. North Walsham circuit being in want of a preacher, he was recommended as likely to suit the vacancy, by W. G. Bellham, who said, "If he does not prove all that I state, I will bear the blame." When the call was given, he conferred not with flesh and blood, but immediately commenced his itinerant career. From his first circuit he went forth, sowing the seed of the word in London, Brandon, Norwich, Upwell, Lynn, Wangford, Wisbeach, Yarmouth, and Ipswich circuits. Then he returned to Lynn the second time; and here he finished the work in which he had been engaged with fidelity and zeal for twenty-two years. In reviewing his course, we are constrained to say,

Lo! at his heels what fruits appear;  
The circuits smile with grain;  
First the blade, and then the ear,  
Repay for all his pain.  
Into the garner it shall come

All reap'd from his employ;  
The angels shout "the harvest-home!"  
While he beholds with joy.

He was successful in the conversion of sinners; an increase of 84 members took place in the Lynn circuit within the two years when he was first stationed there: nor was his last appointment to his native place without some encouraging fruit, though affliction disabled him from fully discharging his usual duties. By the last Conference he was stationed for the Brandon circuit; but this extensive field of usefulness he was not permitted to enter. The seals of his ministry are found in almost every part of the Lynn circuit; revivals took place, many souls were converted to God, a prosperous work was begun, and was in successful progress under his superintendency during the last two years of his life. Other circuits, as well as the Lynn circuit, have been raised and enlarged through his toil; and if they could speak on this subject, how encouraging would be their testimony. He was instant in season and out of season; and yet he humbly acknowledged himself to be an unprofitable servant. A few days before he was seized with his last illness, while reviewing the year 1848, he wrote in his diary, the following passage:

"Praise God for all the blessings of another year! The Lord has preserved my health, and given me a little fruit for my labours; but, oh, how comparatively useless I have been. O Lord, revive thy work! During the past year, I have travelled, chiefly on foot, 3484 miles; made, since the March quarter, 1790 family visits; and preached about 400 times."

He was a good minister of Jesus Christ; not a novice, but "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth;" and was an example to believers, in word, conversation, charity, faith, and purity; of good behaviour, vigilant, sober, patient: in a word, he was "a vessel unto honour," sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto good works. On his fair mitre might be seen written, as with the pen of the living God, "*Holiness to the Lord!*"

Seldom were those two ministerial traits,— the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove,— more closely allied than in our departed brother; hence, in Yarmouth, he was called, "the circuit dove." The gentleness of his manners may be inferred from an incident which took place at a Missionary meeting, where he expressed the hope, "that our preachers would never be gentlemen:" when brother Garner sat down, the chairman said to the meeting, "If Mr. Garner is not a gentle-man, where will you find one?" He was pre-eminently peaceable and prayerful, and was, consequently, happy and influential. The whole of his deportment did honour to his profession; he was a burning and shining light, and was exceedingly pained if anything occurred in the church to dishonour the cause of his Master. After returning home, on one occasion (while in the Ipswich circuit), he wrote, "I was much pained in mind to hear of the conduct of some professors of religion. Lord, save them, and revive thy work!"

As a brother and companion in the ministry, he won the affections of his fellow-labourers by his kindness; he superintended in love, was a sincere and confidential friend, and his memory will ever be dear to those who had the privilege of being stationed with him. After the last March quarterly meeting, (which he could not attend through illness) a friend sent him a note, from which the following is extracted: "My dear brother Garner,—I was deeply affected at your absence yesterday, and my sympathy and prayers followed you into your retirement." He replied, "My dear brother,—I am much obliged to you for your sympathy and prayers; and can assure you that I have confidence in the prayers of the righteous."

