

MEMOIR OF ELIZABETH RUSSELL,

Primitive Methodist Itinerant Preacher and Missionary, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Smith.

She says:

I was born in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire, January 10, 1805. In my infancy I witnessed such scenes as daily take place in families who regard not the Lord nor the operation of his hands.

My father was a wholesale glover, but from a want of prudent care his affairs became embarrassed, and the prospect of poverty with continual discontent in his family drove him from home, and he enlisted on board a ship as a marine; and we soon after heard that he was dead.

My mother was left with six children, of whom I was the youngest. Had she known HIM who has promised to help the widow and the fatherless, she would have found comfort in her distress. But she was a stranger to God, and her trouble only increased the natural violence of her temper, which rendered her situation difficult.

I was taken by my grandmother; and she being industrious and moral I was early in life inured to work and to frugality. In addition to this I had the advantage of being sent to the national school on week days.

When I was about seven or eight years old, the Lord influenced a Miss Brown to talk to me about eternal things, and not in vain:—I was soon made sensible of telling lies, and of other sins, and my convictions were at times so heavy that I retired in secret, and prayed in an agony that God would forgive my sins. My impressions were attended with dreams; in one of which I thought I saw the sky pass away with fearful blackness; and the Lord coming seated on his judgment seat. I thought the dead were bursting from their graves. And I beheld the Judge open a book, in which (it was told me) the names of all that were saved, were written. I thought I stood guilty before the Judge, and all my idle words and thoughts came before me, and filled me with terror.

After this dream, that scripture followed me for some time, “Stand in awe, and sin not. Commune with thy own heart on thy bed, and be still.”

I am convinced these fears did not arise from natural timidity, nor from human influence, but from the Spirit of God. And I never remember revealing them to any one till many years after.

Not long after this I was apprenticed to the dress-making business, And in this new circle I met with an actress, who took me to dress her for the stage. The first play I saw acted was the Moor of Venice. The scenes I witnessed, with the company to which I was admitted, were so fascinating to me, that I soon became ashamed of every thing that was like God.

When I reached my sixteenth year, I went to live in the family of Colonel Mc’Donald, No. 36, Bryanstone Square, London.— While I lived in this family, the gracious God, whom I had so long grieved, and so dreadfully provoked, interposed for me. My mistress returned from a party early one morning, and the next day missed a diamond of considerable value. And as I had the care of her jewels, she suspected I had taken it. I felt greatly distressed; and, knowing my innocency and ignorance in the matter, I ventured to pray to my long forgotten God; and, after I had prayed, the house-maid came next morning, and brought the diamond in her hand.

Whether this was an injury intended for me I cannot tell; but the circumstance aroused me to see the mercy of God, and kindled in my careless heart a measure of gratitude towards him.

After leaving London, I lived in the family of the Rev. W.L Bennett, vicar of Water Stratford in Buckinghamshire. This family was related to the family I lived with in town.

I had frequently been followed with Divine impressions, and had felt remorse of conscience. The Spirit of God often impressed the truths I had committed to memory in childhood with fresh light on my mind;* but at this time I began.

Continuation by her husband.

Here my dear wife breaks off. But the matter was, she began to entertain atheistical thoughts; or, at least, to wish she could think there was no God; for she saw he was holy and just, but she could not see how he could justify a sinner, and remain just. But the impression returned with double force, "There is a God who will judge the world." She tried to drown the impression by reading novels and romances. But the Sunday before Christmas, 1824, for want of some other book, she took up her long neglected bible; and on reading in John iii. 3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," her convictions were renewed with double force, and her distress became greater than she had ever before known. She thought something must be done by way of merit or price; and, reading Matt, vi. 16—18, "Moreover, when ye fast be not, as the hypocrites," &c, she contrived to decline taking supper, that being the only meal she could omit without the family knowing. And instead of taking supper she would retire into the kitchen, and on her knees wrestle with God for mercy. And in this state she continued a considerable time.

Coming to Ludlow she made her sorrow known to a young woman who had attended the P. Methodist ministry. And, at that young woman's request, one of the P.M. travelling preachers wrote a letter, pointing out the way to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. And in reading this letter Elizabeth saw how God could be just, and yet justify a sinner by Jesus Christ. And near Christmas, 1825, she wrestled with God, for Christ's sake, to pardon her; and after continuing in prayer till near midnight, she obtained the inestimable blessing of the pardon of all her sins. No one was with her, but in the solitary chamber alone, she praised God aloud for what he had done for her soul.

At this time she was living with a family she had lived with before. And the mistress told Elizabeth, she should go to the races on the most noted day, and the other servants on the other days. But Elizabeth said, "I do not mean to go to the races." The mistress said, "I do not want any Methodists about me."

Elizabeth was called to much exercise of faith, and to much earnestness in prayer, for the Lord to keep her from falling. She was also diligent in reading the scriptures.

She wished to remove if it could be honourably; and at length her health appearing to decline, the mistress said, "Smith, I am afraid you are in a consumption." And out of fear lest the children should be thereby injured, her mistress agreed for her to leave. And one of the young ladies wrote to Elizabeth's grandmother as follows:—

"Dear Mrs. Powell,—I cannot let Betsey go from Bryanstone Square without sending you this little note to tell you that you may depend on us continuing to look (out) for something that will suit her. For though she will be far away, it will not make us remember her a bit the less: for mamma would on no account have parted with her, had she been able to have stopped here, which mamma very much wanted, as she goes out very much in the spring, Believe me yours truly, JULIA."

