

Rev. Charles Simpson

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Colin C McKecknie

Mr. CHARLES SIMPSON, Travelling Preacher.—That the death of a promising young minister should be the occasion of unusual sorrow to his personal friends, and to the people for whose spiritual benefit he employed his talents, is not in any way surprising. But, in addition to the shock sustained by the affections, there frequently supervenes a disposition to question the wisdom and goodness of the afflictive dispensation. Why, it is asked, should the young minister be cut down in the spring time of his usefulness, with the blossoms of promise thick upon him? Why should a life fraught with richest blessing to the world be for ever eclipsed ere it has exhausted its morning beams? Why this great affliction and disappointment, when it would have been easy for the Almighty to have ordered it otherwise? A little reflection, however, suffices to show that we are in no way competent to judge the case. In most instances we are totally ignorant of what is necessary to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes; and the little knowledge we possess shows that present reverses may be pregnant with the seeds of future triumph—that permanent good may be educed from temporary evil; that although the wave breaks and recoils, the tide steadily advances. Let us be humble and wait. What we know not now we shall know hereafter.

These reflections naturally introduce the following biographical sketch of Mr. Charles Simpson, one of our young ministers, lately deceased:

He was born in the city of Durham, in 1823. Although favoured with a tolerably good secular education, his religious interests were neglected, and his youthful years he wasted in folly. When he had nearly reached man's estate, he was arrested in his course of sin, and brought to repentance by means of a powerful sermon preached by the late Mr. James Watson. Immediately afterwards he united himself to our Society, and was employed ere long as a Sabbath-school teacher, local preacher, and class-leader. On the occasion of giving up his worldly calling to engage in the regular ministry, he received honourable testimonials of character from his employers: and his fellow-workmen presented to him a handsome writing-desk as a memorial of esteem. He travelled successively in the Barnard-Castle, Whitehaven, and Wolsingham circuits: in the first, nearly two years; in the second, two years fully; and in the last he had just commenced his third year, when all his labours on earth were brought to a premature termination.

No one could form even a superficial acquaintance with our deceased brother, without being impressed with the amiableness of his disposition. It beamed in his countenance, it mellowed his voice, it softened his manners, and exerted a benign influence over the whole of his social conduct. To oblige, to perform acts of kindness, to promote in one way or other the happiness of all with whom he had to do, seemed to be his constant study. He was always on the look out for opportunities to do good. It was by no means necessary to be on terms of friendship with him to experience his kind attention. I have known him, in repeated instances, put himself to great inconvenience,—walking several miles, for instance, in unfavourable weather, when in a very poor state of health—just to perform some small act of kindness to persons who were entire strangers, and from whom he could expect no recompense, But he had his recompense, nevertheless. He realised in full measure the Divine luxury of a benevolent heart: and, though he sought not human applause, golden opinions were formed. of him, and genial friendships flowed upon him,

A more intimate acquaintanceship made it appear, that though his good nature was partly constitutional, it was sustained and perfected by a spirit of genuine piety, I have known but few young men whose piety was more thorough and unquestionable. It seemed to be interwoven with, and to give its complexion to, the whole texture of his being. An honest, hearty confidence in the substance of revealed truth; and a deep, I

might say, a yearning love to the Redeemer, constituted the essence of his religious life. He was not much troubled with doubts respecting the security of his spiritual foundation. He knew little or nothing, by experience, of those terrible struggles with the grisly powers of scepticism through which many good men have to fight their way. Though not by any means unacquainted with seasons of spiritual despondency, the course of his experience was on the whole peaceful and equable. His piety was eminently productive, yielding in no scanty measure the fruits of righteousness; it was free from ostentation, not proclaiming itself like the vociferous mountain torrent, but resembling rather the quiet, gentle stream, gliding softly in a retired channel, revealing its course by a large margin of green verdure. To the eye of his fellows, the character of our deceased brother was spotless. I know not, that during the whole of his Christian career the correctness of his deportment was ever once called in question. That he had faults may be presumed, for he was man; but the power of religion won beautifully exemplified in enabling him to maintain a consistency of conduct which won the respect and admiration of all to whom he was known. In the several circuits where he exercised his ministry the rectitude of his character is cherished in grateful remembrance, and his name is "like ointment poured forth."

Intellectually he was remarkable for sound sense, rather than subtle or comprehensive thought. He was not gifted to any high degree with the analytical or reflective faculty: it was beyond his province to deal intimately with the essence of things, to trace the mystic links of causation, or to distribute the elements of knowledge according to general laws. His mind was fitted to treat with the concrete forms of truth,—with truth in its actual combinations and palpable developments, rather than in its metaphysical abstractions. By reading and observation he amassed a considerable amount of information on various subjects. He possessed clear, consistent, well-ordered views of Christian doctrine drawn from an earnest study of the Scriptures, in connection with some leading theological works. He could not be said to be an extensive reader; but within the two last years of his life he extended his acquaintance with the world of books, made some important additions to his library, and formed plans for giving himself a more thorough intellectual discipline.

