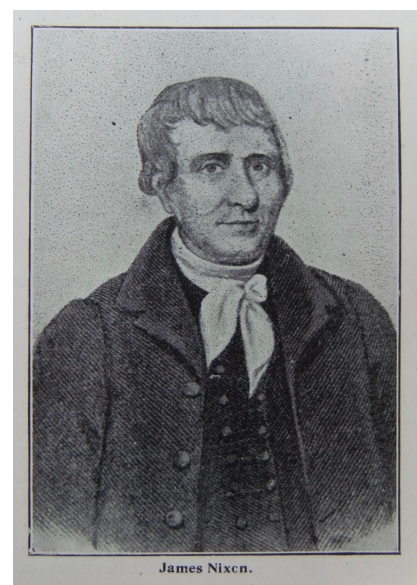


James Nixon

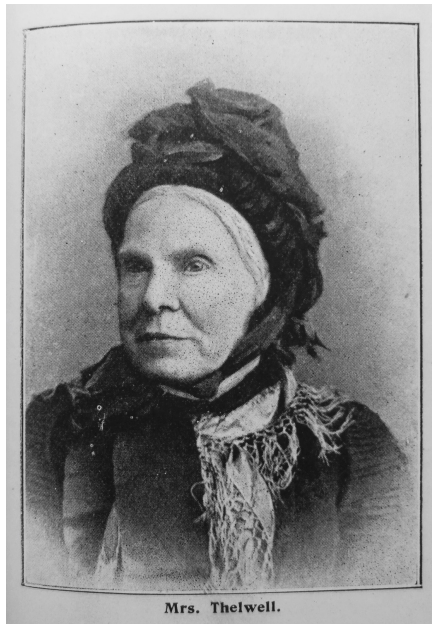
Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John T Horne

In the early years of the last century a small band of men originated a great moral movement, which very rapidly took shape, and became a new religious organisation. These men were bound together by the ties of a common Christian love, and voluntarily subordinated themselves to promote the spiritual well-being of their fellows. As a matter of convenience we speak of them as Bourne and Clowes, but in truth there were several others, specially endowed, who were equally employed in this remarkable work. We are not favoured with biographies of these men, and with the exception of Mr. Thomas Bateman, of Chorley, they do not appear, singly, to have left their impress upon the polity of our Church. But they were none the less remarkable, and if we proceed to try and briefly sketch the career of two or three, it will only be to state a few things which ought not to be allowed to pass into forgetfulness. We have members in our Tunstall Church whose childhood was spent in the atmosphere which these old saints created, and who cherish for them an affection amounting almost to reverence. They lived amongst them, and found their lives made sweeter gladder, and more blessed by their presence and their prayers; they call their children and their churches by their names; their domestic conversation sparkles with the stories of their labours; their familiar sayings are quoted, their "great sermons" are remembered and repeated, and with some, their theology is the standard by which all Christian experience is measured. The traditions which have come down to us are lenses through which we can see into their minds, and show the sphere of thought in which they lived, and the spiritual realm from which they derived their power. They interpreted the cry of the human soul, and led it to the heart of the Great Father. Endowed with the Divine Spirit, they converted the material of raw humanity into good citizens, and made it easy for the Statesmen to solve the social problems of their time. These men were spiritual centres sending out ramifications through the great seething masses of corruption in English Society. It may be a long time before full recognition is made of the service these workers rendered to our Modern England, but the forces generated by their meetings contributed very powerfully to save us from the revolution which swept over France.

Bourne and Clowes occupy the place of honour as the leaders of this heroic band, but they would be the first to admit that they were only two amongst equals. Our present purpose is to briefly outline the career of Mr, James Nixon, whom Petty, in his "History of the Connexion," states to have been the father of the Society at Tunstall. We have still living with us Mrs. Thelwell, a daughter of Mr. Nixon, who has inherited many of her father's remarkable powers. For thirty-eight years she has been a preacheress, and during her public ministrations has witnessed many remarkable manifestations of spiritual power. Although seventy-six years of age she is still vigorous, with keen intellect, tenacious memory, and is of a lovable disposition; exerting an influence for good over hundreds of lives, in almost all parts of our Empire. She is a spiritual mystic of a high order. From her I have gathered a few incidents which will enable me to give a



short sketch of Mr. Nixon. The letters which Clowes wrote to her father, and the literary material which he had prepared, were all handed over to Mr. Fletcher by some members of her family, and have never been returned, possibly because application was never made for them.