Returning to Ludlow she commenced dress making; and, by diligence and industry, soon established a good business.

But her great concern was to meet with the Lord's people. She had invitations to several chapels; but united with the P. Methodists, although their cause was low at that time in Ludlow; and the sun of prosperity appeared to shine upon her both in temporals and spirituals.

In a short time, being in a strange place, and the preacher calling for some one to pray, she commenced. This was the first time of her praying in public. And the power of God soon came down in such streams, that a stout man fell, as one shot in battle; and they had the shout of a King in the camp,

After the June quarter-day, 1825, being requested, she spoke at Ludlow, but sat down a few minutes, apparently over-awed. She, however, rose up, and resumed her labour, to the satisfaction of the friends.

In August, 1826, she wrote to Sarah Evans, as follows :--

“Dear Sister,—Your letter gave me great pleasure, because it told me of the great victory you gained through the strength of your great Captain. Thanks be to his name, he is the Captain of our salvation, and leads us on to sure conquest though the warfare is sometimes severe.

“I must tell you I have been called to do some work for the Lord. And I must say the Lord seems to bless me in the administration of his word. God works by feeble means. O! that he may lay to his mighty hand, and save sinners in all directions. And that he may have all the glory. Amen.

Believe me, yours in the best of bonds,
Elizabeth Smith.”

The September quarter-day meeting received a request from their Presteign branch, in Radnorshire, South Wales, to say that there had been a request for a preacher to be sent to raise up a new mission in another part of Radnorshire.

But the question was, Who shall be sent? But at length the superintendant preacher — said, “Elizabeth Smith of Ludlow will do.” A request was sent from the quarter-day board, and she consented.

But after the preacher was gone, she, knowing of no salary, thought, ‘What shall I do when my clothes are worn out, where shall I go for more? If I go as I have consented, all my friends will turn their backs on me.’

She found great trial of mind, but the Lord sent deliverance in a dream, by impressing on her mind, Luke xxii. 35, “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing,” When she awoke in the morning, she opened her bible on the passage, took courage, and conferred not with flesh and blood.

The next day the preacher came to give her directions. He gave her a map of the road, the place being near thirty miles from Ludlow; and he directed her to the family that had sent the invitation; and at conclusion said, “You must raise your own salary.” She asked what it was, and he replied two guineas for the quarter. “O,” said she, “I did not know that I was to have any thing.”

To give up her business was no common sacrifice. But she set off, walked all day, and at night, in the dark, found herself on a Common, on which there were deep pits, where turf or peat had been dugged out for fuel. And it having been a rainy time, these pits were filled with water, and water lay on the Common, so that she could scarcely make her way; and knew not but in the dark she might step into a pit, and finish her life and labours together, by drowning.

But meeting with a ridge thrown up she got upon it and sung,
“Jesu, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.

Hide me, O, my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O, receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee ;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.”

While singing she saw a light, and it came toward her. A family residing in a cottage at the edge of the common heard the singing, and one of them came with a lantern; and it proved to be the very family to which she had been directed; so all was surprise, joy, and satisfaction. And of course they all believed the hand of the Lord was in it.

About this time she had a peculiar dream or vision. She thought she saw many of the saints in heaven, and particularly the apostles of our Lord, and great glory rested. She felt a wish to share the glory. But one of them said, " You must not stop here now; but go back to the world again, and preach the everlasting gospel, and then you will come." This had a powerful effect on her mind.

Shortly after this, she dreamed she was thirty years of age, and that she died; and as her spirit left the body, it stood or hovered over it, and said, "Poor body, thou hast come through great sufferings, but now thou liest there. But we shall be re-united in the resurrection, at the last day."

Directly she was in the midst of a most glorious company of the angelic throng, and of the saints of our Lord Jesus, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And amidst the company there stood one much taller than the rest, being girt about with an exceeding glorious girdle, who said, "Though we have left the world, we have not done, but must be ministering spirits to our brethren who are in the ministry, and help them until they have finished their work."

Her Mission in Radnorshire.

Being so providentially brought to the family to which she was directed, she entered on her labours, and the Lord gave her favour in the sight of the people. Opposition she had to meet; and she encountered it though but a weakly young woman; and her plain and firm method (with faith in the Lord,) generally gained her the victory.

Sinners being born again, was her chief motto; and this to be effected through the merits of Jesus Christ, was the substance of every Sermon, and indeed of her private conversation. This failed not to give her great success, so that in the course of the quarter she opened a number of places, and formed several societies.

Toward the close of the quarter she informed her new friends of what the superintendant preacher had said relative to salary. They said, then there must be a collection. This was made, and it met the salary and all other expenses, so this new mission was opened without burdening the circuit.

Observations.

There are some things that are a little striking:—

1. Her diligence and frugality, which not only gave her favour in the families in which she lived, but fitted her for usefulness in the cause of God.
2. Her uniting with the society at Ludlow although in a low state, and much despised.
3. She must have had an aptness to getting into faith, as her first attempt to pray in public was crowned with success.
4. Her consenting to undertake to open a mission on new ground, although she had been a speaker in public only about a quarter of a year; and her giving up her business at what she believed a call of God. This was extraordinary.
5. Her enduring trouble and affliction in a thinly inhabited country; yet persevering in the true spirit of a Primitive Methodist MISSIONARY, overcoming the difficulties by faith and labour, establishing the cause, and maintaining herself on her own labours.

(To be continued.)

* Here we see the propriety of training up children. ED.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1837/95