

Rev. Matthew Shorrock

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Wm. Goodman

The Rev. M. Shorrock was born at Catforth, a small village near Preston, in Lancashire, on March 16, 1839. When four years of age he was removed to Preston, and at once began to attend our Saul Street Sunday School in that town. His first teacher, a Mr. Verity, was pious, attentive and devoted, and as a result of his diligent efforts to bless his scholars it was found that a portion of the seed sown by him had fallen into the heart of young Matthew, which should afterwards spring into life and fruitfulness. Contemporary with this was another element that largely contributed to lead him to fully surrender himself to the service of Christ,—he had a pious mother. Her piety, prayers, and counsel operating upon his mind from an early period, at length became effectual in leading her son to a firm decision in relation to the Christian life.

Matthew was of a buoyant, cheerful, and sociable disposition, which developed in an extreme fondness for amusements, and as a youth he indulged extensively in those entertainments of the world which are only too common in all our large manufacturing towns. His mother earnestly prayed for his salvation, but as he still persisted in his attendance upon worldly amusements, she told him that the time he spent in such places she would spend on her knees in prayer for him. And sometimes on his return home he would hear her voice pleading earnestly in prayer for her. This interfered very seriously with his enjoyment, but still he followed the bent of his mind in this respect. One night, about Christmas of 1854, when he came home his mother said, 'Now, Matthew, we'll have a reckoning between me, and thee, and the Lord. If thou continues to go to these places of amusement, I shall pray for the Lord to afflict thee.' He continued to go, and his mother commenced to pray. Matthew was shortly afterwards taken ill with inflammation of the lungs, and so severe was the attack that the medical adviser, on the third day of his illness, said he saw but little hope of his recovery.

The Rev. W. Rowe (1) was at this time stationed in Preston. He was sent for, and along with Matthew's mother offered earnest prayer on his behalf; the burden of the mother's prayer being that the Lord would either take her son to heaven or convert him and keep him in the Christian faith. She pleaded hard and long for his conversion, with a holy determination not to give up the conflict until she had realised the conquest. Nor did she plead in vain. The youthful heart of our brother that night opened to receive its Lord and Master. And from that night's experience his religious life began, never to be terminated, but to find its consummation as it has now done in the region that lies beyond our mortal ken. From that night also he began to mend, and was soon restored to his usual health. He did not, with returning health, forget the vows made in the hour of sickness, as, alas! so many do, but joined himself to the church and began to make himself useful in church work.

He had had a very fair education, and soon began to give evidence of ability for public speaking. After a band-meeting at Saul Street schoolroom one night, the Rev. John Oscroft, then travelling in Preston, went with him home, and while they were together said to him in his own plain and quaint manner, 'I say, lad, hast thou ever thought anything about preaching?' 'No,' was the reply, 'I have never thought about it.' 'Well, thou hast abilities for it,' said his venerable friend, 'and thou must prepare to do it.' Shortly afterwards he received a note from the Quarterly Meeting to accompany Brother W. Cook, a local preacher, to his preaching appointments. In the first quarter of the year 1858 his name was placed upon the plan as an exhorter. He passed through the usual stages of trial, and at length took his position as an accredited local preacher of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. In this capacity he became very acceptable. He loved his work, and was. useful therein, many souls through his agency having been led to decision for Christ.

In October, 1859, he received a call to enter the regular ministry. The Rev. W. Rowe, who had been present at his conversion, and who had observed his youthful piety, recommended him to the Manchester First Station, where he himself was then travelling, and Brother Shorrocks joined Brother Rowe in ministerial labour in that important station. In entering upon the work of the ministry in the present day young men are pelted with questions relative to their educational and other attainments that had no existence a quarter of a century ago; not that all our fathers were indifferent to education, but those were not the days of school boards, and even moderately educated youths were not numerous amongst us as a body. The harvest was great, the work urgent, and the labourers were few. But moral and spiritual attainments were strongly insisted upon as they are at this day.

