

Rev. John Symonds

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Mr. JOHN SYMONDS, Primitive Methodist itinerant minister, was the son of Mark and Ann Symonds, and was born, in the year 1812, at Whitwell-beck, near Reepham, in the county of Norfolk. The father of our deceased brother has been for many years a pious man and a local preacher amongst our people, and is now a supernumerary on the Dereham circuit plan. Sensible of his responsibility as a parent, he sought with great anxiety to promote the salvation of his children; and after frequent and earnest pleadings with the Almighty, he had the unspeakable pleasure of witnessing the conversion of several of them, amongst whom was the subject of these lines.

Our deceased brother being naturally of a lively and playful disposition, he took great delight in cricket-playing, and neglected the instructions and reproofs of his pious father, whose admonitions he continued to disregard until the year 1830, when he was brought to a saving knowledge of the truth through the instrumentality of brother R. Key. Attempts were made by those who were not favourable to religion to draw him aside from the truth; but their attempts were in vain; he remembered the advice of the wise man: "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not;" "Walk not thou in the way with them; restrain thy foot from their path." His conduct, indeed, was so becoming, and his anxiety to interest and benefit his neighbours by securing their attendance at the house of God, as to cause even his enemies to say, "We believe John Symonds to be a good man,"

Qualifications for usefulness being discovered in him, induced the authorities of the circuit to put his name on the preachers' plan as an exhorter, from which office he rose to that of an accredited local preacher, and in performing the duties of which his success was so satisfactory as to justify his being taken out to labour as an itinerant minister. He was consequently employed in a mission belonging to the Fakenham circuit, by which circuit he was taken out to travel. When he laboured in the above circuits he bore the significant title of "the farthing missionary," his first quarter's salary being paid to him in farthings, raised by children and other friends of the mission cause. In some stations he suffered much; but, encouraged by the conversion of souls, he endured his sufferings with patience. Our departed brother laboured acceptably and successfully in the following stations: Norwich, Brandon, Yarmouth, Colchester, Norwich (a second time), and in Louth; in the last of which he finished his toil.

I have received several letters from preachers with whom brother Symonds travelled, and they testify, without exception, that they believe him to have been a man of sterling piety, and that he anxiously desired the prosperity of the cause of Christ. From the day of his conversion to that of his death, they know of no stain in his moral character. In his deportment as a man and as a Christian, he pursued an upright course, and was rather severe on those whom he thought did not "walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing." As a spiritual ruler, he endeavoured to maintain discipline. As a colleague, he was kind and affectionate, and was always ready to assist his brethren in affairs belonging to the circuit. As a preacher, he possessed a mind well stored with information; but he had not the happiest method of expressing his ideas, yet he was generally acceptable. He was an eminent family visitor, and was much esteemed by, and often made a blessing to, those whom he visited. His liberality was exerted to the utmost of his means to help on every good work that came in his way. Whenever he met with any persons that gave promise of usefulness, he would give them some encouraging advice, or lend them suitable books. At Louth, he was accustomed to meet, on a sabbath morning, at seven o'clock, eight or nine young men, with whom he read, and to whom he explained, the Scriptures. Those youths occupy a place on the preachers' plan, and they made considerable improvement by the instructions he gave them. For the conducting of their meetings,

they had rules drawn up, and a fine was levied on those who failed in their attendance, which fines were put into a missionary box. His death is much lamented by those young men, they having received such tokens of kindness from him. He was a great admirer and a faithful practiser of the temperance principles. As a husband he was kind and affectionate; as a father he was tender, but firm, and laboured to instruct his children in the great principles of the religion of Jesus Christ.

The scarlet fever having been for several weeks in the family of our departed brother, a slight failing in his health was observable for some weeks before his death; but not so as to prevent him from attending his work. He was at my house on Saturday, October 27th, and did not even complain; but during the night he was attacked with sickness, On the following morning he attempted to go to a prayer-meeting at six o'clock, but failed; he then tried to attend the young men's meeting at seven o'clock; but was unable. Anxious to be at work, he afterwards tried to start for his appointment; but by this time the fever had gained the complete mastery. A medical gentleman was called in, who considered his a dangerous case. The disease continued to make its ravages upon his system; so that a physician was also called in, and various experiments were tried; but they all failed, though many prayers were also offered on his behalf. But he was fully prepared for his change. The sabbath was a day of much joy to him, though he suffered much pain. Being unable to speak, he gave satisfactory signs that heaven with all its blessedness was before him; into which he entered, October 31st, 1849, in the thirty-eighth year of his age, and in the fifteenth year of his ministry, leaving behind him a widow and six small children to lament their loss.

The deepest sympathy was excited on the mournful occasion, and on November 2nd, ministers and members both of our own and of other denominations, amounting to some hundreds, paid their last tribute of respect, by following his remains to their resting-place. On Sunday, November 11th, I improved his death to an overflowing congregation, and many were unable to gain admittance. After this service, five or six persons professed to find peace with God. May they with us be found faithful, that we may meet our brother at the right hand of God!

References

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