

MEMOIR OF ELIZABETH RUSSELL,

(Formerly Elizabeth Smith.)

(Continued from page 181.)

At the Conference of 1830, she was re-stationed in Brinkworth circuit, and at Midsummer she was appointed again to labour with us in the missions in Berkshire; was much employed in new places; and the sorrow she bore for these places, she was of opinion, laid the foundation of her dissolution.

At Beenham Green, while preaching in the open air, the clergyman's son came and fired a gun close by her, four times. But this did not discourage her. And soon the Lord gave her to see a great work break out, and a good chapel built and settled on the Connexion, and much good done in it.

Her travail of soul for these places was not in vain; numbers have been converted to God, and powerful societies raised up, which have proved a blessing to the circuit. But truly it may be said she drunk deep into the sorrows of a missionary spirit; which caused her to pray much, and often weep in secret places for sinners, and to lay herself out for usefulness,

August 22, 1830, she attended the first Camp meeting at Shefford; and she wrote to say, that in the lovefeast the Lord gladdened their hearts by converting fifteen souls. His glory was visibly seen,* and powerfully felt by many. But of the others, some jumped out at the windows, and some ran through the doors. Mrs. Wells of Shefford had got her husband to build a house with a room large enough for preaching, with lodging rooms above, so that the whole might be occupied by a preacher's family.

But after this powerful time, persecution at Shefford raged more than ever; this house was threatened to be pulled down, and tenants were forbid to attend. But still on the Saturday following, Sister Ride and family came to reside at Shefford; and the house at once became a home for all the preachers. And all of us being present, we fell on our knees, and prayed in great earnestness for the interposing hand of the Lord; and for about half an hour we scarce knew which way the conflict would turn. But Elizabeth, rising from her knees, clasped her hands together, and said, with much assurance, "The Lord God has delivered us." And so it proved, for we heard no more of the house being pulled down; and other matters subsided.

September 11, I was with her at a meeting held at Ramsbury, at seven in the morning; she preached; the mighty power of God came down, the cries of penitents were loud and piercing, several found peace, and a blessed work went on.

Her enterprising mind contemplated a field of missionary labours in Hampshire, an adjoining county. And she opened Faccomb, a village in that county, and several were converted there the first quarter, and a society formed.

There was at Hurstbourne Tarrant in Hampshire, a man who for years had been in great distress, bordering on melancholy; and who had been taken to various doctors but none knew his complaint. But coming, in company with others, to hear Elizabeth, she in her preaching described his complaint, and he soon found peace. This caused us to have pressing invitations to visit other places in the north of Hampshire, where a most blessed work broke out.

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*By some it was seen as a light, and by others as fire falling amongst the people.

In the latter end of January, 1831, being taken ill, she removed into Wiltshire. And in a letter she says, "I have been for some months worse than poorly. The people judge me to be in a decline. I was brought into this state by a fever on my nerves. I rested eleven weeks, and started again to take my appointments April 13, 1831, with very little prospect of being able to continue to travel."

April 13, she says, "This day, after near a quarter's rest, I set out for my appointments. I know if I go home I shall travel no more. And as I am only weak in body, I do not like the thought of burdening the (circuits' assistant sick travelling preachers') fund. My mind has been in a state like that of a ship driven by the tempest. I desire to die, but something tells me I shall not die yet.

"I believe I fell into this way by the following means: I had for some time enjoyed better health, and felt more delight in the work than ever. But satan continually suggested that the work in the Berkshire mission would fly away like chaff, and melt like snow before the sun. The dreadful case of one backslider confirmed the temptations. The effect was, I gave way, and spoke peevishly, and then gave up my confidence of the evidence of perfect love. And if the Lord had not in his mercy kept me, I should have run away from the work.

"April 22, 1831.—Through the help of the Lord I have been able to take my appointments since the 13th. Some of the friends say I am in a decline; but I dont think so.

