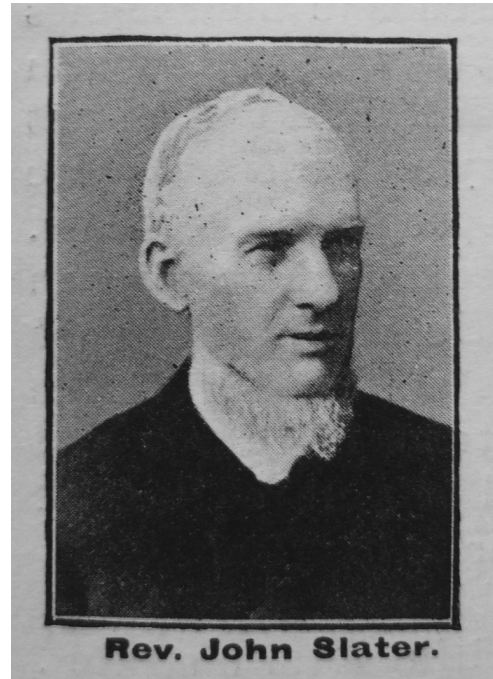


## Rev John Slater

### Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by S.S. Henshall

John Slater was born at Barnoldswick, near Colne, Lancashire, August 1st, 1838, and he passed in triumph home to God on Tuesday, March 17th, 1903, after having for many years served his generation with fruitfulness and power.

In early life he was favoured with few social or educational advantages. He was one of a family of seven. His parents were poor, belonging to the operative classes. His father died while he was yet very young, leaving his mother to struggle with her large family in times when work was scarce, wages low and bread dear. Under these circumstances he had little or no schooling, and, in his tender years, was sent to the factory to help earn a trifle towards the maintenance of the household. He was a brisk, smart lad, full of frolic, mirth and fun, always ready for a bit of mischief and eager to seize the opportunity of indulging in a roguish trick. He was leader and hero among the more adventurous spirits of his own age.



Happily the religious influence entered into his young life and effectively checked and cured all disposition towards a wicked course, turned his steps into the higher paths and consumed his energies in useful pursuits. In the Congregational Sunday School, at Summit, where his mother with her household had gone to reside, he acquired the art of reading and a knowledge of the Scriptures. At sixteen he was deeply impressed under a sermon by one of our local preachers. Immediately afterwards his conversion was completed in a marvellous revival that was witnessed among our people and that spread throughout the neighbourhood. The new birth to him meant new beginnings. He immediately engaged in all kinds of Christian work. He became a Sunday school teacher, an open-air speaker; he took an active part in cottage prayer meetings, and in aggressive evangelistic enterprises. His intelligence, zeal and devotion commended him to the Church; and the young, ardent disciple was soon promoted to higher honours and to wider spheres of influence and labour. He was placed on the plan of the Knowlwood Circuit to which the society at Summit, belonged. He toiled to equip himself creditably for his sacred task. He read and studied with diligence such books as his limited means would enable him to purchase. He grew in knowledge and in grace, in stores of information and power for service. So acceptable and successful was he as a preacher of the Gospel that he was called by his native circuit into the regular ministry in 1860, when he was twenty-two years of age.

The fact that by the voice of his brethren he was chosen to labour among them as a travelling preacher was a signal proof of the progress he had made and the promise he had given. Their confidence and hopes in him were abundantly fulfilled. He struggled and prayed to be worthy of his

high vocation, and, without doubt, he advanced the ranks of that valiant generation of men who did so much to build up the Kingdom of God in our churches and to further the material interests and the moral authority of Primitive Methodism throughout the land. Besides Knowlwood he exercised his ministry in the following circuits:- Manchester First, Manchester Third, Manchester Fourth, Chester Fourth (twice), Oldham Second, Blackburn, Bury, Liverpool Third, Rochdale, Sheffield Fifth, Third, and Fourth.

He travelled 43 years. He was invariably favoured with marks of prosperity. In some circuits gracious revivals were witnessed, in all the Word was with signs following. The record of his stations shows that conversions were frequent and congregations increased; Sunday schools also flourished, properties were improved and new causes were established. The cities of Manchester and Sheffield were the scenes of his longest residence and of his greatest successes.

In Manchester he spent fifteen years, eleven of them being at Higher Ardwick, where the friends had already committed themselves to a building scheme to cost £14,000. He entered into the movement with all his heart and energy, erected magnificent premises, consisting of church, schools and manse, and under his direction, and chiefly by his plodding and determined efforts, £10,000 were raised toward the project. He was fourteen years in Sheffield and, during his stay in the Fifth Circuit, Abbeydale Church was built; while in the Fourth Circuit Hoyle Street Sunday Schools were erected.

Mr. Slater's preaching was of a practical, experimental, rather than of a theological or philosophical order. His themes were evangelical. They were discussed in a plain, lucid style. His illustrations were for the most part drawn from the life of the people, and so appealed to the life of the people. His discourses were charged with warm fervent feeling. They were aimed at the heart rather than the intellect. They were delivered with considerable unction, in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. They often produced marked effect, stirred the deepest emotions of the hearers. His supreme purpose was to win recruits for the army of the King. He sought direct and immediate results. He urged instant decision and had the joy of seeing a goodly number of souls brought to embrace the salvation of God.

As a public speaker Mr. Slater was in great and constant request. He was decidedly a favourite at large gatherings. With the insight of a seer, and the seriousness of a statesman, he combined the gift of humour. He could tell a story, perpetrate a joke; but the story and joke were meant to serve a useful purpose. They were intended to arrest attention, teach a truth, illumine a thought, enliven and apply an argument. His speeches might not, perhaps, be polished specimens of the oratorical art, but they were the telling, forceful utterances of one who had deep convictions, who had made a careful study of human nature, knew how to marshal his facts, and possess his hearers with his own enthusiasm. His aid was solicited for all sorts of good causes - religious, philanthropic, political, social - and it was fully and unstintedly given.

