

John Leekley

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Sharpe

JOHN LEEKLEY of New Diggings, La Fayette county, Wisconsin, America. Brother Leekley furnishes the following account of his early life:

"I was born September 4th, 1803, at Middleton, Teesdale, in the north of England. My parents were poor, but industrious; they attended the means of grace among the Wesleyan Methodists, but made no profession of religion; they, however, taught me good morals, and often led me by the hand to the house of God. From the fifth to the tenth year of my age, I felt strong desires to serve God; I often prayed in private, and wished I was a man, that I might serve God and be a Methodist. Had I been at this period taught the plan of salvation, and carefully watched over, I might have escaped a thousand evils into which I afterwards fell.

"The eldest of a large family, I had at an early age to go with my father to work in the lead mines, for the purpose of assisting to maintain the rest. This was the commencement of a new era in my career. I now began to slide gradually into vice, as I saw and heard much wickedness. Of a naturally frolicsome turn of mind, I frequently led the way in mischief and vain amusement. Growing in agility and strength of body, I grew more important in my own estimation. New and varied scenes of vanity and wickedness, suited to my depraved nature, presented themselves, and I launched into them. I became especially attached to shooting and field sports. I delighted to join my companions in poaching, and in its many vices and dangers. Through exposure to the night air when hunting, wading through streams, and travelling amidst frost and snow, I caught a severe cold which led to an inflammation of my lungs, and nearly terminated my earthly existence. In this sickness, I reflected upon my guilt and danger, and earnestly prayed for pardon through Jesus Christ. My prayer was regarded by the God of all grace: he spoke peace to my soul, and removed from me the fear of death.

"In recovering my bodily health, I became remiss in my attention to secret prayer, and soon lost my confidence in God and the peace I had enjoyed in believing. This, in my reflective moments, made me mourn, and I frequently wished I had died when I was happy in the love of God; but these impressions were soon erased from my mind; I associated again with my companions in sin, and became more and more thoughtless and profane. Thus I continued until I was more than twenty years of age."

Here his own account terminates. From other sources we learn that the ministry of the Primitive Methodists was used by the Spirit of God to effect his conversion. Under it he was awakened, enlightened, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, and united with their society in 1824.

When thus graciously changed, his energies, mental and physical, were consecrated to God, and the brethren in church-fellowship with him soon discovered in him germs of future usefulness. The quarterly meeting of the circuit in which he was located, in due time authorised him to give a word of exhortation. After he had laboured some time in the sphere of a local preacher, he was called to devote himself to the work of an itinerant minister. This was probably in the year 1826, and the field of his ministerial toil was Alston, in Cumberland, and its adjacent places. His superintendent was brother John Flesher, who exercised a fatherly care over him, assisted him in his studies, and did what he could to encourage him in the work of the ministry, which he ever gratefully remembered. But he felt misgivings as to his call and qualifications for the work, and he yielded to the solicitations of his relatives, and retired from the itinerancy. This was afterwards felt by him to be a wrong step, and he regretted it through the remainder of his life.

In the year 1842 he emigrated to the United States of America, and settled near Galena, Illinois, where his brother, T.B. Leekley, and other members of the family, were situated. When Providence had thus opened his way into a new country, he felt a determination to propagate the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and to introduce the discipline and usages of the Primitive Methodists. Accordingly, he and others, amounting to the number of nine persons, formed themselves into a Primitive Methodist society.

In February, 1843, this little band held their first quarterly meeting at Granthill, near Galena, engaged an itinerant preacher, and made suitable regulations to carry forward the work of God. This was the origin of Primitive Methodism in the Western States. Brother Leekley saw its commencement, marked its progress, and was spared to witness its prosperous establishment. With exultation he saw its advancement from year to year, and its extension from place to place, till it numbered above 1,000 members.

Satisfied that he was in the way of Providence, he laboured much in preaching, until laid aside from such active labours by protracted sickness, which terminated in death. This was a rheumatic attack, which first seized him in 1848, and which he attributed to a severe cold; it affected his limbs, and rendered him incapable of walking without the aid of crutches; his hands were also deprived, to a great extent, of their usefulness. But though lame, and unable to move in that active sphere to which he had been accustomed, yet he continued, as far as circumstances would allow, to promote the work of God among his fellow-men. He preached occasionally with good effect, though he had to be carried into the pulpit and had to sit while there. From the commencement of the Connexion to the time of his death, he held the office of corresponding secretary, and satisfactorily and efficiently discharged its duties. He was also book steward for the Connexion, and a member of the Connexional committee.

He not only endured much personal affliction, but also suffered much from domestic affliction and bereavement. In 1844 his second wife died; in 1848 his only daughter, and in 1850 his eldest son. These were to him distressing bereavements, but he found a solace in believing that he was in the hand of a good and merciful Father, who does all things well.

Towards the close of 1853 he was taken seriously ill, and it was thought by himself and his friends that this sickness was unto death. He did, however, revive a little, and being recommended to try the cold-water treatment, he was taken by his brother, T.B. Leekley, and brother James Alderson, to Cleveland and Painsville, Ohio; but meeting with no encouragement from the conductors of these cold-water institutions, he returned home, and on the same afternoon that he reached New Diggings he was seized with an apoplectic fit, and died the same evening, February 27, 1854, in the fifty-first year of his age, and in the thirty-first of his Christian life and religious experience.

Brother Leekley was a man of sound judgment, deep piety, and great usefulness. His death is keenly felt in this country; but our loss is his gain.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1854/714