

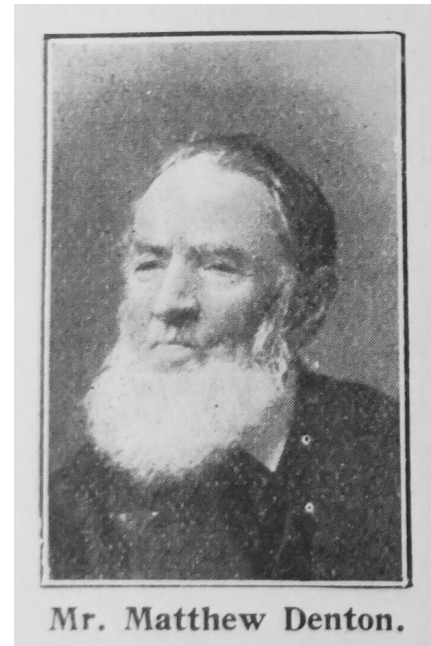
Matthew Denton

Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine by F Rudd

"The course of my long life hath reached at last,
In fragile bark o'er a tempestuous sea,
The common harbour, where must rendered be,
Account of all the actions of the past."

Longfellow.

MATTHEW DENTON was born in Beverley, November 22nd, 1810, the very year in which the first class was commenced that formed the nucleus of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Through misfortune, the circumstances of the family had been greatly reduced, so that Matthew had to begin working for his living very early. He received but little schooling, as free education and compulsory attendance at the day school were things then undreamt of. In a sketch of his life, which he has left in manuscript, I find the following entry: "I received my first religious impressions whilst listening to the conversation of two pious women, as I was walking by their side from one of the services in the old dancing room in Turners Yard (the first place in which our services were held). They talked about seeing Christ by the eye of faith, when they were first brought to God. The very words which they used fixed themselves indelibly on my mind, and, although more than 70 years have passed away since I heard the conversation, it is still as fresh in my memory as though only spoken yesterday."



He was present at the opening of the chapel erected in 1825, and after this, at a prayer meeting in a vestry behind the chapel, while listening to a hymn on the love and sufferings of Christ, he wept much, moved by a deep sense of his sinfulness. From that time he was an earnest seeker. He says: "One day when working in a field on the outskirts of the town, my sorrow for sin was so deepened that I was constrained to fall upon my knees in an old stable and cry for mercy; light came, and I was enabled to trust in Christ as my Saviour, and found peace through believing. This decision was the great event of my life." This was in 1826. He says, in referring to those early days, "The Sunday morning prayer meeting at 6 o'clock was held in special honour, and I was zealous in my attendance. On dark winter mornings people might be seen, lantern in hand, on their way to these meetings. We loved Christ, and loved each other. Sacrifices and labour Christ's cause were our delight. How precious was the Word of God in those days! How delighted we were with the services of the sanctuary!

With the new Divine life in his soul, there came a new view of life; his dormant powers were quickened. He began to read good books and had a thirst for self-improvement. The number of books at his command was very limited; books then were dear and money scarce, his parents too poor to help him, and his wages barely sufficient to find him in clothes. But difficulties are not impossibilities to one determined on mental improvement. While acting as servant to a butcher he spent his winter evenings in a hay-loft, and long after the family had retired

to rest, he read and wrote in the dim light of an oil lamp. Night after night, he spent hours in the hay-loft in reading, thinking, writing and praying, and often he had to sleep among the hay. He says in his own quaint way: "Necessity knows no law so I made this hay-loft my study. Here I kept my books, and wrote sketches of sermons. This place was my college, a piece of old board my desk, and I was my own tutor." In 1832 his name appeared on the Preachers' plan of the Hull Circuit as a local preacher, and for more than half a century he did yeoman service on this side of the East Riding of Yorkshire. Journeys were long and had to be done on foot, and it was frequently midnight ere he reached his home, tired and often footsore, but a great joy filled his heart that his Divine Master counted him worthy to labour for him.

He was one of the originators of the Sunday School at Wednesday Market, and for 24 years was engaged in Sunday School work; and here he spent some of the happiest hours of his life. For 32 years he held the office of society steward, and faithfully did he perform his duty.

In 1886, he was elected a Deed Poll Member of Conference. This was to him a most gratifying appointment, and to attend the Annual Conference was one of the joys of his declining years. It was to him a great disappointment when owing to physical weakness he was compelled to resign and forego what had been to him a great privilege.

Rev. B. Fell says: "He has been quite a character - a distinct personality - a good man, devout Christian, as loyal a Primitive Methodist, as could be found the world o'er. How he did love the Church of his choice, and how well he has served it through his long life! I always found him ready to help, as he was able and most agreeable to work with in the church, peculiar and odd in his ways sometimes, but he had no greater joy on earth than to see the work of God prosper. My relations with him were of the happiest. I very much respect his name and memory."

He was an intelligent and well-read man and a frequent contributor to our Connexional Magazines. His book of anecdotes has furnished many a telling illustration in both sermon and speeches. Only three or four years ago his articles on Primitive Methodism in Hull and District appeared in our sixpenny magazine; also articles on China, in which great empire he took a deep interest up to the last. He passed away peacefully on Monday, May 27th, 1901, being in the 91st year. The following ministers took some part in the funeral obsequies: Revs. F. Rudd, W. Swales, T. Whittaker, D.D., B. Fell and C.G. Honor. Dr. Nolluth, the respected Vicar of the Minister, was present at the graveside and joined with us in singing the hymn chosen by our departed brother. "There is a better world they say, &c." and then, at the request of Rev. F. Rudd, he pronounced the benediction, and walking with us from the cemetery spoke of the great respect he had for our departed friend, believing him to be a very good man and faithful Christian. "The memory of the just is blessed."

References

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