As a preacher, he was thought by many to be wanting in constitutional energy; but this was compensated in great measure by a constant flow of emotion. When excited by his theme, he did not yield to an excess of shouting or gesticulation—that was not the natural outlet of his emotion; but his large dark eye would melt in liquid tenderness, his usually pallid face, would become flushed, and his somewhat monotonous voice thrill with tremulous intonations. He could not cleave the heart with the linked thunderbolt; he could not overpower his hearers by electrical outbursts of eloquence; but he melted and won them by the sunshine of sympathy, the gentler electricity of the heart. His sermons were not remarkable for originality or brilliance; but they were sober, solid compositions, well calculated to inform the judgment and amend the heart.

He was attentive, almost beyond comparison, to circuit duties; not contenting himself with a bare fulfilment of his own appointed work, but ready at all times to co-operate with his superintendent and lay-brethren in devising and carrying out plans of general usefulness. During the last year but one of his life, the management of Wolsingham circuit devolved principally upon himself, owing to the protracted illness of his superintendent; and the tact, diligence, and wisdom with which he conducted affairs, gave unmingled satisfaction to the brethren among whom he laboured, and pointed him out as one to whom the responsibility of a circuit might be safely committed.

Although his ministry was not crowned with extraordinary success, it was honoured with frequent tokens of Divine approval. Ever and anon, he had the pleasure of recording in his journal the conversion of sinners to God. But he was far from being satisfied with the amount of good which visibly followed his labours. He

thirsted to see more signal demonstrations of the saving power of the Gospel attending his ministry; and his private memoranda witness to the fervency of his intercessions for more enlarged effusions of the Divine spirit upon the word he preached.

The physical constitution of our deceased brother was exceedingly fragile, morbidly susceptible of damage from exposure to inclement weather, or from excessive exertion; and his friends had little hope that he could, for any great length of time, endure the constant wear and tear of a travelling preacher's life. During his brief public career he was frequently prostrated by affliction, but succeeded in rallying again. At length the mortal stroke fell upon his weak frame, and hurried him to an early grave.

The following account of his last illness and death is from the pen of his superintendent, Mr. S.G. Butterwick, whose considerate and kindly attention to him during his affliction is deserving of honourable mention:

"Our departed brother, Mr. Simpson, was laid aside from labour on December the 9th. The last time he preached was on the previous evening, at Witton-le-Wear, when he took for his text, 1 Peter i. 24, 25. 'All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass, &c. And concluded the service with the 48th Hymn, Large Book; 'The morning flowers display their sweets, &c.; as if he had a presentiment of his own doom. Early in the morning he had a severe attack of spasms, and was obliged to arouse the family with which he was staying, to obtain relief. He was never again permitted to make an attempt at preaching. After his return from Sunderland, where you saw him,* he was so enfeebled as to be incapable of free conversation. At that time his spiritual enjoyments were only low, but he had a settled confidence in Christ, as his all-sufficient Saviour. The language of the Apostle is, I believe, not too strong to employ as expressive of his confidence, 'I know whom I have believed, &c. He made the following reply to a question asked relative to this subject: 'Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, *and He is mine:*

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee ;"

Adding, 'I need not repeat the other lines, for He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." ' His confidence, I believe, was never shaken. I had the mournful satisfaction of being with him when he died. I spent some time with him on each of the three preceding days: and when I had last left him, from his extreme weakness, I did not expect to find him again alive. In this, however, I was agreeably disappointed; and I found him in a very composed state. I had not been long in the room before the death struggle commenced; and it seemed severe. But the countenance of our brother gave no indication of fear or disquietude: he appeared perfectly tranquil. When the violence of the attack abated a little, he desired me to pray for him; which I did. Then, with great emphasis, he exclaimed, 'Praise God!' For awhile he appeared a little easier, as if hardly conscious; but this 'lull' was not of long continuance: the death battle was soon renewed with as much violence as at the beginning. Still his spirit quailed not: the smile of peace and joy played on his countenance; and while death's loud rattle proclaimed the contest all but over, he said as distinctly as possible, 'Praise God!' and then, 'If this be death _____.' This was his last attempt to speak. For a few minutes he continued to breathe; and then quietly passed away to the spirit land, on the 8th of July, 1853, in the thirty-first year of his age."

*He went to Sunderland for medical advice. Happening to be there at that period, preaching some special sermons, I called upon him several times. He felt that the hand of death was upon him, but was calm and even joyous in prospect of the great event.—C. C, M'K.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1854/129