

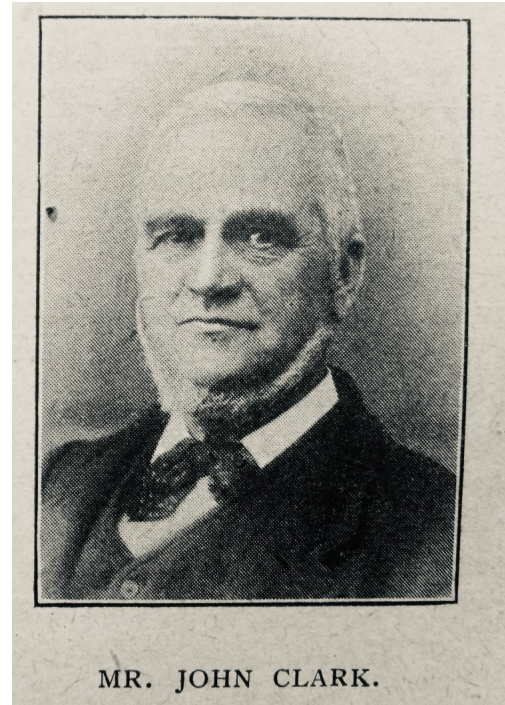
The Late Mr. John Clark of Chester-Street (1845-1919)
"The Religion of the Happy Heart"

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Will. H. Campbell

"JB" once wrote of the Master, "It was not mere mentality that made the Christ. It was SOUL." A distinct feature of Christian discipleship has been the sure discovery, by many choice spirits, of the Master's secret of influence. Their strength has been their SOUL.

As we recall the strong yet gracious personality of Mr. John Clark, we are sure that his charm and atmosphere were essentially spiritual. In him "the higher energies" were constantly released. Those who knew him best knew this to be the well-spring of his refreshing presence and the source of his undying religious influence. The SOUL of John Clark was the most impressive thing about him. In all that gave him contact with the world, his personality lived intensely and shone forth radiantly. From the poorest parishioner to the chiefest citizen he was known throughout the town and to all he was "John, the beloved." It was significant of him, as of his Master, the poor were always with him and

he was always with the poor. In ways untraceable, by his quaint, kind speeches, his sunny smile and happy song, and by his many secret gifts to the suffering poor, his incalculable kindness lit the lamp of hope again in many a heartless home and in many a homeless heart. He used to carry God's sunshine about with him and dispense it with prodigal delight everywhere he went.



His SOUL called the muse to give wings to his thoughts, and among the most treasured possessions of the family are those scores of old scraps of paper on which he penned or had printed his poems of fancy and fact. For years he was known as "the poet" in this "ancient city of Cunecestre," and his quaint rhymes and poetic rambles must be quite voluminous could they be collated and bound. His longest and one of his best known efforts in metric verse is a semi-historical piece entitled "Ye Olde Church of Cunecestre," and was originally printed in booklet form and widely appreciated. We make appreciative reference also to those lines entitled "God's Beautiful Thoughts." They were most-surely inspired by true poetic and religious contemplation of the beauties of Nature. John Clark could not escape the conviction that a world which entranced by its loveliness must bespeak a divine thought equal to the creation of such magnificence. He undoubtedly possessed the poetic genius, vision and temperament to have made him known in the county of Dora Greenwell as a singer of no mean order. The power of rich song was in his soul and it burst irresistibly into utterance. He was unversed in the art of the schools, but the singer within him made expression imperative.

We are sure, too, that it was the ever-singing soul of John Clark that made him a natural master of praise. For over forty years he was leader of divine praise in the house of God. It is probably as the divinely ordained precentor that he is mostly missed in his own church. There was a time when a

camp meeting, a prayer meeting, a school anniversary, a Christmas carol, any service of praise were unthinkable without the musical leadership of Mr. John Clark. He was the soul and genius of all these occasions, and in his own town they never attained higher degrees of excellence or power than under the harmonising spell of his gracious personality. How well we recall him, as for years he led the procession through the long town to the camp ground on "the greens" to the irresistible accompaniment of "that sweet old violin!" We never stumble across the old hymns he sang in prayer meeting or class meeting without hearing, as in echo from the Great Beyond, his mellow tenor voice calling us to new consecration by the SOUL he put into those verses:—

"Happy the souls to Jesus joined . . ."

"The church triumphant in Thy love..."

"And if our fellowship below..."

In this ministry of happy song, John Clark was the embodiment of the spirit of Primitive Methodism in the seventies. Primitive Methodism made him a singer when it captured his soul for Christ. Never once did he forget the debt he owed to his spiritual saviour. He loved the Church with a passion that was only excelled by his love for Jesus Christ. For fifty-six-years he was associated with the cause in this little northern town. He came to it when the only Connexional Chapel in the circuit was in Bland's Open. They were hard pioneer days, when ridicule and rowdy opposition were common. Yet John Clark was ever proud of being one of that dauntless band of young men who every Sunday night marched in procession, led by his fiddle, to the Ranters' Chapel. These were heroic days indeed, when the intervals between the sermons and speeches on the great camp days were filled in by little group prayer meetings under trees or in the fields, and the serving of tea was hastened by being distributed through watering cans, lest souls were lost to the Kingdom by slowness. In all this Mr. John Clark was one of the most active workers, ingenious organisers, and brave sufferers.. Through the long years his gifts to the Church, like his gifts to the poor, were always unostentatious, and like his service they knew neither lack nor limit. To the honours and fame of office he never aspired, but he found sweet delight on those occasions when he was pressed into delegateship to the district meetings, and when on two occasions he represented his Church in Conference he was inwardly more proud than a new-made knight.

Mr. John Clark was besides a gifted, original and winsome preacher of the Gospel. If joy in the Church Triumphant is to be measured by the men and women who have been won to godliness then the joy of John Clark must be exceeding great and full of glory. He had the preacher's heart and the preacher's sympathy. It was surely these, added to his native geniality and the fact that he was blessed of God with a wife whose heart was of the purest gold, that made his home an open house of glowing welcome to all the preachers. The hearthstone of that house was never cold for want of Christian company, and many hundreds there must be now who recall with unfeigned delight the gracious hospitality of the happy table of Mr. and Mrs. John Clark.

We shall remember the seventh day of September, 1919. It was the sunniest day in that month of the golden leaf. It was also the Lord's day. The church was full of people, who met to pay their last tribute of love to him who was now of the Choir Invisible. It was a calvary to many tender hearts, but the joy of Easter was in the service as truly as God had given the joy of sunshine to the day. The service was not funereal, for we sang the hymn of the happy heart that he so dearly loved. His spirit lived in the

Church that day in a new and very powerful way, and as we sang and prayed we seemed to hear his call to consecrated service.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1920/642