

MEMOIR OF RICHARD WOOLDRIDGE,

P. METHODIST ITINERANT PREACHER.

“He being dead, yet speaketh.”

Richard, son of Richard and Rachel Wooldridge, was born Jan. 21, 1815, at Sparsholt, in the county of Berks. His parents were moral in their deportment, felt interested for the welfare of the souls of their children, and laboured to instruct them in those duties and principles which tend to promote the happiness of human beings in this world, and in that which is to come. The subject of this memoir, at an early age, was desired by his parents to read and study the holy scriptures, that like Timothy he might be made wise unto salvation, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and the advice had a salutary effect. Richard possessed an amiable disposition, was obedient to his parents, and manifested some concern about religion when quite young in years. His father died before he was six years of age, which dispensation our brother often said deprived him of many useful lessons taught by the precepts and example of his affectionate parent. The following is an account of his conversion, written by himself:—

“At a very early period of life, I was the subject of divine impressions, and was often led to pray that I might become acquainted with the nature of religion, and embrace all its privileges. But, alas! the darkness of my mind, and the carnal desires of my heart, still kept me wandering in the path of error, and my soul was captivated under the servitude of satan. When I was about sixteen, I heard a Methodist preacher for the first time; the text he explained was, Rev. i. 15, 16, ‘I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot,’ &c. In many respects he spoke of me, and God was pleased to accompany the word with a Divine influence, which produced a good effect. But being ignorant of the plan of salvation, and striving to conceal my feelings as much as possible, I was kept in ignorance for some time respecting the forgiveness of sins, and the joys of true religion. I did not confine myself to the ministry of the Wesleyans, but wandered from place to place, with a motive of proving all things, that I might hold fast that which was good. While I thus went to and fro, my burden continued to augment, and the number of my crimes to increase, till I was almost in a state of despair. But, he who leadeth the blind by a way that they knew not, was pleased to conduct my feet into the path which leads to joys of a perpetual duration, and pleasures which never die. It was in the nineteenth year of my age, on a summer’s morning, while the sun gilded the earth with his rays, the birds of the wood, the flowers of the field, and the trees of the forest, all spoke forth the power and goodness of God, that I bowed under the shade of a willow with a heavy heart, to mingle my feeble praise with the surrounding throng; and, while lifting my heart to God, the glorious Sun of Righteousness shed forth his enlightening beams on my mind, and caused darkness to pass away. Then was my burdened mind eased, my sorrowful soul filled with joy, and my believing heart filled with that peace which passeth all understanding. Then could I chant forth the praises of Him who had been angry with me, whose anger was now turned away, and who comforted my soul; and, with the poet I sung,

“Now I have found the ground wherein
Sure my souls anchor may remain,” &c.

From this time his life and conversation adorned the gospel of God his Saviour; and he was invited to meet in class; but his mind was exercised with the thought, that if he should be overcome by temptation, and fall into sin, it would not only bring condemnation on himself, but also disgrace the cause of the Lord. At length he felt persuaded that there were many advantages arising from church-fellowship, and that these would help him to overcome temptation; he then joined the Wesleyan society, and met upwards of twelve months in a class which was led at the village where he resided.

The glorious light which the Holy Spirit revealed in his mind was not hid, but shone perspicuously; so that of him it may be said, “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

On his leaving the Wesleyans and uniting with our society, he writes, in substance, the following:—
“In the spring of the year 1835, the Primitive Methodists came to preach at Sparsholt; I went to hear, but without any design of uniting with them. My going to hear did not meet the approbation of some with whom I stood connected; but I was fully convinced that the P. Methodist preachers were the servants of the Most High God. On the 24th of May, 1835, I went to hear one of the

preachers give a farewell address. I believe Providence directed my steps. A very great Unction from on high rested on the meeting, and my soul was wonderfully blest, and in my heart I said, 'This people shall be my people.' But I knew that a deliberate conclusion in a matter of so great importance, would be more judicious than a hasty one. In my anxiety, I made my request known to the Lord, praying that his will might be done, that if it would be for the advancement of his glory for me to join the Primitive Methodists, he would bring it about; if not, that he would prevent it: and God, who heareth prayer, brought the thing to pass according to his pleasure. Several things afford some reason for thinking that the hand of the Lord was in it; but I shall only say, that after I joined them, several persons with whom I was intimate, were led to hear with satisfaction for themselves; and it pleased God to make me useful to those of my relations who were strangers to religion, and who were induced, through this circumstance, to hear the word preached by the Primitive Methodist preachers, which they found to be indeed the word of God, able to save the soul."

