

Rev. Richard Gibson

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

MEMOIR OF RICHARD GIBSON.

DEAR BRETHREN,—Grace, mercy, and peace, be multiplied unto you. I here present you with a brief memoir of Brother Richard Gibson, late itinerant preacher, of the Primitive Methodist Society; hoping the same will tend to edify the numerous readers.

Bolton, March 7, 1835,

Yours in the bonds of Christ,

S. TILLOTSON.

“On piety humanity is built;
And on humanity much happiness;
And yet still more on piety itself.
A soul in commerce with her God, is heaven;
Feels not the tumults and the shocks of life—
The whirls of passion, and the strokes of heart:”

Are facts illustrated, exemplified, and substantiated in the life and death of the subject of the following memoir.

Richard Gibson was born in the vicinity of Blyth, in the county of Northumberland, April 10th, 1804; of parents who were truly pious and feared God, above many; one part of whose devotedness to God, was that of training up their children in the way they should go, in hopes that when old they would hardly depart from it. His pious parents agreed when entering the marriage state, to join themselves in a perpetual covenant to Christ the Lord; so immediately after they were united together, they unreservedly joined the Methodist society. They continued steady members, and endeavoured, at a very early period, to impress the minds of their children with the vital and important truths of godliness; and the impressions, it is believed, were never wholly erased from the children's minds.

In the year 1815, our brother lost his earthly father, who was suddenly taken from his affectionate family; for, while labouring in the bowels of the earth, as a collier, the water burst in upon them from some old works, and seventy-five men and boys lost their lives. Of the greater part of these, but especially of Bro. Gibson's. father, it might be said he did not die, but lived to see the glory of God; for when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, the believer shall also appear with him in glory. Our brother, by this alarming catastrophe, lost the guide of his youth, and was left, along with five other fatherless children, with their widowed mother, to feel the loss they had sustained.

His dear mother at this important period, feeling, as every pious parent ought to feel in such circumstances, the responsibility that devolved upon her, endeavoured, as far as in her lay, to make up that deficiency, by regularly taking her children to the various means of grace, and by daily kneeling with them at the family altar; where she, with earnest solicitude, breathed out the desires of her soul to that God, who has said, “While my people pray I will hear, and while they are waiting I will answer.” And again, “Leave thy widow and thy fatherless children unto me, who am the Father of the fatherless and a husband to the widow.” At this crisis she was blessed with all that guidance and support which those experience who put their trust in the Lord, and make the God of Jacob their refuge. In 1817, this pious mother in Israel was called to bear another shock in the loss of her eldest son, William; who, sailing out of North Shields harbour for

Hamburgh, a storm arose, and all hands perished. In this trial, as well as the former, the Lord was her support.

The subject of this memoir was then the eldest son living, and the only one at that time on which she placed her hopes for support; and for a while he seemed to sympathize with her, and laboured to administer consolation. But this goodness was like the morning cloud and early dew which soon passeth away, He soon began to be inattentive to her pressing concerns, and to neglect her kind and affectionate admonitions. He formed a connexion with a company of young men, against whom the wise man cautions, saying, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." But he did consent, and soon manifested a hostile disposition to all that was good. His mother was now obliged to use her authority in compelling him to attend the means of grace; she remonstrated, and wept and prayed, but apparently without effect; he seemed bent on a course of wickedness, and soon became a great proficient in vice, a ring-leader of his companions in gambling, dancing, &c. This was a source of inexpressible grief to his mother; particularly as he made demands on her for money to follow those practices which her conscience would not permit her to encourage. Often has she gone to the throne of grace drenched in tears, on account of his conduct in following those things, the end whereof is eternal death. His brother says, "I have frequently sat and wept with her by the fireside, when he has left the house in those outrageous passions to go to his scenes of amusement and pleasure, after having threatened to break and destroy every thing in the house. But, like a faithful parent, she stood in her post, and God abundantly compensated her perseverance in the patience of hope and the labour of love. I do not mention these things to sink him in the esteem of those who may hear them; no, I would much rather have concealed them from public observation. But I know that nothing serves to illustrate the power of Divine grace more than the conversion of such notorious sinners to God. Considering his age, he was one of the deepest dye; and of him it may be said, "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"

Although he was constrained, by the authority of his parent, to attend divine service on sabbath days, he had a fixed aversion to every thing that looked like religious devotion, and it was to him most irksome: he saw no charms in religion, but was an entire stranger to its heart-cheering and soul-reviving influence.

