

Rev. William Sleath

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by C Lace

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM SLEATH.

Primitive Methodist Preacher.

William Sleath, son of William and Sarah Sleath, was born at Rempstone, in the county of Nottingham, Nov. 12th, 1795. While he was very young, his parents removed to Hoton, in the county of Leicester, where they still reside. When he arrived at a suitable age, he went into farmers' service, and remained in this employment until he lost his right arm, which was occasioned by the bite of a horse. Soon after he was recovered from the weakness connected with the amputation, he opened a school, and taught a considerable number of scholars. In this capacity he was engaged when the love of God was shed abroad in his heart.

In the year 1816, the God of Salvation was pleased to send some of the Primitive Methodist Preachers into Leicestershire, and to own their labours by the power of his Spirit. Many sinners were then turned from their evil ways, and by divine conviction could say: "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who show unto us the way of salvation." Some of those who then received redemption through the blood of Jesus, have since fought the good fight, and finished their course, and are now rejoicing in Paradise; and others are pressing "towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

W. Sleath, with his parents and sisters, (who comprize the whole of the family,) were among the first fruits of Primitive Methodist usefulness in this county. The following brief account of his conversion is extracted from one of his manuscripts:

"The Most High God brought me to a knowledge of himself, by his gracious Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Primitive Methodist Preachers. It was noised abroad in Hoton, that one of these would preach in a neighbouring village, (Wimeswould,) I was desirous of hearing him, and went to the place at the appointed time. Bless God! I did not go in vain, I then received impressions which never left me, but increased more and more. I followed him and other preachers to many places, and the work of God deepened in my heart. I resolved to enter in at the strait gate. I prayed and cried unto the Lord, and soon he heard me, and set my soul at perfect liberty. I saw the Lamb of God by an eye of faith. I was born of the Spirit, and had the abiding witness of my acceptance with him. I might have been banished from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. But I am a brand plucked out of the burning—a sinner saved by grace. To God be all the praise for ever!"

William now became a living epistle, read and known of all who were acquainted with him. He ardently desired the salvation of souls, and fervently prayed that all men might come to a knowledge of the truth, and be saved. He soon began to exhort believers to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and to preach repentance in the name of Jesus. "Soon as I was made happy in God," says he, in one of his papers, "I felt a desire to warn my fellow men, to flee from the wrath to come; and in a little time, I was put on the plan as an exhorter." He laboured in the vineyard of the Lord with diligence and success, for, though his talents were not great, yet the Saviour of men rendered him useful. He habituated himself to early rising, soon after his conversion, and continued it the residue of his days, unless prevented by affliction.

His general hour of rising, summer and winter alternately, was five o'clock. He spent the time until breakfast hour, in reading the word of God, meditation, and prayer. He was a man of unceasing fervent prayer—a man who loved his closet. He would often seclude himself from the world, for the purpose of enjoying

uninterrupted communion with God. In secret he frequently poured out his soul in the power of prayer—experienced the fellowship of the Holy Ghost—anticipated the bliss of the New Jerusalem—beheld with open face the glory of the Lord—and was changed into the image of Jesus, from glory into glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. But, though he delighted in temporary solitude, he delighted to visit from house to house also, that he might pray with various families. His zeal for the salvation of souls, induced him thus to visit; and he who gave himself a ransom for all men, blessed his servant while thus engaged in his service. In this labour of love, he exerted all his powers, and by the blessings which descended in answer to his prayers, evinced that he was a Friend of God.

Brother Sleath possessed a permanent tranquility of mind. His experience was congenial with the poet's:—

“Earth and hell their wars may wage,
Calm I mark their vain design
Smile to see them idly rage
Against a child of thine.”

