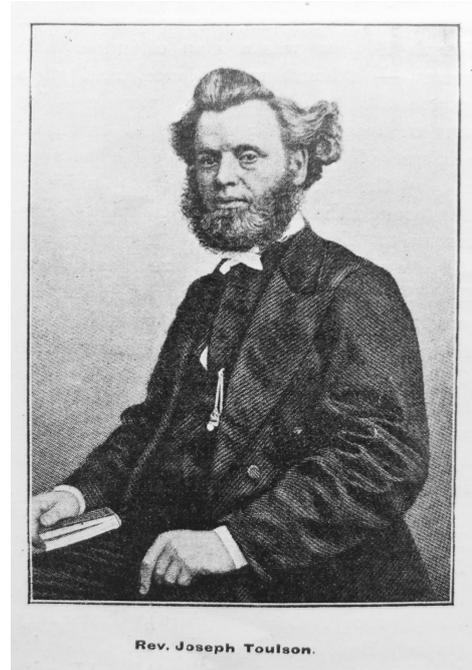


Joseph Toulson: The Persistent by Grapho
"A man to seek the welfare of Israel." – Nehemiah

Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Grapho

COMTE DE BUFFON once said, "Genius is patience, and patience is genius, the result of profound attention directed to a particular subject." And our own Isaac Newton acknowledged that he wrought out the grand results embodied in the "Principia" only by application, diligence, and perseverance.

It may be said concerning such acknowledgments, that they discover nothing so much as the modesty of the greatness of these men who made them. But such confessions reveal something more: even the fact that for genius to distinguish itself it must be wedded to industry. Industry can do better without genius than genius can do without industry. Perhaps, in its final analysis, genius is but aptitude and capacity, which need energy and labour to make them productive. And where genius is not seconded by work, it is at best but a slumbering giant.



Few men we have known have been possessed of fewer gifts of a conspicuous kind, natural or acquired, and of less talent, or accomplishments of a dazzling order than Joseph Toulson. But we have never known one who shared in the genius of industry more than he. Dr. Arnold once said, "the difference between one boy and another lies not so much in talent as in energy." And if this famous man's judgment is correct, then Joseph Toulson deserves a place among the best in our church's history. Without any great affluence of nature, he evinced an immense wealth of industry; and succeeded where others, better dowered and with finer opportunities, have failed. Some men have an abundance of those qualities which may be termed luxuries, and yet disclose a fearful deficiency of those solid qualities which are of prime importance, and necessary to success. Joseph Toulson was a man of indomitable energy - exhaustless patience, and of a commanding and presiding purpose – that purpose was to be a useful and successful minister of Christ; and this he became, not by the of remarkable abilities, but through the force of his complete consecration to this end.

He was born at Alverthorpe, near Wakefield, September 17th, in the year 1822. He was but a youth of seventeen when he made the all-important decision for Christ, in our Chapel at Wakefield; and when only nineteen he became a local preacher. So marked was his devotion and enthusiasm in this sphere that the following year he was called into the ranks of the regular ministry.

He commenced his ministry in the Hull District, July 1842, and laboured at Pontefract, Tadcaster, Brigg, Patrington, Hull (first), Pocklington, Doncaster, Epworth, Gainsborough, London (third), Canterbury, (twice), Reading, High Wycombe, London (second, twice), London (seventh) and London

(first). In each of these circuits he did yeoman service. But it was in his London work where he reached the high-water mark of his power.

London third circuit was formed March, 1853, with Sutton street as its centre, and Joseph Toulson as its first superintendent. Here he did magnificent service, and deserves no second place in the history of our work in the Metropolis. It was during his first term in the London second circuit, with Elim as its head, that we were first privileged to know him. It was a circuit of gigantic size, stretching from Finchley to Westminster - Holloway to Chelsea - Islington to Kensington - Holborn to Notting Hill - Hampstead to Kilburn, with the vast areas of population between. It was a circuit of huge membership - of vast dimension - considerable chapel difficulties, and of varied and even conflicting official interests. Such a circuit required a minister of no ordinary worth and strength to direct its movements - to harmonize its interests - to marshal its energies, and to develop its resources.

However, in Joseph Toulson the man was found. He was just in the prime of his physical strength. He had had a varied experience in other spheres. He was magnificently self-poised, could manage himself, and so knew well how to manage others. He was impartial and firm, yet withal of profound kindness, patience and persistence - strength and sweetness - policy and principle - praying and plodding, blended in wonderful proportions in his build and demeanour.