"This morning I made a solemn offering of myself to the Lord; and promised if the Lord would restore my strength, I would spend it in travelling. I began praying; but was so weak as not to be able to kneel upright. After this I felt a sharp pain going about me, which continued for some time. But my appetite returned, and I soon found a degree of peace and joy. Glory be to God. Amen.

"May 1, 1831.—I walked seven miles from Wootton Bassett to Hillmorton, and returned in the evening. A great number were assembled in the street; the room having just before been taken from us. I spoke in the open air, and it was a solemn time."

The quarter day, being requested, appointed her to the Hampshire mission. And on her arrival she drew up a plan of appointments, and gave it to me, with the following lines composed by herself, which she called

THE MISSIONARY'S PRAYER.

Great Founder of the mission cause,
We send our humble cry to thee,
While suppliant at thy feet we pause,
And inly wait thy grace to see:
Thy word our hearts with zeal has fir'd,
Our souls renew'd, our spirits bent;
That truth, which ages past inspir'd,
Might be to every creature sent.

CHORUS.—Save all nations, we beseech thee,
Save all nations from their sins.

Earth's utmost bounds, thy word declares,
The brightness of thy light shall see;
Great kings,* from far, thy sons shall bear,
And queens* their nursing mothers be:
We praise thee who Judea mission'd,
Our eyes thy ripening purpose see ;
Thy gospel servants are commission'd,
To distant nations now by thee.

CHORUS.—Save all nations, &c.

On Asia's sultry shores they stand,
The gospel banners high unfold;
To Greenland's icy coast extend,
And frozen hearts receive the mould:
America their labours shar'd,
With fruits repaid their pleasing toil;
In Europe they have peace declar'd,
And publish'd Christ who died for all.

CHORUS.— Save all nations, &c.

Nor is Old England quite forsaken,
The country dear to British hearts,
With shouts of joy her shores have shaken
Her land is blest in many parts:
We bless thy name, thou missions' Friend,
For grateful thoughts which now arise;
Our raptur'd souls with praise ascend,
We raise our voices to the skies.

CHORUS.— Save all nations, &c.

But here our zeal cannot be ended,
While parts of England desert lie;
O, let thy arm be downward bended!
Lord, send to Berks+ a rich supply:
For Hampshire we as suppliants bow,
Our humble cries besiege thy throne ;
Thy Spirit pour, O, pour it now,
Answer our anguish'd earnest groan.

CHORUS.— Save all nations, &c.

Let Sinai's dreadful thunders shake,
Thy pow'ful word poor souls arrest;
Contrition's tears their sorrows speak,
And show they long in thee to rest:
May every grace to faith be added,
And perfect love each soul possess,
Thro' blood divine each moment saved,
With endless life in heaven bless.

CHORUS.— Then well praise thee when thou bring'st us,
To surround thy heavenly throne.

These lines may show somewhat of the anguish of her soul for the cause of God. Frequently in the night she would get up, wander about the room; and pray and agonize for the blessing of God to attend our labours. She indefatigably laboured here for the prosperity of the work. Frequently the travelling would be nearly one hundred miles in a week, and preaching eight or ten times, and visiting a number of families every day, as well as leading classes; which we always had to do as soon as we could form them.

T. Russell had opened this mission in April 1831, and about thirty were gathered, and he thought to open several places near; but her mind was for the town of Newbury to be opened; and this being rather distant, caused more travelling.

+ The short name for Berkshire.

July 7, 1831. She attended a Camp meeting at Little Hungerford. A man from Newbury being present, the Lord awakened him under her preaching; and he soon found peace, and opened his house for preaching. We formed a society in Newbury, and after some time, the room occupied in Mr. Wesley's days was taken, and the society worship in it to the present day, and much good has been done.

The Lord owned her much on this mission, and she was anxious that it might pay its way without being burdensome to other places; due care was therefore taken to establish a sound course of discipline. And in October 1836, brother Ride informed me, that that part had more than paid its way from the beginning. This was of course owing to the sound discipline, the foundation of which was laid chiefly by her. The September quarter-day arranged for the preachers to move in general in Hampshire and Berkshire. There were then seven travelling preachers, and seventy-one places, and near five hundred in society. And she went through the travelling surprisingly, and laboured abundantly, frequently assisting the widows and fatherless; altering and fitting the clothes that had been given to them; for which she of course was well qualified.