Mrs. Thelwell.

James Nixon was born on February 18th, 1785, in a cottage which is still standing at Goldenhill, in the vicinity of Tunstall, and which we reproduce. He was one of nine children, and his mother, being a widow, was not able to give him more than the scantiest education. For a short time he was sent to the Wesleyan day school at Burslem, but was very early sent to work on the pot-bank. He had served his apprenticeship when he was sixteen years of age. Although the home was poor his mother tried to train the family for God, and being a member of the Wesleyan Church, opened her house for religious meetings, and a widespread revival resulted from the services conducted in that cottage. This home influence had a restraining power upon the young man, and although he indulged in the brutal sports common to young life at that period he never completely threw off the impressions made by

his mother's godly life. In his twentieth year he experienced a change, which I had better describe in the words of his daughter: "He was deeply convinced of sin, and for a time appears to have despaired of obtaining mercy; but Mr. James Steele said to him one night after they had been to the meeting together, 'James, do you not believe that Jesus died for you?' 'I do,' he replied, 'I dare not disbelieve that.' 'That's it,' rejoined his friend; 'believe it over and over again, till you feel he died for you.' After my father had parted with his friend, and was walking homewards, he was enabled to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, was justified freely by the grace of God, and received the witness in himself that he had passed from death unto life. This happy event occurred March 4th, 1805.' He at once became a member of the Society Class of Mr. James Steele, in the Wesleyan Church at Tunstall, and retained his connection with that community until, to use his daughters words. "He was put away from the Wesleyan Connexion, partly through his zeal for camp meetings, and his fervent manner of worshipping God, but without any charge affecting his moral character." During his membership with the Wesleyan Church he had become very intimate with William Clowes, and there was between the two men, a very close friendship, as maybe learned from the Journal of Clowes, and also by the life-long correspondence which they carried on. They were companions in sorrow, for Clowes had, at about the same time, experienced the force of the Wesleyan Conference regulation against camp meetings, and had been left off the plan, deposed from leadership of his Tunstall Society Class, and dismembered. When Clowes was deposed he formed a class in his own house, and received into fellowship those persons who had been by his agency led to Christ. "*This class was the first Society Class in the Connexion*, and not the Standley Class, which was formed in March of the same year." We have persons living who tell us that the Standley Class was offered to the Wesleyan Church, and accepted by that body, and that a Mr. Slater was appointed its leader. But the class that was formed in the house of Mr. Clowes became the nucleus of the Connexion, and when Mr. James Steele was interrogated by the Nottingham Preparatory Meeting in 1819 he stated that this was the first class. From Clowes' house the class was removed to



a room belonging to Mr. T. Smith, where the young converts worshipped, and here they were joined by Mr. Nixon, Mr. T. Woodnorth (a brother-in law of Clowes), and others. At this time Mr. Nixon lived with his mother in the Grolldenhill cottage, and worked as a potter, rendering very valuable service by strengthening the hands of the workers in the infant community. Being much impressed with the success of James Crawfoot as a missionary, Messrs. Nixon and Woodnorth proposed to employ Clowes to devote himself entirely to missionary work, for which they believed him specially fitted. Before deciding on this important subject Clowes spent five days and nights in fasting and prayer for guidance from God, and, if it were the Lord's will, for endowment for the work. Ultimately, it was made clear to Clowes that he must "go," and he went forth from that little chamber, with a Divine power resting upon him, to his first service as an evangelist, which he held on a pot-bank at Tunstall. It need hardly be recorded that a marvellous manifestation of spiritual power attended the preaching of the "word "; and this was the beginning of that wonderful evangelistic career during which Clowes went like a white flame of holiness throughout England. The proposal of Nixon and Woodnorth to pay Clowes ten shillings per Week, oftentimes involved Nixon in heavy suffering. It sometimes happened that work was short, and Mrs. Thelwell tells of one experience which was related by her father, in which he was required to make a great sacrifice. It was arranged that Woodnorth and Nixon should pay Clowes on alternate Saturdays. Once when it was the turn for Nixon to pay, his whole weekly wage was only ten shillings and sixpence. He, however, paid the money, leaving him but sixpence to give his mother with which to supply the household needs. The next morning, Sunday, he was planned at a place a long journey from Tunstall, to which he started without any food, gathering blackberries from the hedge-rows to satisfy his hunger. He conducted three services, but no one offered him bread. Returning to his home, footsore and hungered, he called at a friend's house to beg food. The door was bolted, for all had retired for the night. In trying

