

AMERICAN MISSION, 1831.

JOURNAL OF W. KNOWLES, 1831.

To the Book Committee,

Dear Brethren,—In compliance with the request of Brother H. Bourne, I have transmitted to you part of my Journal.

This summer we opened a mission of one hundred miles in extent, expecting that Br. Edward Smith would go out to travel.* The appointments were made, and published in the newspapers several weeks before the time, by a magistrate who resided in the State of Indiana, and who, previous to making the appointments, gave us an invitation into that country.

The first appointment was on the 16th of May, at Mount Pleasant, ten miles from Cincinnati. We had a derebourn waggon provided for our conveyance. This is something like our caravans in England. The morning was wet and unfavourable; and our little son was very sick. But we felt it our duty to commence the tedious journey. We left home about eight o'clock in the morning, and arrived at Mount Pleasant about twelve o'clock. My wife stepped from the derebourn, and entered the church which was crowded to excess; and she had the pleasure to address a well behaved and respectable audience.

While delivering the word of eternal life, she felt the power of the God of missions. The dew of heaven descended upon the congregation, and tears gently stole down the cheeks of both young and old. When the service was concluded, we were invited to a number of places, and the people at Mount Pleasant cried out, "When will you come again?" And we think some lasting good was done. To God be all the glory.

We travelled about three miles farther to Burlington, and at five in the evening, drew near to a large meeting house, which was surrounded by horses and carriages; the inside was crowded, and windows surrounded with people, waiting to receive the word of life. I commenced divine worship; and, while going through the exercises, it seemed as though the heavens dropped fatness upon me; and the river of life flowed down amongst the people: some wept, and some shouted for joy. Indeed I felt like being at home. May the Lord grant that the seed may sink into honest hearts; and bring forth much fruit, to the honour and glory of his great name.

When I had concluded the service, I found that the child had been growing worse and worse, till it was with difficulty he breathed; and we found it necessary to administer an emetic, the complaint being of a phthisicky nature. After the operation, we retired to rest, being very much fatigued with riding. The roads are not like the English roads, but are very rough and mountainous. It takes nearly as long to travel twelve miles here, as it does twenty or thirty on some of the roads in England.

But neither me nor my wife got any rest through the night, the child was so very ill; and we thought we should not have been able to proceed on our journey. One thing however gave us satisfaction, the family with whom we stopped, were very kind and affectionate; and yielded us every comfort they possibly could. And through the great blessing of the Lord, the complaint, about six o'clock in the morning, took a turn for the better; and, after the child had taken two hours of sweet sleep, we packed up and proceeded on our journey, having twelve miles to travel by twelve o'clock. Some may think it was mistaken zeal to proceed on our journey. But, observe, if we had missed this day's appointments, we could not possibly have reached any of the other appointments.

We reached Hamilton, which was our next appointment, about twelve o'clock in the day. My wife preached in the court house. There was a large and attentive congregation; amongst whom was a man who, according to his own account, had not heard a sermon for fourteen years. He was a large inn-keeper. **

My wife did not feel her usual freedom in speaking; but the people felt much under the word, and were very solicitous for her, on her return, to preach in the Episcopal Methodist church; which request was complied with.

Hamilton is a large populous town in the State of Ohio; but I am informed, it abounds with infidelity. May God Almighty shake the very foundation of their hearts and principles, for Christ's sake.

We left Hamilton and travelled five miles to the next appointment, at an old gentleman's of the name of Erwe. This man had been a deacon in the Presbyterian church for forty years, and had borne the best of characters; but, alas! in his old age has become a complete drunkard. Reader, let us take care lest we begin in the spirit and end in the flesh.

I spoke at his house to a large congregation; but did not feel my usual liberty, and did not see any thing uncommon amongst the people. May the Lord God have mercy upon the old man and the congregation.

We retired to rest after a little refreshment; and, through the blessing of God, had a good night's rest.

