

Simmonds, Mark (1836-1911)

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by G.E. Butt

Mark Simmonds was born at Wootton Bassett, in the Brinkworth Circuit, March 3rd, 1836. His father was one of the leading tradesmen of the town, and was able to give his son what in those days was considered a liberal education. During his early days, in harmony with the habit of his family, he attended the services of the Parish Church. He possessed a deeply religious nature, and often felt strangely disappointed and dissatisfied with his religious instruction and environment. It was a case where sympathetic and wise counsel would have been fruitful. But failing this, dark days and almost tragic experiences ensued. He was a seeker after Christ with no one to lead him.

But help came in an unexpected way. His father placed him in a business house at Cricklade. He left home with great reluctance, not being attracted by this new departure in his life. But he was not long in Cricklade before he came into contact with the ministry of our Church. That mighty man of God, the late Rev. G. Warner, was holding a special mission in the town. Mr. Simmonds heard him preach at a street corner. The intense conviction, the direct personal appeal, and great spiritual force of the message captivated our young friend. He went again, and again, and was soon led out into the realisation of personal salvation, and confessed Christ by joining the Church. His progress in business finally took him to Newbury. Here we have a strong Church, and he found suitable friends and congenial fields of labour.

He quickly graduated as a local preacher, in which office he became efficient and successful, and he was soon called to the work of the full ministry. His labours were confined to the South of England. Newbury Circuit both recommended and pledged him. Then he spent terms at Southampton, Motcombe, Aylesbury, Witney, Chipping Norton and Cirencester. It was while labouring on the last named circuit that his health gave way and he had to take four years' complete rest. This period proved to be very trying to his intense and eager temperament. With health only partially restored, he recommenced work, but suffered from sleeplessness for years, which made the miracle of the labour he achieved all the greater.

As second minister, he spent eighteen years on three circuits—Reading, Plumstead (twice) and Tottenham. He was an excellent circuit minister. He moved among the people with gracious ease and dignity, and they had great confidence in his judgment and counsel. His preaching was above the average, fresh, suggestive, and deeply spiritual. He did not feel at home at "specials," but among his own people and in the quiet work of his station he greatly excelled. He had a philosophical cast of mind, and held his convictions and, even his opinions, with great tenacity; but he claimed in this respect no right for himself which he did not freely extend to others. His charity often bore the stamp of personal sacrifice, and many of the Lord's poor were blest by his bounty. In all his circuits he is remembered and honoured as an able and faithful minister.

I can endorse every word of the following appreciation by the Rev. J.P. Langham:

— "For thirty-five years it has been my privilege to call the Rev. Mark Simmonds my friend. When in 1877 I removed to Reading, I first made his acquaintance. At that time he was resting, having been compelled to superannuate through nervous breakdown. As a young superintendent of an extensive and important circuit, I found in him a sage counsellor and a true friend. From our first meeting we were conscious of spiritual and intellectual affinities for the rest of our lives, affinities which assure us of continued fellowship and co-operation in the life beyond. His conversation was stimulating, sane and spiritual. In our talks we canvassed many subjects, and let our thoughts 'wander through eternity.' I found that he had read much and thought deeply, and again and again I followed with advantage his riper judgment. I soon discovered

that he was utterly unselfish, giving thought, energy and money lavishly to many worthy objects. Soon after our acquaintance began, finding his health somewhat restored, he ventured to take a few appointments from quarter to quarter, and wherever he went he was urged to come again. After four years of retirement he returned to the full work of the ministry, becoming my colleague in the Reading Circuit. He remained in Reading as second preacher for four years, and then removed to London, to be my colleague on the Plumstead Circuit. Our second term of co-operation deepened and strengthened our mutual affection. Of him it may be truly said, 'He went about doing good.' Wherever he went he made many friends, and the friends he made, he kept. Of his own family, he was the vital centre, its whole life revolving about him and reflecting his qualities. His removal will seem to his widow and children an irreparable loss. He lived so long in the realm of unselfish service, that those who knew him well felt that it would be impossible for him to do a mean or selfish act. Living to God and living for others was the habit of his soul."

Early in October last his health began to fail. At first it was thought he would soon take his old place among his friends, but his earthly work was done, and the Master called him to the higher service. This was December 13th, when he had reached the age of 75. Six days later we laid the spent body to rest amid universal respect, and hundreds of devout hearts in all the churches joined in thanksgiving for the holy life and ministry of our brother, and in prayer for the comfort of his widow and children.

"His works do follow him."

References

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