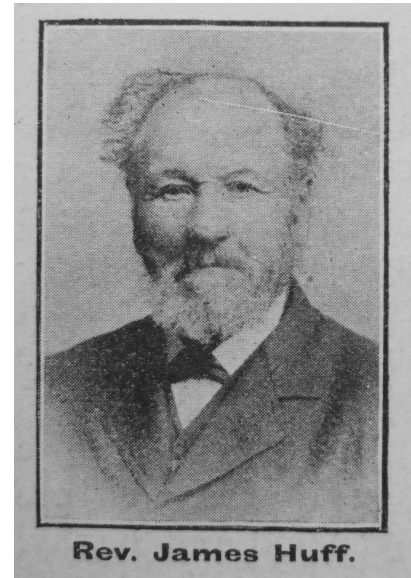


Rev James Huff

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J Ferguson

Came into life May 8th, 1816, at Snead, two and a half miles north-west of the ancient town of Bishop's Castle, in the County of Montgomery and in sight of the Salopian Hills. His father and mother were industrious and honest and were strict and close Episcopalians. James was carefully taught to correctly repeat the collects and catechism. His parents earnestly impressed him with the thought that Jehovah was everywhere and saw all things and all people. James, like the boys of the toilers, suffered educationally from the notion that learning was for the wealthy. James longed for the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but it was not for him who was born to till the field or make a barrow. His first academy was the house of the village dame, who imperfectly taught him to read and write. At the age of eight he trained his throat, by frightening birds from the spring corn, and his master also sent him into his fields to watch swine - even these conditions fledged his soul and sent it in search through Nature for Nature's God. At the early age of twelve he left home to be a plough boy for £1 for the first year, and for the second - his parting was sad and the loss was great. In this situation the long dark nights and lonely hours fed his mental hunger - he needed a star to guide him. Magicians were few and books were dear and scarce, but the best of books was at hand. In this Lamp to human feet he discovered the requisite light and interest. He read old English ballads and songs, and committed scores of them to memory, which, like a peculiarly clad porter, ushered him into a new 'world. At this time he regularly went to the Episcopal church and obeyed her commands - the priest to him was the only representative of God. And yet his soul found no satisfaction through her ritual, he sighed for fellowship with the living. God. He says his Episcopal confirmation only confirmed him in his sins, - no light from Christ filled his soul. He saw himself a sinner, and felt the agony and burden of an unregenerate heart - the prevenient grace descending had started a heart-cry that none but God could hush. Sometimes he had peace of mind, at other times he was full of doubts and fears respecting his acceptance with God. He began to attend the services at the Primitive Methodist church a mile away. Often when the nights were dark and stormy he went alone to the services and returned to find the doors closed against him, to spend his night in the barn which offered shelter and litter. It was while listening to Miss Bowen - sister of the sainted Robert Bowen, and subsequently wife of the lovingly remembered Phillip Pugh - that our friend came into the early morning of God, in the following class meeting all his night departed. To quote his words so mystical, he says - "I cannot say whether it was imagination or a reality, but to me at that time it was very real. I saw the Saviour at the far end of the chapel looking at me. I wept much, I wiped the tears from my eyes and looked again at the Saviour, who was still in the same position. I still kept looking at Him, when suddenly I was struck upon the head by what appeared to me to be a ball of fire, I fell from the seat flat upon the floor. I felt that my inside was all on fire, and I could not forbear shouting, Glory! Glory!! for sometime. Before the meeting closed the leader especially prayed for me, and the fire blazed again in my soul and I felt that Christ had baptised me with the Holy Ghost. Yes, that was to me the baptism of fire." These psychological phenomena will puzzle and seriously



perplex those people who try to decide Divine manifestations by the limited *data* of their philosophy. We readily admit that some human elements entered into this wonderful experience of my friend, but the spiritually Divine governed, and left unearthly marks upon his life, experience and work which outlasted sixty years. We must not limit the Holy One of Israel. His saints who live the higher life and in the spirit dwell, may expect visions too glorious for human words. James with open eyes and loving heart told the villagers what God had done for him, and in a few months some ten people came into the kingdom of Christ. My friend suffered much persecution - men sought by every means to put stumbling blocks in his way; he was sneered at and ill-treated on account of the ideas he was known to hold, but in all he was more than a conqueror. In June, 1836, when twenty years of age, his name appeared on the Bishop's Castle Circuit Plan but his modesty and felt lack of needful intelligence hindered his acceptance of this onerous work. It was not till September he yoked this responsibility. Among his early hearers were his father and mother, and his text was (John xix., 26). "Woman, behold thy Son."

At night, in his own father's house, he preached from Matt. iii., 7. The success of this day settled his course, and so it came to pass that during the years of his local preachership - he never wilfully neglected an appointment, although planned nearly every Sunday, most of his journeys being from *twelve* to *twenty* miles without horse, bicycle or train. He showed the sincerity of his love by his labour, and many were led by him to Christ his Lord. In 1841, he received a call for the public ministry from three circuits - Motcombe, St. Ives and Ludlow. In modesty he said "No" to each call, but such was his struggling state of mind, that he promised the Lord that if he received another call from his Church he would go. — "Here am I send me." His next call came in 1842, from his own circuit (Bishop's Castle), and for one year he preached the word in season and out of season. He subsequently travelled in Ludlow, Nantwich, and Burland, Oswestry, Longton branch of the Tunstall Circuit, Rubery branch of the Birmingham Circuit, Bromyard, Hadnall, Prees Green, Minsterley, Presteign, Congleton, Darlaston, Wrockwardine Wood, Dudley, Lichfield, Bilston (4 years), Tipton (five years), and Old Hill. He was elected deed poll member 1886, superannuated in 1887, and went to reside at Bishop's Castle.