the door he awoke the sleeping man, who quickly admitted his friend, after which he placed before the famishing man a plentiful supply, which revived his expended powers, and enabled him to reach his home in the early hours of the morning. This may be taken as a sample of the many privations which these heroic men voluntarily endured in obedience to the behests of conscience.

Before separation from the Wesleyan body he had impressed his fellow-workers with his wonderful power and high piety. He lived in close communion with God, “walked with God,” spent much time in secret prayer, and was mighty in Scripture. He was a man of strong will, and when he had reached a conclusion that a certain course was right, he could not easily be dissuaded from his opinion.

After leaving the Wesleyan Church a wide sphere for usefulness was found in the evangelistic and aggressive work of the young community, and his name appears on the first written plan.

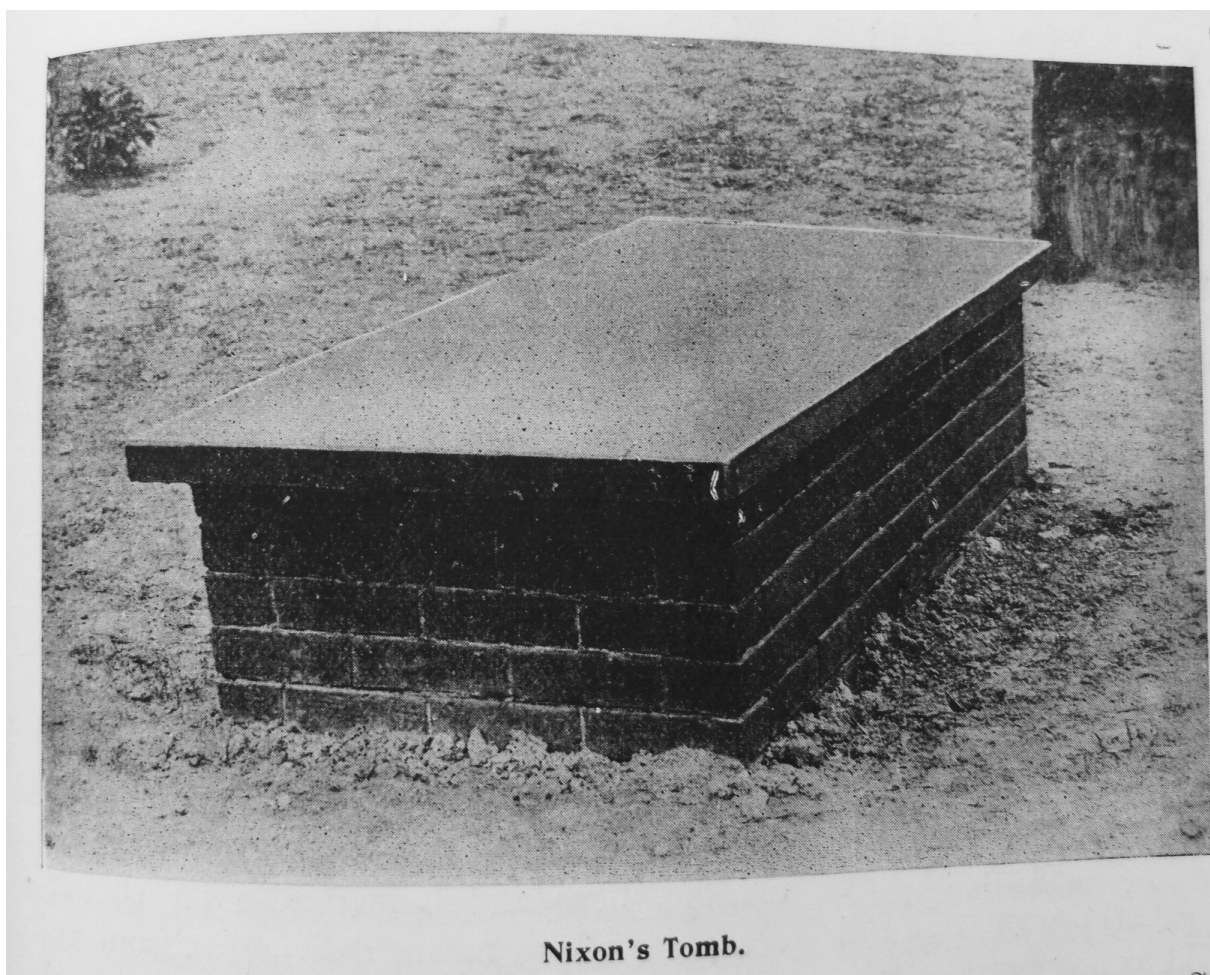
Many strange and exciting incidents occurred in the little “Cottage Chapel,” Cross Street. At one time there were two parties, and as a consequence, very often disputes. So high did feeling rise, that a caretaker had to be left in charge of the premises. Now “James,” as Mr. Nixon was familiarly called, was very retiring, but one night the caretaker was overpowered by four strong men, who had come to the chapel for the purpose of doing all the mischief possible. Information of this state of affairs reached Mr. Nixon, just as he had retired to bed for the night. By his bedside was a pair of new breeches, which he hurriedly pulled on, and arming himself with the kitchen poker for a weapon, he at once, half dressed, proceeded to the scene of disturbance. Upon reaching the chapel he quickly routed the assailants; and by threats, significant brandishing of the poker, and other means, chased them to Scotia Road, nearly a mile from the chapel. I cannot ascertain whether personal violence was used, but “James” returned home late that night with the poker badly bent, and his breeches slit in many a place. Mrs. Thelwell has a vivid remembrance of that redoubtable weapon, and says that it was kept for many years afterwards in the family.