Mr. Slater was a wise and diligent pastor. Some of the best work of his life was done in this connection. He was the friend and counsellor of his people. He took deep personal interest in their welfare. He sympathised with them in their sorrows, and sought to direct them in their business and domestic troubles. He was always ready to cheer and comfort the distressed. His presence in their homes was welcomed. He brought sunshine with him, balm for the wounded, messages of rest and

solace for the weary and the sad. He knew and recognised his people in the street. The poorest among them could approach him with confidence. He would enter at once into their struggles and cares. In the house of mourning and tears his words and prayers were healing and helpful to the soul. He was a real, true father to his flock.

He was a shrewd capable man of business, a master of details, a skilful administrator. He discharged the manifold duties that devolve upon a superintendent minister with regard to his circuit, with promptitude and efficiency. He filled nearly all the offices his brethren in the district could bestow upon him with great ability, and with considerable advantage to our churches. He was Building Committee Secretary, then Sunday School Secretary of the Manchester District, and for twelve years was Secretary of the Sheffield District Committee. He was twice or thrice General Committee Delegate, several times Chairman of District Meetings, and attended several Conferences as one of the appointed representatives. By the Conference of 1899, held at Grimsby, he was elected vice to the important position of General Missionary Secretary, and on the breakdown and death of Rev. R.W. Burnett he entered upon the responsibilities of that exalted and onerous office in July, 1902. Our friend was an adept in debate. He could state his case in a terse convincing way, and while conciliatory in disposition and scrupulously fair to an opponent, he could hold his own view with much tenacity and grip. His judgment was generally sound and reliable, formed upon a comprehensive survey of the facts of the situation and going down to the roots of things. As a rule a meeting felt that he was a safe guide to follow, and more frequently than not his pronouncement upon a matter prevailed.

He was a social reformer of an enlightened and advanced type, an earnest radical in politics. He believed that no reform was more essential or urgent than temperance reform. And he presented and pressed this plea in season and out of season. An imperial measure of Sunday closing was an item of his programme. For many years he was a member of the Council of the Association for the closing of public houses on the Lord's Day, and one of its leading advocates. Local option received his persistent support and he contemplated the total prohibition of the liquor traffic as the ultimate end of temperance agitation and legislation, and as the only perfect safe-guard of National honour and well-being. He fought against the subtle influence of drink, gambling and impurity, locally: against the illegal practices of publican and bookmaker and the indifference of the police to them, he uttered his protest, and the protest flamed with the wrath of a righteous soul. In Sheffield a Social Questions' League was established to combat these evils. It did much good. It was indeed too successful for its enemies. They misrepresented it, calumniated its members and leaders, stirred the vicious elements of the city to shout down its speakers at public meetings. Many of the weaker friends of the Association dropped off, ran away. But Mr. Slater stuck to it in the time of storm, became its President, and stood at the helm till calmer waters were reached and brighter days dawned.

He was a staunch Free Churchman, and, though a loyal Primitive Methodist his influence was felt and his ministry appreciated far beyond the limits of his own Church. He was revered and loved for his work's sake by many, in all the Nonconformist Churches.

His was a fine Christian character. He was kind, genuine, generous. His heart was full of warm human impulses and passions. He was a most brotherly man, frank and candid in his fellowships, an

interesting and agreeable companion. His exuberance of spirits and mirthfulness attracted the young to him and caused children to delight in his presence. He was an enormous worker. He never rested. He poured forth his energies unreservedly in happy service. He had strong faith in God, in the overruling power of His providence, in the final triumph of His Kingdom. The splendid courage he displayed was the result of his faith. He went into battle with the songs of hope in the soul and with visions of victory before his eyes. Apparent defeat did not daunt him, it stimulated to greater exertion, for he knew that at last the glory of the Lord should cover the land and fill the earth.

Look at Mr. Slater in the various aspects of his life and in the manifold offices that he filled; regard him as man, husband, father, minister, neighbour, citizen, friend; we are grateful to the God of all grace that he was given to us for so long, that by the Divine mercy he was able to achieve so much and to leave us such a noble example.

No account of him would be complete that omitted all mention of Mrs. Slater, in whom he found an invaluable help-meet, who shared his cares and toils for thirty-nine years, bravely seconded his endeavours for Christ and the Church, endured without murmuring all the inconveniences and hardships of a Methodist minister's wife, and gained the respect and affection of the officials and friends of the circuits on which they travelled.

The end came suddenly. He had gone down from London to Manchester to preach and lecture for his old friends at Higher Ardwick. On Sunday morning, March 15th, 1903, he conducted the service and delivered his message with his usual vigour. In the afternoon he was seized with paralysis and gradually grew worse, until he passed away on the following Tuesday to the life, joy and service of Heaven, having occupied the post of General Missionary Secretary for about nine months.

An impressive and beautiful "In Memoriam" service was held in the Higher Ardwick Church, and also at John Street Chapel, Sheffield, on Saturday, March 21st, and his body was laid to rest in the City Road Cemetery, Sheffield, amid the regrets of a great crowd of friends, old colleagues, and comrades. Ministers of other churches and public men paid their tribute of respect to him either in words from the pulpit or letters to the family, and the Rev. German Hunt, his last colleague, preached an appropriate sermon on his life and death, in Abbeydale Church on Sunday, April 5th, to a large and sympathetic audience. And so we part with our dear friend for a little while, to meet him again, by the grace of God, in the land beyond the shadows, and "in the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1904/573