That wisdom and righteousness influenced all his disciplinary acts, is believed by those who sat in official meetings with him. His aim was, to cure by the enforcement of discipline, and not to kill; for those whom the Saviour had purchased with his own blood were too precious in his eyes to be rigorously destroyed; they were engraved on his breastplate, and he never failed to present them before God at the throne of grace. On these accounts, his name was as ointment poured forth among the people; he lived in their affections, and was cheerfully received into their abodes: indeed, all ranks and classes respected him; and though dead, he yet speaks. Brother Bellham says, "I know many good people, but I never beheld in one person so many excellences as were concentrated in brother Garner. However, he always confessed that he was far below what he ought to be, though those who knew him well were sure that he was in private what he appeared in public—a genuine Christian. Fully he depended on the atonement, saying, "I am a sinner, saved by grace."

His journal, at the commencement of the year 1846, contains the following thoughts: "How fleeting are the years of our lives! Another volume of time is just closed, and has borne away its records to the judgment-seat. How many of the moments of the past year have been unimproved! O that the future days of my life may be devoted to God, entirely to God."

On May 15th, 1833, he was united in marriage to Rebecca Cole, of Great Yarmouth, to whom he was an affectionate husband: indeed, in the domestic circle he walked within his house with a perfect heart, and evinced great solicitude for the welfare of his numerous children; many of whom regularly attended the sabbath-morning prayer-meetings at seven o'clock, and were remarkable for their commendable appearance and behaviour. Under considerable indisposition, from January 9th till February 18th, 1849, he laboured with much difficulty. On the latter date he preached at Lynn—in the morning from "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" and in the afternoon from "Behold! I stand at the door, and knock;" but feeling himself exhausted, and unable to preach again in the evening, he remarked, at the conclusion of the afternoon's sermon, "I have been an itinerant preacher for twenty-two years; during which I have been laid aside only one week through illness." However, on this day an end was put to the ministerial labours of our brother; he lingered seven months in a consumption, which the best medical aid could not arrest.

His afflictions were borne with remarkable patience and resignation. "I wish," said he, "to lose all in this furnace, which God designs me to lose. It is hard to quit the work when so much needs doing; to retreat when the enemy stands armed on all sides." He was astonished when his brethren first expressed their fears about his recovery, and he hoped that those fears were ill-grounded; but, as his strength failed, he began to anticipate his departure. However, he was not alarmed; his language was, "All is right and well; all is peace; the will of the Lord be done." 'The writer of a sketch visited him during all his affliction, and always found him firm in the faith, clear in the assurance of his acceptance with God, and perfectly resigned to the Divine will. When asked "how he felt respecting death," he replied, "If it had been the will of God to have spared me till I had instilled into the minds of my children the principles of religion, and formed their character, I should have been thankful; but the Lord's will be done." On another occasion, when several of his brethren were present, he pointed to his children, and said, "These are my ties." By grace he was enabled to commit them into the hands of Him who has said, "Leave thy fatherless children with me, and let thy widows trust in me; for I am a Father to the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow."

He was visited by brother Bellham, and other travelling preachers during his sickness; by the Independent minister, and a pious clergyman, who acknowledged him as a brother minister, reminded him of promises most suited to his circumstances, and invoked the throne of grace in his behalf. Francis Creswell, Esq. (of the firm of Gurney and Co., bankers) kindly visited him, and was very faithful in his inquiries into the grounds of his confidence. "You," said he, "I understand, are a people who depend on good works;" but his mistake was soon pleasingly rectified by our dear brother, who replied, "No, sir, we depend on Christ alone, who is all in all to us as a people, and the only foundation on which I myself rest my hopes." The gentleman expressed his entire satisfaction with his visit; and brother Garner received it with much thankfulness and pleasure.

The brethren in Lynn paid great attention to him as he neared the grave, and endeavoured to soothe his descending steps. On one occasion he said to the circuit-steward, "I have many precious seasons with the Lord, but sometimes I am mightily harassed by the enemy." At another time, when brother Saintry and brother Sheldrick spoke pointedly to him about death and eternity, and engaged in prayer, the heavens seemed opened; an influence from above overwhelmed them all; they wept, the children wept, the wife wept, all wept. The wife said, "My dear, do not fret;" he replied, "Fret? I am rejoicing in the Lord; this is a foretaste of that heaven which I shall soon enter, to be for ever with my heavenly Father."