He always set the Lord on his right hand, and therefore was not moved, He seemed to act under a perpetual conviction of his being a stranger and pilgrim here below. He kept himself from idols—set his affections on things above—and manifested by his exemplary piety, that he desired to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ his Lord. He was not very conversable: his words were few, and seasoned with grace. He set a watch upon his lips, lest he should offend with his tongue. He, I believe, was never heard to speak evil of any man. He carefully avoided foolish talking and jesting, and often quoted that scripture: “For every idle word that men speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.” Matt. xii. 36. He loved the word of God, and delighted to meditate in it day and night. He with propriety could say, “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee” He had a tender conscience—a conscience which shrunk at the approach of sin. He beheld it with detestation, and constantly endeavoured to abstain from all appearance of it.

The preceding graces characterized Brother Sleath soon after his conversion, and shone with increasing lustre until he was taken to receive his reward

He commenced his itinerant labours in the Ashby circuit, and afterwards travelled in Winster, Isle of Man, Ramsor, Wrockwardine-Wood, and Frome circuits. In each of these he was esteemed highly in love for his work's sake, and in the last mentioned one he finished his ministerial labours. He was seized with affliction in the month of September, 1829, and preached his last sermon on Christmas day. He remained in the circuit five weeks, and finding his affliction prevail upon him, returned to Hoton,* languished for nearly a month, and then put off his clay tabernacle,

The fruits of the Spirit were clearly exemplified in him throughout his illness. His pains were excruciating, yet he uttered not an expression which savoured of impatience. Often would his grateful heart be emitting effusions of gratitude—often would his ready tongue be employed in expressions of praise. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless and praise his holy name,” would he say with all the remaining strength of his body, and with all the fervour of his soul. His zeal for the salvation of souls, and prosperity of Zion did not abate by his suffering. His prayers for those who lived without God and without hope in the world, and for those who lived a life of faith in the Son of God, were not less frequent than when he enjoyed health. “O Lord, revive thy work !—Saye poor sinners !—Bless thy people” were his increasing petitions. His piety displayed itself very conspicuously as he approached the eternal world. He appeared to breathe a heavenly atmosphere, and live on heavenly joys. When two individuals expressed their solicitude

for his body, he interrupted them by saying, "My heart and thoughts are in heaven, and I shall soon be there."

Several of the friends of Jesus visited him, and were greatly benefited by his suitable advice, and striking example. Some of them esteem the moments which they spent in his chamber among the happiest of their lives. The sight of a man smiling while suffering exquisite pain, is calculated to affect all who behold it:—The sight of a Christian mariner weathering the last storm, and the last glance of the vessel as she sails from the sea of life to enter into the haven of eternal repose, are peculiarly interesting to all who are sailing on the same sea, bound to the same port, and necessitated to brave the same dangers:—The sound of "victory" from a dying soldier of the cross, triumphing over his last foe, is unspeakably ravishing to all who are enlisted under the same banner, and expect to contend with the same adversary. These scenes were beheld—this sound was heard by those who surrounded Brother Sleath when he entered into the joy of the Lord. In him was exhibited the fortitude of the man, and the triumphs of the Christian. Often would he vent the emotions of his soul in shouts of "Glory! Glory! Glory!— Victory !! Victory ! Victory !—Hallelulia! Praise the Lord!" These words he often used, and they were among the last that he was heard to articulate. He had a great desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better for him than tabernacling here. His earthly tent was violently beat upon by an irresistible disease; it tottered—it fell. It fell—but its inmate did not perish in the ruins. It fell—but its immortal inhabitant escaped from it, and entered into "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

He was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom," March 16th, 1830, in the 35th year of his age.

Servant of the Lord, adieu!
Now thy bless'd reward is given,
Now thou dost thy Saviour view,
Tasting now the joys of heaven.

All thy labour now is o'er,
Past thy sorrow, pain, and care;
Thou shalt bear the cross no more,
Thou the crown shalt ever wear.

Soldier of the Cross, Farewell!
May I live and die like thee,
Vanquish all the hosts of hell,
Dying, vibrate "Victory!"

C. LACE

Approved by the Circuit Committee.

* Hoton is in Loughborough circuit.

References

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