Our friend married twice - first Miss Ellen Woolley, whose relatives still reside not far from the town where his remains await the resurrection. He had one son and two daughters, the elder of whom has crossed to the other side leaving children to mourn their loss; the son and daughter still linger to speak of the grace that made and adorned their father. More than forty years ago he was married to Miss Martha Wilson, whose incoming to his completed manse was light, comfort and help, and her departure to God some years past left a saddening shadow.

Our friend was an earnest student. He gave attention to reading. His thirst for knowledge and ceaseless efforts to acquire it early appeared in his Christian life. His regeneration affected the whole man - intellect and heart pulsated with new forces. He loved theology - the science of God - and eagerly read the great Puritans, such as Howe and Baxter; the theology that came into life and made men pure-hearted and happy, zealous and morally strong, he accepted; but that which created doubt about God's word given to encourage faith he rejected. He loved the scholarly student who went to the Scriptures with reverent mind and thus sought to know the thoughts of God. He was a man of persevering energy - this was seen in his young manhood days as a farm labourer, his industry gained for him the confidence and respect of his master and secured the faith of his fellow-

labourers. After his conversion he apprenticed himself to the combined trade of wheelwright and carpenter. It was during the *three* years spent with Mr. Francis he went to a night school held by Mr. John Jones, a local preacher, and so in a degree prepared himself for his public work.

As a Christian, he was a lover of peace. His brethren he held in much esteem, and the greater their talents and successes the more was kindled his appreciation. The work of godly laymen filled him with gratitude. He had an eye to goodness, he inherited a vigorous constitution, was hopeful. A man of faith, and yet he worked in his circuit as if success depended upon the character and extent of his labour – he proved his faith by his works.

He was a cheerful Christian, carried psalms in his heart, - in everything gave thanks. His happy laugh was sweetly infectious. Our friend was best seen in a grand revival of religion. He was a thorough Methodist in taste and in methods of work. He knew the way to Christ, and the convicted sinner would soon find by our friend's guidance the way to His Cross. He was much beloved by his brethren and especially those who worked under his superintendency. He was uncursed by cruel jealousy, the fire of envy never scorched his being, and his love remained undiminished by the ministerial prosperity or popularity of his colleagues. The Rev. W. Wright, of Scarborough, says - "Forty-nine years this last May (1903), I was brought to God under his ministry, and ever since loved him as my father in the gospel." The Rev. T. Richards, who was led to Christ by our glorified father, said: "He was the best man I ever saw among people seeking the Lord, and his ministry for many years showed a wondrous power." Our aged friend, the Rev. C. Smallman, who had preached the gospel between sixty and seventy years and who knew our friend, spoke in cheery words of their early fellowship more than sixty years ago, and expressed the good hope that they will soon meet in heaven, and enjoy eternal fellowship." The Rev. J. Banes, who travelled with him in Minsterley, the scene of his greatest triumphs says, "I can never forget the happy days I had with him. His godly life deeply impressed my young mind and the influence has never left me. - Those old times and his name will be ever most dear to me." The Rev. T.G. Dyke, says:- "Brother Huff was a kind husband, a gentle and loving father, a good friend, and a faithful and true Christian. I shall ever remember with pleasure the two years we spent together in Dudley, and his great kindness to me as the Superintendent of that circuit. He was a man of simple faith in the gospel, of great zeal in its promotion, and many will have to thank the Lord for ever for his faithful ministry."

The Rev. Geo. Cook, says:- "I have known James Huff, for thirty-six years. His high character, intense zeal, strong faith and untiring labours and marvellous successes, won for him a very warm place in the hearts of thousands. His soul was aflame with love for Christ and for souls. He has lived a long and noble life."

As a friend, he was faithful, perpetual and ever operative, especially when his friend was not present to misunderstand his eulogistic Words.

As a parent, his children's estimate will rank the highest; those who, like the writer, have lived with him will not forget his cheerful love and the sacrifices it led him to make for their good. As a minister, his conversion was genuine. He had no doubt of this or of his call to the work of the ministry – his assurance was power. He was faithful to Evangelical truth and to his conscience.

During his sixteen years of superannuation he preached and visited as if he were the second minister.

He was successful in winning men to Christ. It was said in 1887, when he superannuated that out of sixty ministers called out of the county of Shropshire, forty owed their conversion to the ministry of James Huff. The secret of his success lay in his private prayer, his tears, his practical sympathy with men, his thoughts ever were "What can I do to save men and glorify God."

He was a lover of Primitive Methodism, believed in her mission and was faithful to her claims. He has gone to his reward. The General Committee and the West Midland District Committee through the Revs. R. Bryant and J. Ferguson, who preached a memorial sermon, expressed their appreciation of his character and work, and their loss at his removal from us. He ascended on Saturday morning, at 10.55, July 11th, 1903, eighty-seven years of age. His life was long and earnest and his glorification certain.

References

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