However, it pleased the Lord to send the Primitive Methodist missionaries into the North of England; and, among other places, they visited Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and its vicinity, where hundreds of the most abandoned sinners were converted, and made the subjects of Divine grace; and many who were counted the filth and offscouring of all things, are now among the most useful, laborious members of our religious community; and amongst the many who were converted and thus brought to God, was Brother Gibson, in the year of our Lord 1823.

He was by persuasion induced to attend a lovefeast at Butchers' Hall. To this meeting he went in a carnal state, sold under sin. In the lovefeast he was instantaneously arrested by the power of God, which opened his blind eyes, gave him to see his awful condition, and that there was but a single step between him and eternal damnation. He was constrained then and there to cry for mercy at the hands of the Lord. And the Lord, who is attentive to the cry of the penitent, did mercifully, there and then, set his captive soul at liberty. He was delivered from the guilt and power of sin, and could confidently exclaim—

"No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus and all in him is mine;
Alive in him, my living Head,
And cloth'd in righteousness divine,
Bold, I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own."

He returned home to his mother a changed man,— “A new creature in Christ Jesus,” exulting in the God of his salvation. The Leopard’s spots were removed, and the Lion was turned into a lamb; there was a decided change, both in the disposition of his heart, and in the actions, efforts, labours, and pursuits of his life. His newly liberated soul was fixed on heavenly things, and he endeavoured daily to lay up his treasure above. He now, with the greatest intensity, sought after the moral and spiritual improvement of his mind. This radical change presently made itself manifest in his conduct; he at once broke off from his old companions in sin. A change like this taking place in such a character, soon made him the subject of conversation in the village where he resided; and his fall was as confidently predicted as if it had already taken place. But, blessed be the name of the Lord, the predictions proved false; for God, who had called him into liberty, kept him to the day of his death. I have often wondered at his preservation in the divine life, considering his former perverseness, and the profligate characters among whom he was destined to labour, and who were continually laying snares to entrap his soul. But why should we wonder? Is there any thing too hard for God?—who has promised both grace and glory, and who withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly. He asked, and the Lord gave him strength according to his day; even grace to help him in every time of need. He went on from conquering to conquer, magnifying and praising God, who had translated him out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son, and telling to all around what great things God had done for his soul. A local preacher residing in the village where he lived, he closely united himself with him in the bonds of Christian affection, and from him he received much useful information and assistance on divine subjects. He began to examine the doctrines contained in the word of God; and, being but young in years, his mind and views soon began to expand like an opening flower, so that he was shortly grounded in the fundamental principles of christianity.

In the year 1825, I was stationed for Newcastle-upon-Tyne circuit, where I first became acquainted with Brother Gibson. He was then much esteemed in society, on account of his exemplary piety, and his uniform devotedness to God and his cause; and being a young man of some promise, he was admitted on the plan as an exhorter, then a local preacher, and was much respected, not for his flaming talents, but for his attendance to all the duties of his office.

In 1828, while I travelled in the Sunderland circuit, he was by that circuit called out to travel as an itinerant preacher. He laboured to make himself useful, and in some instances souls were converted to God, and believers edified. He left Sunderland circuit at midsummer, for his station at New Mills, in Derbyshire. The state of his mind may be partially known from an extract of a letter to his dear and widowed mother.

“Dear Mother,—With pleasure I take up my pen to communicate my thoughts to you. I feel thankful that we can (though at a distance), make known to each other our states and feelings. I am well in body; but I have had to pass through some intense operations of mind. The enemy has used all his subtle influence against me, and my own evil heart, like a broken bow, has been ready to start aside; but I praise God I feel a desire to go forward in the path of duty. I sometimes think of the joys—the transporting joys—we shall have, if we be faithful, when we all meet above, and join those who have gone before. I was particularly struck when I heard of the death of Brother Clavering, (a young itinerant preacher), but our loss is his infinite gain. Oh! what need for us to stand in habitual readiness for death. May the Lord keep you and me. When I look back on what has been done this last year, I feel uncommonly depressed in mind when I hear of the work of God reviving in other circuits, and not in ours. Yet, notwithstanding this, I have reason to be thankful for what has been done. I believe I have a few seals to my ministry; there are a few which, through the blessing of God, I have been the instrument of bringing to a knowledge of the truth. Look to the Lord; pray for me and you. Dear mother, you must not let things trouble your mind. If I am absent from you, the Lord is my

protector and guide. So commit yourself and me into his kind care and keeping; look up and live for heaven. A few more storms, and then we shall arrive at our destin'd port."

