

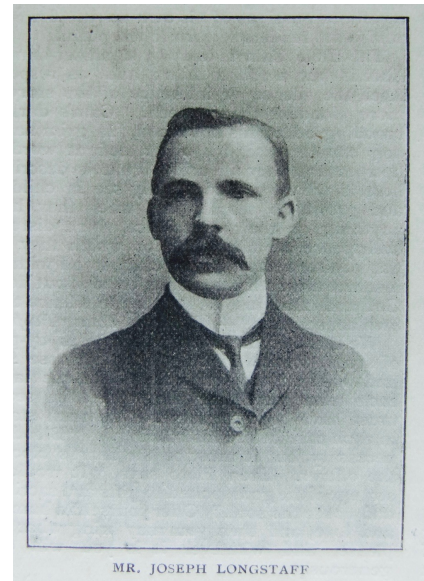
Joseph Longstaff

Transcription of Sketch in the Christian Messenger by W.M. Patterson

There is always a pleasure in writing or speaking about a good and able man - a man of some proportions, whose brains and hands are always full, whose outlook is capacious, and who has an aptitude for a variety of activities - a dash of humour withal, and social, of course.

Such is Joseph Longstaff, and the Connexion possesses few men to whom it is a heavier debtor.

Mr. Longstaff is in the succession. He was born at Shildon in 1863, but he is careful it should be known that his forbears belonged to the dales. (How tenaciously those dalesmen cling to the wild region of their origin!) His grandfather was one of the first adherents of Primitive Methodism in Weardale, and was for many years a local preacher.



From his earliest days Mr. Longstaff was surrounded with pure and healthy influences. Living in the fear of the Lord, actively engaged in Christian work, his parents inspired him with high ideas and ideals. In some senses he was blessed with an ideal home. Thus surrounded day by day with an atmosphere which nurtures the good and true in the young mind and heart, coupled with the influence of the Sunday school, he made an early decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He was, indeed, only twelve years of age when he cherished this resolve.

Soon he became a teacher, and while yet a lad he was urged to enter the pulpit. He was 23, however, before he could be induced to face such a responsibility. Some of his friends hoped he was destined for the ministry. That he did not entertain the idea was a disappointment to not a few who felt that his proper sphere was in the larger vocation of a travelling preacher.

Mr. Longstaff removed to Newcastle in 1890, and joined Maple Street Society. Since then he has taken a fair share of pulpit work, having preached in nearly all the Circuits of the Sunderland and Newcastle District, and in many outside of it. Often he has been privileged to see visible results from his ministrations in souls deciding for Christ. Like most other ardent spirits, he has frequently had to be satisfied with the hope that his labour was not in vain.

As a preacher Mr. Longstaff holds a high place amongst lay ministers. He puts his conscience into his work, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God. With refined tastes, he hates slovenliness in pulpit work. To him it is a great thing to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and he lends the best that is in him to the work of preparation.

He is a voracious reader, and no man who has had constant and actual fellowship with the "Kings o' Men" can be unfurnished to help his fellows. Carlyle, Wordsworth, Browning, and Whittier are his

favourite authors, and no more need be said of the texture of such a mind. Except this, perhaps: Mr. Longstaff is an accountant by profession, and the continual exercise of severe analysis and method - essential qualities in a man who has to grapple with the tangled mass of figures perpetually - has been of enormous benefit to him as a preacher.

Never shall I forget a camp meeting, held on the site on which Kingsley Terrace Church, Newcastle, now stands. Three preachers were planned in the afternoon. No matter who the other two were, Mr. Longstaff was complete master of the situation. It was a psychological occasion.

Just a short specimen of his style:- "The Christ-possessed man climbs the mount, but does not forsake the valley. He delights to revel amid the splendours of spirituul altitudes, but he remembers that below there is a surging, struggling tide of humanity needing sympathy and help; and the higher he mounts the deeper he descends. . . True spiritual life includes the revelation of the Mount, and » the practical humanities of the valley; and the spiritual energy gained in the uplands should lead to increased zeal and vigour amid the haunts of men."

Two worlds meet in a spirit with such insight of Divine things and such grasp of human need and Christian responsibility.

Naturally the worship portion of the services in our sanctuaries appeals with special force to a mind like this. Mr. Longstaff has more of the aggressive in his nature than the so-called ascetic; though he is far from being insensible to the charms of asceticism in its rational manifestations. But he is aesthetic in a high degree. Music captivated him when a boy. Its domination grew with his growth. In his manhood it has been his master passion. He is organist and choirmaster at Maple Street, a post he has held for ten years, and the service of praise in that chapel is a delightful exercise. His great joy is that most of the members of his choir are identified with the church and active members therein. As a prominent official of the Sunderland and Newcastle Psalmody Association, Mr. Longstaff has done much for the success of that very popular and useful institution.

Space forbids following Mr. Longstaff in all his manifold and varied labour. Recognising that he owes much to the church with which he is associated, he freely gives much. Actively engaged in school work, he is also Circuit Secretary, a member of the District Committee, and otherwise employed in the work of the denomination. He has been sent to District Meeting by his Circuit, and in 1899 represented the District in the Conference at Grimsby. In the full possession of all his valuable powers, he is capable of doing grander work than ever for his Sovereign Lord and his fellows. May his achievements expand with the years and larger and yet larger horizons greet his coming days.

References

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