Mr. James Nixon was a very powerful preacher. He made a profound impression at the second Camp Meeting, July, 1807. Clowes writes in his Journal:— “My friend James Nixon laboured with extraordinary power and effect. I and many others were greatly struck with the solemnity and power which attended his ministrations. In giving out the hymn which begins with ‘Stop, poor sinner; stop and think,’ every word appeared to shake the multitude as the wind does the forest leaves.”

One Wednesday evening the saintly Fletcher attended the service at Tunstall, and as Nixon preached, it is said that “Fletcher wept like a child,” and at the close of the sermon, he thanked Nixon, saying “Oh, James, I never knew how to preach like you.” This was a high tribute from a man like Fletcher. Long and weary journeys he undertook to preach the Word, and his message was frequently attended with uncommon power. As a class-leader he excelled; his members found in him a guide and counsellor who cared both for their temporal and spiritual welfare. He never went to his class meeting without first spending a long time in earnest prayer for the right words to be given him; and his members still speak of his counsels rich in wisdom, and his exhortations being Scriptural and savoury. For many years he took a very influential part in the business affairs of the Connexion as a member of the General Committee, and was honoured by selection as a permanent member of the Conference, whose annual assemblies he generally attended.

It remains for us to say that Mr. Nixon was married to Mary Barlow on June 27th, 1818.

For some months before his death he had premonitions of his end. Asthma and diabetes had long troubled him. He told the members of his Society class on March 16th, 1857, that while at prayer before coming to the meeting he had been impressed that this might be his last time of meeting them, and so it proved, for on April 8th, 1857, in the seventy-second year of his age, the Great Master called James Nixon to the Higher Service, and the world was so much the poorer by his removal. His mortal remains were carried to their earthly home by good men and true, who had been his "comrades in arms," and he was laid in the burying ground belonging to Christ Church, Tunstall. Petty says that "he had been appointed by the General Committee to assist at the Jubilee Camp Meeting on Mow Hill, held in the following month; but the great Head of the Church removed him to the regions above, and he spent that day in the society of the blessed."