The next morning being the 18th, we set off for our next appointment. On our way we had to cross the seven mile river 3 times; and it was very high in consequence of the great fall of rain which had been in the week. It looked very awful to cross; but with difficulty we crossed without any injury.

When we got near the place, which was by name, Yarkey town, it, I think, surpassed any thing I had ever seen, to view the number of waggons and single horses that stood near the dwelling where the preaching was to be. The people came twelve miles distance, most of them to hear the gospel preached. After resting a little, my wife preached (in a place which had been fitted up for the purpose,) to a large and listening congregation. The word ran like fire among dry stubble. The God of Jacob shook the very foundation of the people's hearts.

When the service was nearly ended, the clouds gathered blackness, as though the awful truths which had been delivered were about to take place. Directly after which, the awful thunders burst like tremendous cannons from the clouds, accompanied by the forked lightnings, with their frightful glare. To add to the awful grandeur of the scene, a dreadful hurricane followed, which seemed to threaten destruction to nature. It carried fences to the space of one hundred yards distance. All this time the congregation were confined to the spot of ground where they had heard the preaching: to reflect on their state and situation before God. I believe that day, and that sermon, will long be remembered. May the fruit remain and be seen in eternity. I would wish to remark, that no damage was done to the people, who came to hear, nor to their horses nor waggons: for which we have reason to praise God.

On our return, we called to dine at the house, and were informed, that there was great good done; and the gentleman of the house, who is very rich, told us if we would come once a month, we should be paid well for our sermons. May the Lord reward him with eternal life.

We went four miles farther, to Newcome, a small village in Ohio. I preached at five o'clock in the Episcopal Methodist meeting house, to a large congregation. They received the word with all readiness, and there was every appearance of great good being done. After I had preached, my wife gave a powerful exhortation. And the language of the people was, "God bless you, come again." A person who kept the hotel in that place, took us home to sleep, and we received tokens of friendship and kindness, for which we desire to be very thankful.

On the 19th we left Newcome for Eaton. This is a large village in the State of Ohio, containing a great number of respectable inhabitants. We arrived there about half-past eleven o'clock, having travelled about twelve miles. At twelve o'clock my wife went to the church, which was opened for divine service. Here such a circumstance took place, as I never heard of before: while she was speaking, the power of God came down in such a manner, that every man, woman, and child, sprang at one moment from their seats. One old gentleman jumped on the form, and commenced

a discourse in the following manner: "God bless you my friends, what she says is true, it comes down from heaven, I felt it fourteen years ago." Some were praising, some were crying aloud; but I cannot describe the scene, but a piece which appeared in the newspaper, and which was handed to us on our return, will more fully describe the feeling of of the meeting: it is as follows:

For the Eaton Register.

Sir,—On the 19th instant, in compliance with a notice published in your paper, a female addressed a large and respectable audience, at the public meeting house, in a manner worthy of the highest commendation. So anxious were the people on the occasion, that a vast crowd assembled, and thronged the long vacated seats, at least half an hour before the arrival of the object of their curiosity, as she well may be termed. During this short interval, an awful silence reigned throughout the vast concourse, which added no little to the grandeur and magnificence of the scene. The idea of a person and a female too, being the means of such public curiosity, reminded me of that venerable personage, who some five or six years ago, at the same place, laboured in the ministry from an application of the text, "I have a message from God unto thee." *** And as the mind naturally contrasts and draws a distinction between two objects of comparison, I was forced to accede the point of superiority, in favour of our sister's ministerial service; and must confess, to do her justice, in the language of Agrippa, She almost persuaded me to be a Christian.