At midsummer he removed to the Bolton circuit, where he was blessed, and made a blessing; from which he writes as follows:—

"Bolton, Feb. 23rd, 1831.

"*Dear Mother*,—With pleasure I again take up my pen to write unto you. I returned last night from Oldham, where I have been preaching preparatory sermons for their missionary meetings, and assisting at the same; and after preaching at night, there were a few souls brought into liberty. I do not remember that I have felt more of the power of God this nine months, than I felt among them. I suppose I am one whom they intend to get stationed with them the ensuing year; but these things I leave with the Lord; they are matters I never puzzle my mind about; I leave it to an unerring Providence. I intend to live to God, and aim at improvement, and I believe my way will open before me. It is a matter of consolation, to the reflecting mind, to consider that there is a particular Providence presiding over his creatures, and particularly over his church. I have of late been a little exercised in my mind about my state; but when I consider the nature of the cause in which I am engaged, I feel notwithstanding we have things to contend with contrary to flesh and blood, I feel desirous to die in the cause."

In the same letter he addresses his friends separately, the substance is as follows;—"Dear mother, I feel thankful for the measure of health you and I have enjoyed. I am expecting to see an alteration in your person, if I should be spared so long; your body must decay, and turn mellow for the grave, if I may so express myself. But I hope your soul is ripening for glory. Look up, dear mother, though we are called to separate here, yet we ere long shall come to mount Zion, and join the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven, where we shall part no more."

To his sister and her husband he writes:—"Margaret and Robert, I do not know how to address you. Could I only say a single word that might fasten a nail in a sure place, and prove to your conversion, it would be well, and my end in addressing you would be answered. What then must I say? Shall I refer you to the groans and sighs of the damn'd, and say, 'Unless you repent and be converted, this will be your eternal destiny' Or must I refer you to the glories of heaven, &c. Or must I refer you to that period when a final separation shall take place between the righteous and the wicked? Oh! how awful the idea of being separated for ever! Let these things have their weight upon your minds; think of the Saviour's dying love, and abandon your sins; give your hearts to the Lord, and live for heaven."

At midsummer he removed to Oldham circuit, from which he writes as follows:---

"Oldham, Jan. 5th, 1832.

"*Dear Mother*,—It is with pleasure I take up my pen to write a few lines to you. I received yours dated January 1st, with the important news of so many of our fellow creatures being called off the stage of life, with that awful malady—the cholera. I felt quite anxious about your welfare; particularly about Robert and Margaret; for I believe to any other of you, death would be gain. O that the Lord would shine into their hearts, and give them a knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins. Then, and not till then, are we prepared for death. Oh! tell them from me to lay aside every weight, &c. I feel happy to say I am still pressing forward towards the mark of the prize; but more religion would do me good. I want to enjoy that degree of holiness which will make my peace flow as a river, and my righteousness as the waves of the sea; and to have a close and perpetual communion with the Lord: or, in other words, I want to enjoy a full salvation. There is need for us to bestir ourselves, and to stand in constant readiness for our dissolution. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching." We had one of the most delightful quarter-days I was ever at; peace and harmony prevailed. After which we had a fellowship

meeting; the glory of the Lord descended, and five or six souls were brought into liberty. I had a good time last night in Oldham chapel, from those words, "Cut it down," &c. I believe good was done. Pray for me; and may the God of peace fill your hearts, and keep your souls through Jesus Christ.

Again he writes:—

"Oldham, May 1st, 1832.