During this quarter we had more than one hundred increase, and at the December quarter-day, 1831, the whole was made into a separate circuit, and named Shefford circuit. This mission, notwithstanding its sufferings and opposition, had far more than paid its way from the first; and this to her was matter of joy.

Early in the year 1832, several letters were received from near Winchester, requesting a female might be sent to open a mission in that part. Accordingly Elizabeth was appointed, and I am happy to introduce a part of her journal, as follows:—

“Jan 15, 1832, Sister _____ being ill, I agreed to change appointments, and preached at Little Hungerford, to a house full of people. Then at Compton, and the Lord blessed us with his presence.

“Next morning, Jan. 16, visited several families, and found a woman dangerously ill, who for a week had expected to die. She said, “I heard you preach at Market Illsby, twelve months ago, when you came to mission there, and I was convinced I had not perfect love, nor did serve the Lord fully, (she was a member of _____ society;) and from that time” said she, “I have been seeking liberty.” I perceived her distress of mind had produced the affliction. The Lord drew nigh while I was speaking and praying with her. She said, “I believe if I could love the Lord as I want to do, I should soon get better in health.”

I left her, and went four miles over the hills, to Aston Upthorp. I returned at midnight, and the woman's husband coming for me, I went to see his wife, and found that fear had given place to filial love, and peace did now o'erflow her soul.

Feb. 3, 1832, I walked from Shefford to Burdley, eighteen miles, to meet brother Ride, who informed me I was to go on a mission near Winchester. This gave me great pleasure, because I was persuaded the Lord had a work for us to do in that part of the country.

Feb. 4. I reached Down Hurtbourne. The people said it was given out for me to preach that night. In the space of an hour I visited several families, and in one house found a poor woman dreadfully bruised by a fall. She had lived all her life without religion, but was now penitent, and upbraided herself for having put off repentance. She said, “Can the Lord have mercy?” I said, “He has been merciful to you, or you would have died on the spot; and desperate as your case is, he is waiting to save you now.” I prayed with her, and found access to the throne. She cried for mercy, and her family wept and trembled as they knelt around her bed.

At the time appointed, I preached to a number of people.

Feb. 5. I preached at Mitcheldever, East Stratton, and Swarraton. My mind was perfectly calm; I had liberty in preaching, and saw many weep.

Feb. 6. Spoke at Brown Candover. Feb. 7, at Preston Candover. Feb. 8, at East Stratton, besides visiting and praying with different families each day. I then went with some others to Waltham; and

on the road it was powerfully impressed on my mind, that I should have opposition from the church ministers. I told the people of the impression; but they would not believe that he would oppose me, because said they, he is such a good man. I reached the place, and found a great number of people gathered to hear. Some were rather unruly, but I had not the opposition in the meeting I anticipated. But after I had concluded, a young gentleman of the clerical order, an intimate friend of the church minister, who boarded at the house where I stopped for the night, endeavoured for three hours, to discourage me I told him, that I had neither inclination nor ability to cavil. But I had heard the same objection started before, and was not at all dismayed, being well assured that the Lord had not forbid me. He replied, "Where have you a positive command to preach? there are several that forbid you, and those scriptures you quote allude to prophesying and not teaching." I asked him to tell me what prophesying was. He answered, "Not teaching." And as he was looking for something in proof of his position, he read 1 Cor. xiv., and when he came to verse 3, which reads thus, "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort," this scripture ended the debate. I told him his objections had rather encouraged me than otherwise. So we parted.

Feb..9, I spoke at twelve in the day at Woodmancot, to as many as could get into the house. One man was powerfully convinced, and set out for heaven. Praise God. In the evening I preached at Mitcheldever to some hundreds. Many tears were shed, and the word of the Lord reached a man's heart who stood outside listening at the window.* Since then, two very opulent farmers, who were bitter opposers to Methodism, have let me preach in their barns. There is a great thirst for the word of God, and a number of invitations to go to other places. But there must be a mighty change before Primitive Methodism is fully established. I have preached at, ten places, and if I had had time, could have opened as many more.