Reader, may'st thou obtain like precious faith;  
To smile in anguish, and rejoice in death ;  
Such conquering faith God will on thee bestow,  
If thou but live as did our brother here below.

The most triumphant scene transpired on the day previous to that of his death. Brother Sainty said, "Mr. Garner, your evidence is bright for eternity." He replied, with tears streaming from his eyes, "Yes, but I wish I were able to talk, for then I would tell you all about it." While brother Lift was engaged in prayer, an extraordinary power descended from heaven, and filled the room; our afflicted brother arose into an ecstasy; his face beamed with light, and lifting up his hands, he waved them in triumph, and shouted, "This is the earnest of heaven! I shall soon be at home." On the following day he wished to bid all his children adieu! His eldest son was led into the room; and the father grasped his hand, kissed him, and said, "James, be a good boy!" These were his last words; and as the task of giving his final blessing to his children was too much for him, the eldest was the only one introduced. His wife was overcome when she saw him departing; and after lingering for more than an hour in a calm state, with his eyes fixed upwards, he went to Jesus, on September 17th, 1849, aged forty-four years.

Methought I saw him then convey'd  
By angels to the throne;  
Where now he sits in white array'd,  
Far brighter than the sun.  
May we prepare to follow thee,  
That we with thee may dwell ;  
Then we shall never parted be;  
Kind brother, now farewell.

His sorrowing widow and eleven children mourn his departure, and on the eighth day after his death, and the second after his interment (September 25th), the widowed matron gave birth to the twelfth child. What consolation can be offered to this bereft family?

He rests from his labours;  
He rests from his fears;  
And his Saviour has met him  
To wipe off his tears.

Would you recall him from the society of the glorified, now delighting in those rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand, and residing in those peaceful mansions prepared for God's people, where there is no want, no tear, no pain, no death? Would you plunge him afresh into the troubles of this perplexing world? No! rather be encouraged to reduce to practice his instructions; follow his example, so far as he followed Christ, and live in the enjoyment of that religion which supported him whom you now mourn: thus will you be prepared to unite with him in songs of praise in those glorious realms, where all is peace and harmony, and to hear our departed brother exclaim, "Behold! I and the children, whom the Lord hath given me." In reference to this world's goods—"Consider the ravens, for they neither sow, nor reap; which neither have storehouses nor barns; and God feedeth them; how much more are ye better than the fowls?" Already His providence has been graciously

manifested on your behalf: your loved one died in his native town, where you have met with much sympathy; and God will ever be with you. Thousands remember you at the throne of grace; and how consoling is the fact, that “the prayers of the righteous avail much!” May you walk as becometh your relationship to that holy character of whom you have been bereaved; then will you ever be regarded by God, and remembered by his people.

The funeral of our brother took place on the sabbath, September 23rd, 1849, at one o’clock: the various ministers of the town, including our travelling preachers, preceded the corpse; then followed the mourners, the local-preachers, the Sunday-school teachers, and the members of the Society; and thousands assembled to witness the scene. How delightful it was to see the Independent, the Baptist, the Wesleyan, the Wesleyan Association ministers, the Primitive Methodist preachers, and the clergyman (the last with a Primitive Methodist hymn-book in his hand), all forgetting their party distinctions, and unitedly testifying their respect for departed worth; and, singing as with one voice,

“Hark! a voice divides the sky—  
Happy are the faithful dead,  
In the Lord who sweetly die ;  
They from all their toils are freed.”

The death of our brother was improved in the evening, after the corpse was interred, by R. Howchen; and throughout the circuit, by the travelling-preachers, as they went their respective rounds. Also, the Independent and Baptist ministers of Lynn, improved his death, each to his own congregation, and spoke of him as a devout and eminent minister. Collections were made on behalf of the survivors; and the Independents, the Baptists, and the Wesleyans cheerfully contributed of their substance towards this object. Also, a subscription was patronized by the mayor, the clergy, the Catholic priest, the Unitarian minister, and others in the town of Lynn. By these means the widow has been enabled to furnish a house, and provide necessaries for her numerous family; and a balance has been placed in the hands of trustees for the benefit of the twelve children.

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1850/65