"Dear Mother,—I received your letter, which gave me great satisfaction to hear that you were all in a moderate degree of health; that the Lord hath kept you, and evil from your dwellings, while the ravages of disease have been making inroads among so many families. Oh! how thankful ought we to be for the providential mercies of God, while, (as you informed me), many have been taken away by that awful disease, under the most melancholy circumstances, God has not suffered any of you to be seized with it. Dear mother, here is a motive for gratitude to the gracious Disposer of all events. May we not adopt the language of one of old, "What are we, or our father's house, that the Lord is mindful of us? Let us then, in return, surrender our bodies, souls, and all living sacrifices to his glory, which is our reasonable service. I feel happy to say, that my relish for spiritual things is increasing. I feel desirous of being transformed into the image of my divine Master. But oh! I have need to watch and pray, and I have need of an interest in your prayers. Heaven's blessing rest upon you and me."

At midsummer he removed to Manchester circuit, from which he writes:—

"Manchester, July 16th, 1832.

"Dear Mother,—I feel happy to say I am getting on a little in my own soul; but I wish to do better; for I am sensible, in some measure, of the importance of my station as a minister of the gospel, and the responsibility of my conduct, and likewise the necessity of being ready for death. We have here been much alarmed at the progress which the cholera is making among the inhabitants of this neighbourhood. At times my nerves have been a little shaken; but my fears all subside when I consider that all is under the control of him who has declared, he will be as a pavilion about the righteous, in the time of danger. O yes, all things do work together for good to them that love God. I shall rest under the shadow of his wings, and not be afraid. I will put my whole trust in the God of my salvation, I hope you are all pressing forward and seeking a better country. We had a lovefeast on Sunday, the 8th instant, and a most blessed time we had: sinners were crying for mercy on every side, and many professed to get liberty. Give my kind love to all my relations. I often think of you all in my leisure moments, and contemplate the happy days we have spent together as a family: but those seasons are all over, and it does not appear we shall enjoy each other's company much more in this vale of tears; but if we meet in heaven all will be well. I do not know that ever I felt more in writing a letter: perhaps this is the last. If so, I hope we shall all meet around yon dazzling throne. The Lord bless you all. Look to the Lord, and pray for me. Amen."

At midsummer, in 1833, he entered into the marriage state, with one previously prepared by grace, to be an helpmate indeed, at which time he was appointed to Chester circuit, in which God crowned their labours and gave them a blessed increase; and in which circuit he ended his mortal career. From this place he writes:—

"Chester, August 10th, 1833.

"It is with a mixture of feelings I take up my pen to write a few lines unto you. I feel thankful to God for the health I enjoy, and for the manifestation of his love to my soul, and for the comfortable situation in which he has placed me. But, on the other hand, I often feel sorrow when I cast the eye of mind home, and think of the death of dear Dorothy, (his brother's wife), and the present situation of my brother John, (who was then sick, but has since died happy in God, whose memoir is in our magazine.) I am often ready to exclaim, Oh death! thou cruel monster! hast thou deprived us of one whom we loved, and to whom we were united by all the bonds of earthly fraternal affection; and wilt thou give another, and if possible a more cutting

stroke? But my grief is often allayed with the consideration, that the sting of death and of hell are in the Saviour's hands, and he is too wise to err and too good to be unkind; and that all things work together for good to them that love God. I here leave it, trusting that if I see you no more on this side eternity, that we shall meet in yonder better state to join those who are gone before, where the pains of parting will be felt no more for ever. Death, death is gain to the Christian. It is for him to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. But Oh! what is it to the wicked? It is a departing to be with the eternally lost, which is infinitely worse than the greatest evils we can endure in time. The Lord save and prepare us for his coming. Amen."

Again he writes,--I believe, his last letter but one:—

"October 7th, 1834.

