

**MEMOIR OF THOMAS PROCTOR,
(TRAVELLING PREACHER.)**

VERY DEAR BROTHER,

According to the request of many of your pious readers, I have drawn up a short memoir of my invaluable friend, Thomas Proctor, now where "The wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

Probably it may have been a cause of dissatisfaction to some, that they have not seen it sooner, and I have been equally earnest to gratify them. My chief impediment was the want of documents respecting the commencement and conclusion of his christian course. I applied to his friends in Yorkshire, but hitherto without success; therefore, I determined to begin with such materials as I had.

— — — — — "It seemed profane
To quench a glory lighted at the skies,
And cast in Shadows his illustrious race."

But in consequence of my want of proper documents, the narrative could not be perfectly kept up, and will be found very concise. Also, those amongst whom he laboured, will undoubtedly observe, that there are several notable circumstances left out, which indeed would have been illustrative of his character; but having nothing to depend on but my own memory, I omitted them, rather than run the risk of stating them incorrectly. Therefore, the reader is not to expect here a finished picture, but only a few imperfect outlines. Yet even these may not be entirely useless, if they stir up the minds of those who knew him, (by way of remembrance,) and by introducing him to those who knew him not, serve to inspire them with an ardent desire to follow him as far as he followed Christ. Your's, &c.

Bath, April 2, 1829.

W. TOWLER.

Thomas Proctor was born at Skipton, in Yorkshire, February 28, 1802. Of his parentage and youth I have no particular account, only have heard him say that his father and mother died when he was very young, and that he was brought up among his friends or relations, who were farmers, near Otley, in Yorkshire. Being bereaved of his parents, and brought up among irreligious people, he followed their example, and as he arrived at manhood, grew headstrong and profanely wicked; was dreadfully passionate, and a most horrid swearer and blasphemer; in short, it may be justly said, that he neither feared God nor regarded man.

About the month of July, 1823, through the instrumentality of the Primitive Methodists, he was convinced of sin, and brought to a knowledge of the truth. His convictions were very severe, and his deliverance or conversion was clear and evangelical. And having been a noted character for wickedness, his wonderful change, and extraordinary zeal for pure religion, astonished all who knew him. Having much forgiven, he loved much, and thus having obtained peace with God, and witnessed its happy effects, he soon became actuated by a love to his perishing fellow creatures; and on the last day in the same year (1823,) he publicly stood up and exhorted them to flee from the wrath to come, and take refuge in Christ the rock of ages. From that time he continued occasionally to exhort or preach, and in general was well received, till he began to reason about, and dispute his call to the work. He saw its vast importance, and looked at his own insufficiencies, until he began to despair, and then gave up his heavenly calling. He did not, however, halt long, for God gave him no rest, by night nor day, till he began again; and he humbly acknowledged his error before the congregation. I remember being at the same place shortly after, and they informed me that he wept most of the time while preaching, and they were glad that he had begun again, for they were much attached to him.

From that time he made rapid progress in the work of the ministry, and began to show himself "A workman that needed not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of life."

Soon after the district meeting in 1825, he was requested to go as a travelling or itinerant preacher into the Blaenavon Circuit. At this he seemed to tremble, he saw himself inadequate for

so great an undertaking. But after laying the case before the Lord in prayer, and consulting some of his friends, he saw that his sufficiency was of God, and went. At his departure he called at my father's house, and requested them to tell me that notwithstanding the great trial of leaving his friends, he felt very happy, and could cheerfully forsake all to follow Christ.

From the commencement of his itinerant labours, to his final departure, into Yorkshire, most of his labours were confined to the Cwm Mission, now Cwm Circuit. The unenlightened state in which he found most parts of that country, rendered his commencement difficult indeed, and the trials he endured are not perfectly known to any but God and himself. But the success with which the Lord blessed him, is his never-fading memoir, and the crown of his rejoicings.

