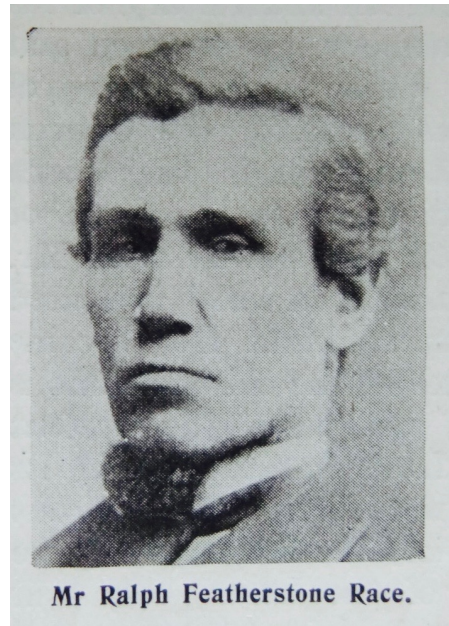


Ralph Featherstone Race

Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine

IN the death of R. F. Race, of Ashgillhead Harwood, Teesdale Methodism has lost a lay preacher of considerable mental force and culture, high moral character and eminent pulpit power. He was the youngest son of Joseph and Isabella Race, and was born at Seldom Seen, Harwood, on February 15th, 1835.

His mother's maiden name was Featherstone, and she was a native of Upper Weardale. She is described by one who knew her well as, "an exceptionally fine woman in her position in society. She had a fine, tall presence, an active brain, and an earnest, devout spirit." In what is known in Harwood as "the Great Revival," she took a leading part all through. She was one of the little company that was present at the first cottage prayer meeting. Whatever the distance, or however stormy the weather, "Bella Race," as she was familiarly called, was always present, frequently bringing her son Featherstone with her, who was then some nine or ten years of age." How much Ralph Featherstone Race owed to that mother cannot be definitely stated. From her he inherited an active mind, a love of reading, and a quenchless thirst for knowledge; and her devout and saintly life was the most potent influence in leading him to full decision for Christ. His conversion took place when he was about fifteen years of age. His early education was confined to the village school in Harwood, conducted by Mr. James, a native of Weardale, and comprised instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography and English grammar. Being a sharp active boy, he took a front position in the school. The resident clergyman recognised the intelligence of the boy, and on the occasion of his conversion urged him to join the Church of England, with a view to being trained for a schoolmaster or clergyman. But Featherstone Race was true to the Church of his saintly mother, and at once joined the Primitive Methodist Church, and consecrated his whole life to its service. When about seventeen years of age he commenced to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, and as a true minister of Jesus Christ he endeavoured to fit himself for that position. He became an extensive reader of the best literature, and a diligent student of the Word of God. In sermon literature his choice authors seem to have been F.W. Robertson, of Brighton, and Dr. A. Maclaren, of Manchester. He read with intelligent interest and appreciation the works of Dr. Joseph Cook, of Boston, and the late Professor Drummond. He took a deep interest in the history of the great Methodist Churches, and at the time of his death he was engaged in re-reading Dr. Gregory's work, "Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism, 1827-1852."



Mr Ralph Featherstone Race.

An intimate friend tells us that, when a young man, Featherstone Race passed through a very severe mental struggle with doubts and unbelief. The very foundations of Christian truth seemed to be giving way beneath his feet. His mind in active quest of the truth was seeking a rational basis on which to rest his faith. The traditional faith of his boyhood and youth was not enough to satisfy the demands of an awakened intellect. His soul demanded a rational ground on which his faith in

Christian truth might rest. And to Featherstone Race, as to thousands of others, this was a time of severe mental struggle. But what Tennyson said of his friend Hallam may be truly said of him.

“He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them; thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.”

Featherstone Race came through that struggle, and found the clearer vision and the stronger faith. And in after years his preaching was marked by a tone of triumphant certainty. He spoke as one who knew the truth, whose mind was fully and deeply convinced and who had not a shred of doubt. He could say with Paul, “I am not ashamed, for I know Him whom I have believed.” And also with John, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren”; and again, “We know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He gave us.” And it was this tone of triumphant certainty in relation to the great verities of the Christian religion that gave to his ministry its freshness and power. For more than forty-eight years his pulpit services were eagerly sought after and warmly welcomed in his own native dale, and even in neighbouring stations. The pulpit was his throne. His greatest ambition was to be a preacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ. On more than one occasion Mr. Race had represented his station in the District Meeting, and on two occasions he has represented the Sunderland District in the Annual Conference in Manchester and Hull. These honours were deserved, but not sought after. He was no mere ecclesiastic. He was, above all, a preacher. This was the work he loved best and studied for; and it was as a preacher of the Word that he rendered eminent service to the Primitive Methodist Church. Mr. Race put a very high estimate on the work of a Christian ministry, and he studied “to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” He carefully prepared himself for his pulpit work, and kept his own mind fresh and vigorous to the last by the study of the best literature. The last book that I supplied him with, about three weeks before his death, was “The Ascent of Man,” by the late professor Drummond. He was a student to the last, and this gave to his ministry a continuous freshness and vigour, a kind of perennial youth. In Mr. Race’s preaching there was a very happy combination of intellectual vigour, intense emotion and practical truth. His sermons were not the mere products of a vigorous intellect of the “dry as dust” type, they were full of passionate earnestness, and often intensely practical.

The Rev. W. A. French, of Shildon, says of him: “In the death of Featherstone Race, of Harwood, Teesdale has lost one of its most discerning and intelligent dalesmen, and the Primitive Methodist Church a loyal member and one who has served the Church with conspicuous ability for many years as a local preacher. He was a keen observer of men and things, and a true lover of a good book, a thinker of considerable merit. To find him with you in any disputed matter of church administration at once gave you confidence that the point would be settled to your satisfaction, but to find him against you was enough to give you pause. He loved the Primitive Methodist Church, delighted in its prosperity, held in the highest esteem the ministers, and ever regarded it as a privilege and an honour when called upon to fill the position of delegate to District Meeting or Conference. I count it as one of my special privileges to have known him, to have had the pleasure of his intellectual and spiritual fellowship, and to have sojourned in his hospitable home that was ever open to the minister

of his Church."

He was a man of tall commanding presence, with a somewhat shrill, but clear, ringing voice, and was in special request for camp meeting occasions. His last sermon was preached in Harwood on November 25th, 1900, from the 11th Psalm, 3rd verse. "If the foundations be destroyed, What can the righteous do?" His last affliction was very short. He was attacked by a bronchial affection about Friday, January 11th, 1901 and on Thursday morning, January 24th he crossed the bar and entered into rest. His death was due to heart weakness, from which he had suffered for some two years.

It was my privilege to visit him on the Sunday previous to his death, January 20th, and to find him calm and trustful. He was resting on the Rock of Ages. In life and in death he knew Him whom he had believed. His life was a living witness to the power of Jesus Christ. He is not lost, but gone before. His sorrowing widow and family have much to comfort them in the sweet remembrances of his piety and devotion. May their father's God be theirs, and may the mantle of the ascended Elijah fall upon his sons and upon many a young Elisha.

J.W.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine [1902/66](#)