About this time the Lord poured out his Spirit, and revived his work in Sparsholt. Crowds of people flocked to hear from different parts, and sinners were converted at almost every meeting. Brother W. laboured with all his heart in the cause, and was made very useful to the P. Methodist church when first planted in that parish.

At the Sept. quarter-day, 1835, he was put on the plan to exhort sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and in March, 1836, was raised to the office of an accredited local preacher. While he laboured in the spiritual vineyard at home, the Lord opened his way, and he was accepted wherever he went to speak to the people. He endeavoured to do the work of an evangelist; he was faithful in warning, affectionate in inviting, and tender in reproving his fellow sinners; and his labour was not in vain in the Lord. When he held forth the word of life, christians were edified, mourners were blest, and careless sinners were aroused to a sense of their danger.

He was taken out and pledged as a travelling preacher at a quarterly meeting held in March, 1838, and commenced his itinerant labours in Reading circuit, on the 15th of the following month. In a journal notice he writes, "During my short stay in Reading circuit, (from April 15 to June 25, 1838,) it pleased the Lord to make bare his arm, and give me some seals to my feeble ministry."

The Conference of 1838 and 1839, appointed him to labour in the Poole circuit, in Dorsetshire, with Bro. C. T. Harris, "Who," he says, "I found to be an agreeable colleague; we lived together in harmony the whole time we were at Poole, and parted under a powerful impression that we should meet no more in this world; at the same time, joyfully hoping to have a happy meeting in glory." I take the following extracts from a letter I received from his last superintendent, Brother C. T. Harris:—

"My dear Bro. Wooldridge's natural disposition was good. He was gentle, affable, and firm. As a colleague, he was kind and agreeable, and one on whom I could depend. As a friend and a minister, he was faithful in the discharge of his duties. His preaching talents were good; and during the year and nine months he was able to labour at Poole, his improvement was great; and had God been pleased to spare his life, he would, doubtless, have been a great blessing to those circuits where he might have been stationed. As a christian, he was humble and fervent in prayer, and possessed a tender conscience; his experience was sound in divine things; he rested on his Lord with confidence, knew in whom he believed, and as he advanced in knowledge he increased in humility and love; he walked as a man of God. As he grew unwell, satan tempted him much; but he always spoke of his confidence in his Lord and Master. On one occasion he said to me, 'Sir, I am to be cut down in my youth; but the Lord cannot err; I know he will bring me to heaven.'

" 'The memory of the just is blessed.' This I have to say, the church has lost a promising minister, and I have lost a brother. Please to remember me to the surviving family of my deceased brother.

"I am, yours affectionately,

"C. T. Harris.

"Hereford, 1841."

Early in the year 1840, his health began to decline; his disorder was a lingering consumption. Medical aid was resorted to, but no cure could be effected. He preached for the last time on the 12th of April. The Conference of 1840, stationed him for Redruth circuit; but seeing no prospect of

being able to preach, he came home to his friends at Sparsholt, where he remained till the Lord took him to himself. He said to me a few weeks before his death, "In the early part of this affliction, I was much pressed with temptation; the most acute trial was, that I must so soon give up the office I filled in the church; but God has, in mercy, delivered me, for which I praise his holy name. It is the Lord who has afflicted me, and he cannot do wrong." He patiently endured all he had to suffer, and frequently said, "My outward man decayeth, but. the inward man is renewed day by day." Monday, January 4, 1841, his end evidently was at hand. Tuesday, 5, the Lord removed all his pain, and filled him with ecstasies of sacred joy; he sang delightfully the praise of God, and exhorted all he saw to get ready to sing with him in heaven the song of Moses and the Lamb. He continued in this happy frame till the 9th, when he triumphantly left this world of sorrow for a world of eternal bliss. His remains were interred at Sparsholt, on Jan. 13, 1841. By his request, I preached his funeral sermon at several places in the circuit, from Psalm lxxii. 26. The congregations were large; many tears were shed, and some good was done. While we learn every day and every hour, that in the midst of life we are in death, may we be prepared to live with Christ in heaven for ever, is the sincere prayer of your unworthy servant,
WILLIAM HARVEY.
(Approved by the Farringdon Circuit Quarter-day, June 21, 1841.)

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1842/45