Among the questions that then, as well as now, met the candidate for our ministry are the following:—‘How long has he been a member of our society?’ ‘What are the Station’s views of his piety and talents?’ ‘What are the names of the persons known to have been converted through his agency?’ And the rule then and now distinctly declares that ‘no person shall be employed as a travelling preacher unless his piety be unquestionable, nor unless he uses prudent and laborious efforts to save souls, and has a considerable share of success in this work.’ Now, although our young friend had been successful as a local preacher in the work of soul-saving, he had made no record of the persons brought to God by his agency. And when in March of 1860 he had to prepare his document for presentation to the District Meeting and Conference, he was unable to furnish names as required. This preyed heavily upon his mind. The following Sunday evening two souls were saved, but this number in the judgment of his circuit officials not being sufficient, he said to his superintendent, Mr. Rowe, in his youthful ardour, that he would make the Lord convert enough the next Sunday. Mr. Rowe kindly pointed out the impropriety of speaking in that manner on such a subject. But he insisted that that was what he meant, and he was determined it should be done. He prayed all the week that if the Lord had really called him into the ministry He would give him at least a dozen souls on the following Sunday night. The Sunday night came. He preached very earnestly and with a direct aim, and ere the service was brought to a close fourteen souls had sought and found the Saviour. Very early the next morning he was at the house of his superintendent joyfully exclaiming,—‘I have brought you good news,’ and then described the scene that had taken place the previous evening. Both wept together in their mutual joy.

The following District Meeting removed our brother to Knowlwood, where he spent the first complete year of his probation. The two following years he was stationed at Preston Brook, the following Conference removing him to Rochdale. He subsequently laboured at Haslingden, Lymm, Chester, Stockport, Walkden, Fleetwood, Preston First, and Darwen. He prosecuted the duties of a minister with great diligence and fidelity. He was ever acceptable and useful in his pulpit ministrations. His genial nature and sincere piety made him a welcome guest in the family. By the bedside of the sick he was always at home, and his sympathetic heart made him a valued friend to those in sorrow. He cannot be spoken of as a ‘Connexional man.’ The executive work of the church afforded him no pleasure. But he was a circuit man. He loved the pulpit, and aimed to be useful in the homes of the people. He also performed quite his share of work in chapel building, and in efforts to reduce chapel and school debts. He was also an earnest friend of the temperance cause.

The Rev. John Sadler writes:—‘ Mr. Shorrocks travelled in my native circuit—Chester—where he was very highly respected and loved. His presence and words were ever a great comfort to the sick and suffering. As a man, a friend, and a minister he was never less than he pretended to be.’

His last colleague, the Rev. D. Clayton, says, 'I always found him to be kind, considerate, and full of sympathy. He took a great interest in my studies, and materially assisted me by his judicious advice and friendly counsel. His views of the Christian ministry were exalting and inspiring to me, and from his varied experience I learned many valuable and important things. I found him to be an invaluable friend.'

Brother Shorrock was never robust, but when he entered our ministry, and for several years afterwards, his health was such that he was enabled to efficiently perform his ministerial duties. In 1867 he suffered from diphtheria, and although he recovered from the acute form of the disease, an affection of the throat supervened, which threatened to permanently unfit him for ministerial work. For several months he sought the best medical help that could be obtained, but at the time of the ensuing Conference, in 1868, he was still unable to preach. A statement of his case was presented to the Conference accompanied by his request for temporary superannuation. The Conference decided to give him a year's rest by appointing him to a station where he would receive his salary in the ordinary way, and to supply the station with a young man to take his work. He was also allowed to choose the station where he would like to locate for the year. He decided to settle in Chester, but by complete rest and skilful medical treatment, before half the year had passed he had fully recovered and was at his work again, and for eighteen months afterwards he successfully worked the Chester circuit. He continued his labours for ten years subsequently to this time.

In 1880 his health, which for some time had been in a precarious condition, now broke down, and under medical advice he undertook a journey to Australia. He returned in about twelve months greatly improved, but after another year of labour in the Darwen Station his health again gave way, and at the Conference of 1882 he was compelled to apply for superannuation. He then settled in Stockport, but gradually became weaker, until at length, on the morning of Sunday, July 15, 1883, he changed mortality for life.

His end was one of great triumph. To the writer he said, 'I was never so happy in all my life,' and with deep emotion he faltered, 'The Lord is taking me to heaven in a chariot of roses.' A few hours before he died he said to his wife, 'My dear, Christ is so precious, and heaven is so near.' 'I am now safe.' 'The Rock of Ages rises high on both sides, and the prospect in the valley is grand.' He lay quiet for ten minutes or so, then lifted up his feeble hands and said, 'Bright angels are from glory come! Hallelujah! I am going home! I am conqueror through His blood!' He then gave his last charge to his wife and children, and though for over a fortnight he had not been able to speak above a whisper, his voice was now clear and loud, and without the least effort he talked for more than an hour. He closed by shouting, 'Victory! Victory!! Victory!!! through the blood of the Lamb! I have REDEMPTION through His blood.' This he repeated with uplifted arms three times, and quietly settling down in bed he said, 'Now I have done, I am going home.' And then peacefully and sweetly, on that holy Sabbath morn, just as the first rays of light gave assurance of the coming day in which the servants of God still in the field would go forth to their toil, this honoured servant of the Master passed home to the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

References

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