"My dear Mother,—Many are the changes of human life, and many are the scenes we mortal beings are called to pass through. At times our state is comparatively a delightful one, and our prospects are auspicious; then we are apt to regale ourselves in the pleasing theme of expectation, of realizing much peace of mind and solid pleasure in days to come; but let us ever remember, that though the gourd may come up, and we may enjoy all possible pleasure beneath its shady bowers, yet God, who holds the reins of government in his hand, and doeth what seemeth good in his sight, may have prepared a worm which may smite it in a night, and speedily our comforts may be withdrawn—may wither and die. Let us therefore sit loose to all earthly things, and pray for that portion of divine grace which will enable us with steadfast minds to persevere in the path of life, and cleave to God with purpose of heart, amidst every scene of life. Great has been the depression of mind I have laboured under of late. I have almost wished I was landed in the regions of bliss, or was at home again, enjoying the sweets of social intercourse with those to whom I am united both by nature and grace. Zion has had to put on her garments of mourning. It has given me many restless nights, and sorrowful days, yet I feel the Lord is on my side, and he often blesses me while preaching. You intimate you should like to see Jane and I in the north, but many things may take place before the dreary winter is past, and the enlivening spring appears,"

On the 31st of October the Lord took to himself his little son, which bereavement was felt both by himself and his affectionate partner; and it pleased the same unerring Providence to suffer him the same day to be attacked with that affliction from which he never fully recovered, which was a bilious and nervous fever. At this time he had a steady reliance on the veracity of God; but had not any thing like an ecstasy of joy. From the first of this affliction, his mind was weightily impressed that it would be unto death, which he frequently made mention of to his partner. But she put it away, and endeavoured to buoy up his mind with the hope of recovery. He continued three weeks confined to his room, after which he had some little prospect of recovery. But, at the instance of a friend, he ventured to resume his labours, and continued one week, when his disorder returned with such violence, that he again took his bed at Wrexham, where he remained till his happy spirit took its flight to heaven and to God. He often in his affliction expressed a particular desire to see his dear mother; but though not permitted, he left this vale of tears fully satisfied with the hope of meeting her in heaven.

About a week before his death, his brother, one of our local preachers, arrived from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who inquired fully into the state of his mind, and says he found him in possession of strong confidence and settled peace, but not ecstatic; his mind frequently hankering after an interview with his mother; but after having learned all particulars concerning her spiritual welfare, he rested satisfied, under the consideration of—

"If no more on earth we meet,
We're sure to meet in heaven."

Tn this frame he continued, with little variation, till Monday morning the 5th of January, when, very early in the morning, he began most earnestly to wrestle with God in mighty prayer, till the power and glory of God descended with such an overwhelming influence as to move all in the house; at which time he spoke unto his partner, saying, "Jane, don't you believe the Lord is here?—This is all I wanted.—This is worth ten thousand worlds!" He then began to repeat those beautiful lines—

"When our race it is run,
And the victory is won,
We to mansions of glory shall fly;
And eternally praise
The blest Ancient of days,
For his love's made us ready to die." &c.

In which ecstatic and triumphant state he continued, witnessing a good confession the whole of the morning. After breakfast he again addressed his wife, alluding to his readiness to depart, saying, "Jane, are you packed up, and ready? Oh! what a blessing to be ready."

The savour of this blessing abode with him. On Tuesday morning he looked more cheerful, like the traveller that has got the city in sight. Surely we may say the path of the just shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

On Tuesday afternoon, about three o'clock, he expressed himself as very drowsy, and desired to he left alone that he might enjoy

"Balmy repose,"

Accordingly his curtains were enclosed, and his friends withdrew and left him alone, excepting his brother.

In a few moments he fell fast asleep; they hoped he was are well; but attentively still waited in the room. He instantaneously changed, attempted to speak, but could not; and in a few moments, without

"A lingering groan,"

He died, his father's God to meet, in the 31st year of his age, leaving an affectionate widow to lament her loss, which I doubt not was his eternal gain.

Remarks.

Dear Readers,- In the character before us we have grace abounding to the chief of sinners, and that in a most remarkable way, which in a clear light amplifies the doctrine of a present salvation, and ought to encourage all who read it to expect a similar blessing.

He went to the means of grace a carnal careless sinner; he was arrested by a secret power that proved to be infinite; his views were changed, his callous heart was first made soft, and then made new; he became an admirer of what he before persecuted; and after this a propagator of what he once sought to destroy.

Sinner, if thou art now in darkness, Jesus Christ, thy Saviour, can now give thee light. If thou art now guilty, he can now pardon,—now impure, now he can cleanse,—therefore now look to him who died for thee and rose again. And that his blessing may attend thy reading, is the prayer of thy soul's well-wisher. Amen. SAMUEL TILLOTSON.

(Approved by the Circuit Committee.)

References

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