

Joseph Hutchings

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.F. Clarkson

JOSEPH HUTCHINGS was born at Poole, Dorsetshire, in the year 1799. His father was the captain of a ship in the merchant service, and Joseph was with his father at sea until he was seventeen years old. Little is known concerning his early days. This, however, is known, which was a cause of joy to him through life, that at the age of fourteen years he was converted to Christ in Newfoundland, through the agency of the Rev. W. Welsh, Wesleyan missionary; and on his return to England he joined the Wesleyan society at Portsmouth.

The time when he first became a local preacher in the Wesleyan connexion is not correctly ascertained, but having settled down at Portsmouth where he held a responsible situation in Her Majesty's armoury, he laboured with acceptability as a local preacher about ten years. Whilst Bros. J. Flesher and W. Harland were missioning Portsmouth in 1835, our departed brother became intimately acquainted with them. This led to his relinquishing his office under Government and entering our ministry.

He was called out by the Hull circuit in 1836, and in conjunction with Bros. Harland and Clemitson was appointed to mission Southampton and the Isle of Wight. He laboured with a good degree of success in the following stations:— Hull, London, Louth, Knowlwood, Lancaster, Hull (second time as town missionary), Tadcaster, Swinefleet, Cwm, Presteign, Leek, Kidderminster, Dudley, Oswestry, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Wrockwardine Wood, and Ramsor. The following figures may give some idea of the success with which he and his colleagues were favoured. During his station in the Isle of Wight there was an increase of 62 members; in Portsmouth mission an increase of 30; Lancaster, an increase of 41; in Hull (home branch), an increase of 193; Knowlwood circuit, increase 30; Presteign, increase 92; Kidderminster, increase 103; Dudley, increase 177; Oswestry, increase 114; Newcastle-under-Lyme, increase 155; and Wrockwardine Wood 50. He was blessed with great success, had numbers converted through his labours, and through his efforts and those of the brethren nearly the whole of his stations prospered much.

As a preacher he was not popular, eloquent, or learned, but he was very laborious. He spoke from the heart to the heart. Plain in manner, pointed in language, sympathetic in appeal, he sought to arouse the sympathies of others, and awaken the consciences of sinners to a sense of their great danger. He strove to be well acquainted with the plan of salvation, and possessed great skill in pointing a seeking soul to the loving Saviour.

Luther said, "When I preach, I sink myself deeply down; I regard neither doctors nor masters, of which there are in the church above forty, but I have an eye to the multitude of young people, children, and servants, of which there are more than two thousand. I preach to them, and direct my discourse to those that have need of it." This seemed constantly the aim of our departed brother, and he had an aptness in arresting the attention of young people, in gaining their affections, and leading their minds out after the most important of all life's concerns —the salvation of the soul. He did not despise learning, but rather would encourage it. Lord Bacon says, "He who seeks knowledge truly does not seek a couch whereon to rest a languid spirit; nor a terrace for a variable mind and wandering feet to walk up and down, with a fair prospect; nor a fort and commanding ground for strife and contention; nor a shop for self interest; but a rich store-house for the glory of the Creator,

and the relief of man." Hence that knowledge which attracted Mr. Hutchings' attention the most was that by which he expected he should be made the most useful. He spent his life in doing good, and in the sacrifices which he made he may certainly be said to have manifested that "charity which seeketh not her own and is not easily provoked."

His aim in the pulpit, and out of it, was to win souls for Christ. He loved the Bible,

"First volume this
For man's perusal;"

and could say with Wesley, "At any price give me the Book of God. I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*" (a man of one book.) Other books he perused, but only for the purpose of illustrating this. This was his constant companion; the book from which he drew all his spiritual delight, and he was generally ready with some portion of God's word, to pour consolation into the hearts of the distressed. He was particularly useful in family visiting. To whatever household he went he kept his one aim in view. His conversation would lead to God, to salvation, to Jesus, and to heaven, and his rule was to seek to impress all with whom he entered into conversation with the idea that he really took a very great interest in "the salvation of their souls." Souls was the burden of his cry, and the glory of God the end of his life and labour. He did not feel happy when visiting to leave any house without prayer.

He has left very few accounts of his labours; he had a very low estimate of himself and of his work, hence, instead of preserving those accounts which he had kept during his ministerial career, for the benefit of others, he destroyed them a short time before his decease.

In his last station his strength began to fail; his extensive travelling and great labours at his time of life caused his health to fail, and he applied for superannuation at the conference of 1865, and retired to Portsmouth, thinking to spend his last days amongst old friends where he first joined a Christian church and laboured as an ambassador for Christ. But he was not so happy as he desired and as he thought he could be elsewhere; so he came to reside in the Dudley station, where he had previously laboured with great acceptability for three years; but the change did not agree with his health as he took up his abode where it was much too cold. He did not preach many times after his removal to this station.

On Sunday the 14th of October, 1866, he was appointed at Old Hill, was expecting to go, and anticipating, as he said, "a glorious day" amongst the many old friends of that place. The morning arrived and the time for starting drew nigh. He had partaken of breakfast and was almost ready to depart, but God had determined otherwise. He became insensible for a time, and had a severe nervous attack.

On Monday following, the Rev. S. Sanders and I visited him and found him prostrate, but sensible and trusting in Christ. It was then quite evident that his work was almost done, and his life well nigh spent. He partially recovered from this attack, but subsequently had another of a similar nature. These impaired his sight and memory, nevertheless he bore them very patiently. His third and final attack was one of apoplexy which took place on the evening of Friday, March 1st, 1867. He was sitting in his arm chair waiting for his son who was expected from Portsmouth about nine o'clock. He complained of being faint and weary; he asked Mrs. H. to get the Bible and read him a favourite psalm, the 91st:—"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the

shadow of the Almighty," &c. When she read the 4th verse, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust," he raised his hands and said, 'That's it! that's it! Blessed Jesus! blessed Jesus!' It was with difficulty that Mrs. H. got him upstairs, and as soon as he lay down his countenance changed, the fit of apoplexy seized him, and though he appeared sensible, what he said could not be understood. The doctor was called in, but he gradually sank, and about ten o'clock his happy spirit took its flight to the heavenly society, leaving the mortal frame behind, which was deposited in the churchyard at Kateshill, on Wednesday the 6th of March. His son came home to see him a few minutes after his departure and saw him, but had to mourn his loss without having had an opportunity of speaking a word to him.

References

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