But to proceed. In a short time, the profound silence of the congregation was interrupted by the annunciation, "She's coming:" which was audibly heard, though moving in silence, accompanied by a simultaneous turning of heads and glancing of eyes, to catch the first glimpse of this divine messenger of peace. A woman about thirty years of age, of low stature and dark complexion, presented herself, dressed in a plain yellow garb; her hair parted over her forehead, which to one skilled in phrenology, indicated a mind of no ordinary strength. There was something prepossessing in her appearance; not what the world terms beauty, if by that expression, we mean abound and contracted form, in continual pain from the tight band and narrow stays, but plain, natural, and dignified, accompanied by a fellow labourer in Christ. She walked amid the pressing crowd, and ascended the Sanctuary of holiness, in the presence of near a thousand solicitous spectators, who were anxious to hear what a woman had to say in the church. A profound silence reigned; the young and old were anxious on the occasion; all eyes were fixed on the pulpit; hope and fear triumphed in succession for the stranger, lest female delicacy should prove inadequate to the task of bearing ample testimony of God and his religion. But soon both were dispelled. After a few moments composure, She rose with a gracefulness which Cicero might have envied; and introduced worship by giving out a hymn in a tone of natural and simple eloquence. Never had nature revealed herself in more simple, but yet cogent language, than through the medians of our sister's prayer. She prayed in the language of the Primitive Christians, a which was calculated far better to convince the poor sinner of his lost condition, than those dry and cold intreaties, which we daily hear from the pulpit-priest, couched in obscure language, a mere laboured effort of scholastic jargon. Another hymn was sung, in which the accordance of so many voices awakened a melancholy pleasure in each breast previous to her ministerial service.

She then took a text which may be found recorded in the 15th chapter of St. Luke, 13—19 verses inclusive; from which portion of scripture, she spoke in one continued strain of the most sublime, natural, and argumentative eloquence.

Her discourse from the two characters spoken of in the text, naturally divided itself into two parts, the former to represent the elder brother, and the latter the younger, or prodigal son, who left his father, and journeyed into a distant country, where he spent his substance, and became extremely indigent.

Her use and application of the parable was remarkably simple and elegant. The elder son, spiritually speaking, was a representative of the Jews and others; but under the character of the younger son, she classed all men in an unregenerated state; and to make the figure more complete, she painted in the most lively colours, the similarity between the sinner coming humbly to Christ, and the prodigal son returning to his natural father. The anxiety which a father would naturally manifest for a dear & absent child, and his embraces at their approach, were most beautifully spiritualized, to give a faint idea of the wonderful regard which Christ has for one immortal soul; and his joy was elegantly alluded to by the tender caresses of the natural father.

In this part of her sermon she was peculiarly eloquent; and from what I can learn from the popular voice, and in my own opinion, she surpassed all who have ever preached in our village, from the same text.

Her description of the garment which the natural father put on his son, as illustrative of that glorious and celestial robe prepared by Christ, for beauty of style was unparalleled, wove in the loom of God; a heavenly garment, whose warp is affection, woof charity, fashioned by the hand of God, stitched with mercy, lined with love, and dipped in the blood of the Lamb. And, "bless God," she exclaimed, "my friends, what makes it more valuable, is the materials of which it is composed, and the texture of its nature; it will never grow old, nor threadbare, nor fringed at the hem. And more than all, blessed be his name, it will fit any person."

She was here interrupted by an overflow of the congregation, which broke forth in acclamations of joy and devotion. In a few minutes she closed her interesting discourse; which, I think, I am safe in saying, had a better influence on the audience than any sermon, to my recollection, ever preached in Eaton.

This fact, while it reflects considerable honour upon the strength of female intellect, if we draw a comparison between our sister and the most brilliant of our brethren, it must unquestionably stop the mouths of our superstitious orthodox friends, who have been interested, from pecuniary motives, in construing that portion of scripture to which they always resort, as a prohibition to woman preaching the gospel.

Eaton, May 22, 1831.

(To be continued.)

* E. Smith went out of the Scotter circuit, Lincolnshire. Ed.

** On our return we staid at his house free of expense.

*** Lorenzo Dow

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1832/91