Here the journal ends.

The Lord was evidently with her in that part. I was informed at Barton Stacey, about nine months after she left, that they thought they never should forget one meeting that Miss Smith held, especially when she sang the 391 hymn,

"Commission'd by the great I AM,
I leave my friends and home,
To spread the triumphs of his name,
O'er desert wastes I roam.

Tho' grief and sorrow be my lot,
I shortly shall be free;
And whether I'm reproach'd or not,
May God remember me."

While she sung these verses, the power of God was greatly felt, and there was much sympathy: many tears were shed, and great was the travail amongst the people, for the prosperity of the work. And indeed this seemed to be the case in many places.

On another occasion, while passing a house at Down Hurstbourne, I asked a young woman who stood in a door, where the preaching house was, and whether there had been preaching there of late, and who had preached. She said Miss Smith had been there, and had visited and convinced her mother. I asked liberty to go in, and found the woman very ill in bed, but praising God that he ever sent Miss Smith to show her the way of salvation.

*This man, with sixteen others, joined society, and he was one of the first. He lived a blessed life for six months, and died happy in the Lord.

May 27. We held a Camp meeting at Bindley. Many hundreds attended. Bro. Ride, with a number from Shefford, came eighteen miles; I was there, with many of the societies from the first mission places in Hampshire; and Elizabeth came twelve miles from Mitcheldever, with a number of the young converts.

She laboured hard at this meeting, and the Lord awakened some of the vilest characters in the country; many obtained good, a number found peace, and a blessed work went on, especially in the lovefeast.

But it was evident Elizabeth's health was declining; and we wished her to rest for some time. But all we could say could not prevail. She determined, if possible to keep in the work: and this she did, until midsummer, when she was appointed to Darlaston circuit.

Shefford circuit report speaks as follows:—*Elizabeth Smith, aged twenty-seven years, has travelled near six years, taken out by Hopton Bank or Ludlow circuit, travelled in Hopton Bank or Ludlow, Presteign, Pillawell, Brinkworth, and Shefford circuits.— Attentive to discipline, a family visiter, not addicted to long preaching, preaches a full, free, and present salvation. The Lord has made her useful in his vineyard as an instrument in his hand in the conversion of souls.”

The Shefford circuit very much wished her to stay another year, but her desire was to remove to some other circuit.

On leaving this circuit, she wrote as follows:—

“June 26, (1832,) I preached for the last time in Shefford circuit, formerly a mission belonging to Brinkworth circuit. I opened this place nearly two years ago; and a good work has been going on ever since.

“It is four years since I first went to Brinkworth circuit in Wiltshire. For the first year and nine months I laboured in the home part of the circuit, one quarter excepted, when I was at Stroud in Gloucestershire, which at that time was a branch of Brinkworth circuit.

“April, 1830, I entered on the Berkshire mission, now Shefford circuit, and great as the struggle was, my peace and courage were proportioned to my day. I opened and assisted to open the greatest part of the circuit; formed many of the societies, saw many souls converted, and some sanctified.

“in the spring of 1831, I was obliged, for the first time since I began to travel, to desist from preaching, through affliction. The March quarter day considering the weakness of my frame, stationed me on the home part for a quarter; and to this day I feel the most lively gratitude for the great kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Trow and their daughter, of Wootton Bassett. And I hope I shall never forget the solicitude and tender care manifested by Bro. and Sister Barns of Hook near Wootton Bassett, for the restoration of my health.

“Being recovered, the midsummer quarter day unwillingly complied with the request of the mission, and stationed me in Hampshire, along with Thomas Russell. We met with much to discourage us—many were the reproaches cast on us; but we succeeded in opening many places, and establishing, by the blessing of the Lord, a good number of societies.”
Here she closed her writing.

(To be continued.)

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1837/216