I regret that I find no journal for the first ten or twelve months of his mission; it was altogether worthy of notice. He once informed me that some days his chief food was only what he could gather off the hedges, and the shade of some bush or tree his study and place of prayer, till the evening arrived, then he would go forth into the villages and preach, where he had to endure the insults and to combat with the blindness and prejudices of a superstitious people, whose outrageous persecutions at times were carried to a great length. On one of these occasions he was preaching at a village called Michael Church, he took his stand on an elevated piece of ground near the said church; but no sooner had the service commenced, than they begun to ring the bells in order to interrupt him. When they could not prevail in this way, they kindled, fire, designing the smoke to disperse the congregation, at the same time throwing rotten eggs, &c. But that God who, "Condescends to men of low estate," and who once in behalf of a few despised fishermen, spoke to the roaring sea, and said, "Be still," interfeared in the cause of this his servant; i.e. The wind changed, which took both the sound of the bells, and the smoke away!

It was not uncommon with him and his colleagues to be pelted with rotten eggs, foul mire, stones, &c. I myself have seen the stones strike his naked head even while at prayer. All this he bore with the fortitude of mind, and serenity of soul, which ought always to characterize a minister of the gospel. And he looked upon the fruit with which it pleased the Almighty to crown his labours, as more than a recompence for all his toil. Yes, I have heard scores testify of the deplorable situation of themselves and their country, previous to his coming; and with tears of gratitude in their eyes, praise God for sending among them such a "Burning and shining light," as Thomas Proctor.

It was about the begining of the year 1826, when I was called out of Yorkshire, and appointed to labour with him in the mission. I found him engaged in the work with all his soul and strength, and I never witnessed such a hungering and thirsting after righteousness in any one, either before or since, as in him at that time. I had not been long with him before he began to enquire if I could give him any information on the great work of sanctification, which his soul was panting to find. But, alas! at that time, I knew but very little about it; only I believed it attainable, and with him was earnestly desiring to possess it. However, in freely relating our sentiments and experience on the subject, we both found encouragement, and agreed to give ourselves wholly unto prayer and the work of the ministry. From that time we used to see each other every week, if practicable, and spend as much of the day as we could spare in edifying each other, and in private prayer. Those were blessed seasons; every week was distinguished by an evident advancement in divine life. He always seemed forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward unto those things which are before; pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, No one could be more diligent in seeking, although he was a long time before he could realize the full witness of entire sanctification; he sought it in public and in private, by night and by day. Sometimes he would fast two or three days in a week, and spend whole nights in prayer without laying down to rest.

On one of those occasions [witnessed his tears, his groans, and his agonizing, and endeavoured to strengthen his hands, for like Jacob, he wrestled with God. About one or two o'clock in the morning he persuaded me to lie down, and take a little rest, lest I should not be able to do my work on the ensuing day. I did so, and about the break of day I awoke, and instantly arose, eager to know of his success; but, alas! I found him as I left him. He wept bitterly, yet he did not despair,

"But still he prayed, adher'd, petitioned, cried;
And on the very hand that thrust him back, relied."

Still the very language of his soul was,

“Wrestling I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name thy nature know.”

Thus he continued to seek with unwearied diligence till the 13th of January, 1827, a day which I shall ever remember. It was Saturday—we intended to meet each other as usual; but before I arrived at the place appointed he came to meet me, and after relating his experience for that week, he said, that he believed God was about to do a great work for him, but he did not know what step to take next; therefore he could not rest till he saw me. My soul rejoiced to hear this, I had long travelled in birth with him, and I saw that as it were he was on the brink of that precious river, and had nothing to do but step in; his hand seemed to encompass the blessing, and he had nothing to do but grasp it. Nay, he seemed to possess it, and had nothing to do but believe it, and rejoice.

I gave him such instructions as I humbly conceived were suitable to his situation, and said that I firmly believed God would sanctify him wholly, that very day, and encouraged him to expect it every moment, He did so; and at times was so overpowered with the presence of God, that we were obliged to stop on the way. When we arrived at Mr. Llanwarne's, (a house well known to the Primitive Methodists in that circuit, and where my deceased friend and I have received many a blessing,) we retired into private, and found that faith was “The evidence of things not seen.” But it was powerfully impressed on my mind that it would be more to the glory of God, if we were to call the house together, and especially so, as that man of God, Mr. W. Gilbert, was then present, and several of that pious family seeking the same blessing. Accordingly we did so, and all kneeled down, and after a long and hard struggle, perfect love cast out all fear; he realized the full witness, confessed it, and rejoiced in it. It is evident, according to his own confession, that he might have rejoiced in the blessing long before he did, had he only simply believed what God had promised, as well as done what God had commanded. But like many more sincere souls, he reasoned too much about what they call “Fitness,” and in effect wanted to be sanctified as a preparative to sanctification, instead of at once, just as he was, casting himself by faith on the merits of the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin, believing for victory over sin, Rom. vi. 14, over the world, 1 John v. 4, 5, a purification from sin, Acts xv. 9; the whole image of God, Eph. iv. 22, 23, 24; and hence have a fitness for heaven. But perhaps an extract from his own journal may best satisfy the reader on this head, as well as give a just representation of his life from that time forward, which is as follows:

“January 18, 1827. This day, at times, I laboured under great depression of spirits, but felt the clear witness of the pardoning love of God, and a greater need of being cleansed from all sin than ever. I have been earnestly seeking this great blessing about a year and a half; but, alas more by works than by faith. But the Lord in mercy to my soul, convinced me of this, and I sought it through faith in the precious blood of Christ. And this night the Lord has enabled me to confess what he has wrought within me. I might have rejoiced in the blessing much sooner, but was afraid to confess it. “Oh! how I am now ashamed of unbelief. When I retired to rest, satan suggested that I should lose the evidence before morning; but however my soul was so engaged with God, that I slept very little; and on the

“14th I awoke with the powerful presence of the Lord. Attended a prayer meeting, and the Lord again baptized me with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Preached at Dorston.* In the afternoon held a lovefeast at Turnaston. Several were overwhelmed with the love of God, and fell to the floor, and my very soul seemed to burn within me.

“15th, This morning the enemy thrust sore at me, and tempted me to think that I had deceived myself, and to give up the evidence of my sanctification, and pray for a greater change. But in the midst of all this, God bore testimony to his own work, by again filling my soul with humble love.

“16th. This day my soul has been preserved in perfect peace and calmness.

“17th. I am exceedingly happy. I now can cast my all at the feet of my great Redeemer.

“21st. This has been a sabbath indeed to my soul. I can humbly declare that I felt all meekness and all love. Glory be to the ever blessed God for what he hath done, and still is doing for me.

"25th. I have found much comfort in reading in, and meditating on the word of God. My soul truly longs for a deeper baptism in the fountain of holy love. O, my Father, stand by thy unprofitable servant for ever.

"26th. I have found it profitable in fasting and prayer.

"27th, This has been a day of hurry and much business, but, oh! what a peace have I felt within; and at night I retired with the following words powerfully applied to my mind: 'If any man love me, my Father will love him, and manifest himself unto him.'

"30th. I was employed in seeking assistance to build a chapel. God was with me, the hearts of the people were open, and I was extremely happy.

"31st, 'Jesus is my all in all,
And ail my heart is love.'

"February 5th, Visited several families; God answered every prayer as by fire. Preached at Meascoed, the Lord again baptized us with the Holy Ghost. I could hardly hold myself up, the Lord so copiously poured his spirit into my soul. My heart seemed as if it would have burst.

"11th. Preached at Snodbill, and met the class; the Lord opened the windows of heaven, and rained righteousness upon us. O how those dear people cried out for clean hearts. May God deliver them.

"13th. Preached at Walterston. Here the rebels had threatened to burn the house down if I preached there. But notwithstanding this, we had a large congregation, all in peace, and a glorious time. Glory be to thy name, O Lord. - What is it that thou canst not do? Thou hast made our very enemies to be at peace with us.

"15th. I have read Mr. Wesley's sermon on 'Redeeming the Time.' O Lord, in this thou knowest I am deficient. But through thy strength I am now determined to awake, to arise, and shine, for my light is come.

"18th. I arose about four o'clock. Read and prayed till seven, then attended a prayer meeting. Afterwards preached three times, and led a lovefeast. This has been a precious day.

"23rd. I have been blessed in fasting, reading, and prayer. Those are precious times. 'The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life, because of righteousness.'

"24th, I feel ready for life or death; but it is 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' I feel myself 'Less than the least of all saints.'"

(To be continued.)

* I heard him preach at Dorston, it was a powerful time, and he told me he found preaching much easier than before.

References

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