The biography of James Nixon derives interest from his close friendship with William Clowes. Mrs. Thelwell tells me that there existed between Nixon and Clowes such close affinity that her father "had a full knowledge of Clowes's movements while he was on his missionary tours." There was a kind of spiritual telepathy between the men. One spirit seemed to dominate the two bodies, and in any great conflict in which one was engaged the other was a sharer. Nixon could tell by spiritual instinct what Clowes was doing at Hull; and Clowes, by some mysterious influence, could move upon the Spirit of Nixon. The latter had some indefinable quality by which he could project his powers

through space, and watch the movements of his friend. For instance, during one of the visits which Clowes made to Birmingham, Nixon at Tunstall saw the coach arrive in the Midland town. He watched Clowes alight, and noticed that Mr. G., who was there to meet the traveller, began to speak to Clowes. Mr. Clowes made some angry reply, after which he was led off to his host. A short time after, when Clowes came to Tunstall, Nixon told him of his visit to Birmingham, and enquired the nature of the conversation on his arrival, and the cause of the difference between him and Mr. G. "Oh," said Clowes, "I was reprimanding him for announcing that I should take so many services during my visit, as I felt I had not sufficient strength." This might be treated as of little account, but Mrs. Thelwell tells many other incidents illustrating the working of the same mysterious force which bound these men in such close affinity. Take this as a specimen. During a time of great Connexional trial, while Clowes was working at Hull, he wrote to Nixon, inviting him to Hull, as he wanted his help. For a time he was unwilling to accept the invitation, but at last the feeling that he must go became so powerful that he could no longer resist. When he reached Hull he was met by Clowes, who took him direct to his home and they spent together the whole night in prayer. Clowes did not tell Nixon the nature of his trouble until they had been praying three hours. He then informed him that the churches in Hull were passing through a severe crisis, caused by the misconduct of certain persons whom he named. Mrs. Thelwell distinctly states that during that night of prayer, both Clowes and Nixon clearly saw the forms of the four leaders in the agitation, and that Clowes gave to Nixon his opinion respecting these men. They continued their prayers for a further three hours, and the four forms gradually disappeared. After six hours spent in prayer they rose from their knees with the assurance of victory.

This was not the only time when Nixon saw, or believed that he saw, these persons during his prayers. Some months after his return from Hull, Nixon received from Clowes a letter telling him that he wanted his help "in knee work." Mrs. Thelwell says that she vividly remembers her father saying that he would have family worship, after which Mrs. Nixon and the children could go to rest, as he was "going to help Clowes." Some time afterwards, prompted by curiosity, she stole down the stairs, and watched her father engaged in prayer. "He did not lean forward as many do when praying, but maintained his body erect. For six hours he prayed that night," and he afterwards told his daughter that he distinctly saw the four persons whom he had seen when praying with Clowes at Hull, and he wrestled with God until he was assured of victory. On the same night, and during the same hours, Mr. and Mrs. Clowes were praying at Hull, and after a long time Mrs. Clowes said to her husband, "We have the victory, and dear Nixon is praying. I know it, and you can tell him I say so." These facts Clowes communicated to Nixon by letter which he received shortly afterwards, and which were placed with others of Clowes's letters.

We have neither the time nor space to enter into an explanation, or an attempted explanation of these features in the life of Mr. Nixon. There are certain great laws which give us a key to the solution, but we have already exceeded our limits. With the permission of the Editor, we will, in the near future, attempt to formulate a working hypothesis sufficiently comprehensive to embrace the psychic phenomena shown by the psychical affinity between Nixon and Clowes, and illustrate it from the remarkable collection which Mrs. Thelwell has made of incidents in the life of her venerated father. Our work to-day is simply to record one or two of these facts; and reserve the others to verify the theory which they illustrate.

We do not say that James Nixon was perfect — he would be the first to dispute his right to that — but we do say that he was good. He dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and though no biography of him may be written by man, his record is on high and his name shall shine resplendent as the flashing diamond in that day when God shall make up his jewels.

References

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