

Rev. George Mercer

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by R Tanfield

GEORGE MERCER was born at Old Malton, Malton Circuit, August 17, 1835. His father died when he was four years old, leaving him and several other children to the care of a widowed mother. Up to the age of twenty-one, George was a stranger to personal piety.

My acquaintance with him began in 1857, while stationed in Malton. Special religious services were being held in the village of Old Malton, resulting in a general revival of the work of God there. We had street-preaching almost nightly for six or eight weeks, making the little village reverberate to our lively songs. Among the hymns most frequently sung, was one to the tune of 'Annie Laurie,' with the refrain—

'O the dying love of Jesus!
Thy blood was shed for me!'

at the close of each verse. That hymn was the first thing that arrested the attention of Brother Mercer. He told me afterwards he was at first very indignant to hear one of his favourite tunes pressed into the service of religion; but as the same hymn and tune continued to be rung in his ears, he was at length melted and subdued by its strains. It was while hearing the writer preach a sermon on 'Buy the truth,' that he was fully aroused from his spiritual slumber to perceive his character and danger as a lost sinner; and at a Sunday morning prayer-meeting, at seven o'clock, March 22, 1857, he ventured to cast his burden on 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' From that eventful day he became a truly happy and devoted child of God.

His natural disposition being of a cheerful, lively character, his religious manifestations partook the same type. Nobody could remain long in quietude or sadness in his presence. He carried with him an atmosphere of hopefulness and hilarity that roused and cheered everybody with whom he associated. He became at once the most active member and the greatest ornament of the society at that place.

It was soon evident from his earnest prayerfulness, strong good sense, and force of character, that he was adapted and designed for usefulness in a public capacity. Six months after his conversion, his name was put on the plan as an exhorter, and before long he was accepted as an accredited local preacher. He had a fine, commanding address, clear and manly utterance, combined with strong emotions and great decision of character, which rendered his labours very acceptable and profitable.

Such was the progress made by our friend, that in 1861 the Malton Circuit deemed him a suitable supply as a hired local preacher, during the temporary affliction of the late Rev. Jeremiah Dodsworth. It was while thus engaged that an event occurred which threw its dark shadow over the rest of his life. After a Sabbath of unusual labour, he retired to bed to obtain the rest he so greatly needed. Early in the morning he awoke, shivering with icy coldness. He sprang from the bed and discovered, to his terror, that he had been put into a damp bed. Up to that date his constitution had been remarkably strong and vigorous, but from that sad event his system received such a shock that one only wonders he survived it at all. His nervous and biliary system was, for a long time, seriously affected by it, and we cannot wonder that in after-years he should have been distinguished by a remarkable sensitiveness, approaching to irritability of temper, as one of the effects of this calamity.

In October, 1861, there being a vacancy in the Ripon Circuit, where I was then stationed, Brother Mercer was, by the authority of that circuit, called out as a travelling preacher. With great fear and trembling, he obeyed the call and entered on the work. Though he had given himself to reading since his conversion, and

had succeeded in gathering a few sermons, yet for want of some direction in his studies, he was at that time—as most young men were then on entering the work—very barely furnished. But he was teachable, truly devout, and had an intense desire to be useful. He gave his whole soul to the work of self-discipline and culture, and in a short time rose above his scholastic disabilities.

As a son with his father, he faithfully bore the yoke while it was our privilege to labour together. As he resided with us part of the time, we had the amplest opportunities of knowing him, and can bear testimony to his fervent piety, uniform industry, and unblemished prudence.

From Ripon he removed, in 1863, to Barnsley, and, in due course, to Burnley, Halifax, Huddersfield, Rosedale, Pickering, and Otley Circuits, and then to Halifax 1st again, where he ended his labours. In the four latter stations he had the duties and cares of the superintendency entrusted to him.

For nearly seventeen years he has laboured with acceptability and tolerable success as a travelling preacher on the above stations, and his fellow-labourers have rejoiced to see how rapidly he has advanced in all that constitutes personal worth and ministerial fitness.

Rev. Thomas Newell says:—‘I have been acquainted with the late Mr. G. Mercer almost from the time he entered our ministry; and, during the last few years, I knew him somewhat intimately. I had a very high regard for him; and, indeed, I may say that in many respects I was proud of him as a Primitive Methodist minister. Like many more of us, he began his public life under serious disadvantages, his educational attainments being somewhat slender; but he worked hard at his task of self-culture, especially in the earlier years of his ministry, when his health was vigorous. He had both a taste and an aptitude for study, so that he took a respectable position among his brethren in mental power, literary ability, and theological acquirements, and I have no doubt that if longer life and health had been granted him, he would have done good work for the church by both tongue and pen, as he had capacity and industry sufficient to enable him to do so. Our church has, in my judgment, sustained a great loss in his removal by death.’

Rev. S.T. Nicholson (New Connexion) says:— ‘I had not many opportunities of hearing him as a preacher, having only heard him preach two or three times. But, from what I heard, I was led to conclude that he was an interesting, forceful, and profitable preacher of the gospel of Christ. He had a strong physical constitution, a good sonorous voice, and when he got warmed up with his subject, and inspired with the love and grace of Christ, his words were most telling.’

Rev. Jonathan Ayrton says:—‘I formed a high opinion of his pulpit abilities. I have reason to believe that he was a close student; and though he had to preach frequently to the same congregation, yet his diligent reading and study enabled him to do so both with vigour and variety.’

It would be easy to add to these valuable testimonies, but a regard for brevity forbids.

His last illness was brief and very distressing. He had been over three months laid aside from work by bronchitis, and had resumed his beloved employment, which he appeared to perform with ease and vigour. For three months that favourable state of things continued, but alas! how erring are our calculations about health and life! On Sunday, November 25, he preached his last sermon in Ebenezer Chapel, Halifax. Next day, after a stroll with his colleague, he complained of feeling ill, and was not able to leave his house that week. Still, nothing serious was apprehended till the following week, when his affliction assumed the form of inflammation of the brain. Everything was done that medical skill and loving hands and hearts could

devise, but all in vain. His work was done; and, after most excruciating sufferings, he fell asleep in Jesus, December 9, 1878.

He leaves behind him a widow and four children to cherish his memory and to feel his loss. May the Friend of the widow and the fatherless be their hope and confidence!

The large number of ministers of various denominations who attended his funeral attested the profound respect in which he was held, and the deep and widespread sorrow which his sudden removal had occasioned. His peculiar affliction rendered it impossible to understand the state of his feelings and thoughts in life's last hours, but we are satisfied that the man who serves and honours the Lord Jesus in health, will be safe in the last conflict. Having honoured the Master by a life testimony, it was not deemed necessary that he should bear any special testimony in his closing hours on earth. May we meet him in the kingdom of heaven! Amen.

References

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