He was pre-eminently a man of affairs - businesslike, prompt, punctual, shrewd, unhasty, precise in details, clear in judgment; verily a man born to rule; a king among his fellows. London second, in those days, showed a strange blend in its official life. The quarterly meeting, or circuit committee, was almost like one of our present-day district synods. The differences in the social position of its members were extreme, and each brought his own peculiar excellencies and defects - preferences and prejudices with him. There were the front seats of the government and the "opposition" always. Nothing was arrived at without a long debate, for a parliamentary concept was part of the official mind in those days. But amid the liveliest scenes the chairman was calm, as the captain amid a tempest, and sometimes he was the only self-possessed and self-repressed man of all the number.

Under his superintendency the circuit wonderfully grew. It is true he had such valuable colleagues as Charles Jupe, William Powell, Josiah Turley, and William Mincher; but his was the directing spirit, and the guiding hand; he never was himself wearied in labour, nor ceased to extract from his associates in toil the maximum of service. He was paramountly a circuit minister, and a model superintendent. We have chosen the word "persistent" as the key-word to his character and ministry. And no other word so well expresses our conception and estimate of him. He was persistent in endeavouring to be what he set out to be when he became a minister, and in what he deemed necessary to accomplish in the varied spheres to which he was called. That he succeeded will be the verdict of all who knew him. He won the affectionate esteem of his district, and the Conference awarded him the highest honours it can bestow upon any of its ministers. For fifteen years he was secretary of the London District Committee; the Presidential Chair of the Conference was honoured by his presence more than the Chair honoured him, and his all too brief tenure of office as Book Steward was a brilliant term.

Someone has called him "*a true child of Methodism.*" And we are prepared to denominate him a true type of a "Methodist minister." In a true child of Methodism you expect the family traits; and in

a true Methodist minister you look for the distinguishing qualities. For Methodism is not a mere denominational label. It represents certain distinct characteristics of its own, which have marked it from the beginning, and which have been the cause of its phenomenal mission.

Methodism is a mere name if it be not fervently evangelistic - passionate in its soul - winning, diligent and persevering in the use of "all means to save some." These were the family marks ever to be seen in this "child of Methodism." And as a Methodist minister, he caught and expressed the Methodist ideal; even a burning Gospel on as wide a scale as opportunity allows.

Tholuck used to say, "Ich hab line passion und die est Er nur Er." Which translated means – I have one passion, and it is He, he alone. That is the picture of Joseph Toulson. He had one passion, and one alone, which was to be a good servant of Jesus Christ. His heart never allowed this aim to become clouded - and to this ideal he directed all his industry and energy. He made "full proof of his ministry," and of such men Cowper writes:-

"I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause."

Yes, "honest in the sacred cause," because rendering to the Master the maximum amount of allegiance and love; and to the people of the Master the maximum of service of which he is capable. There is the portraiture of Joseph Toulson. A man pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. He was no great student, he lived too busy and public a life. He was no great preacher in the sense of startling congregations with novelties; or impressing them with real, or assumed ability. However, he was a man of remarkable shrewdness - sound sense and acquaintance with the needs of men, and if he could preach no great sermons he always preached useful and helpful ones. They may have lacked ornate language - logical construction – exegetical skill—homiletical arrangement; but they always won attention and searched the hearts of his hearers. He knew nothing of the "art of speaking"; but he could talk, not showily nor learnedly, but convincingly and savingly; and this is the end of all preaching which deserves to be so designated. His was an unschooled and natural eloquence-

"An eloquence, not like those rills from a height,
Which sparkle, and foam, and in vapour are o'er ;
But a torrent which works out its way into light
Through the filtering recesses of feeling and power."

Homely, colloquial and rugged his style; but he always had a directness of aim, and a message that no one could mistake, and which hundreds believed, and through it found the pathway to God. Joseph Toulson was mighty in the prayer meeting. So many of us who preach expend all of ourselves in the service, and reserve little for the prayer meeting. This is like the man who exhausts himself in scythe-work, so that no strength is left to bundle and garner. Joseph Toulson may not have possessed such fine implements as some; but he garnered more than many who moved over broader acres, and with louder pretensions than he. He *worked the prayer meeting*. What the sermon lacked, the after meeting more than atoned for. He had a marvellous voice, and knew the battle-songs and could sing them. One Sunday evening at Old Sutton Street, he had a most humiliating time in preaching; but nothing discouraged he told the congregation he wanted them to

remain at the prayer meeting, as he wanted them to learn a new tune. The new hymn was "I feel like singing all the time." The effect was inspiring. When he failed to preach down what he called the "glory," he could sing it down. And on him and on the congregation would fall the afflatus, which was no mere excitement, for it bore fruit, and was not the rapture of an hour; but the emancipation and ennoblement of souls.

A Methodist minister is not only "the preacher." A circuit has more demands than the preparation and delivery of sermons. It is true beyond all questioning that preaching is the first prerequisite in a minister; still, if he lack business capacity and care, even his preaching, as a circuit minister, will not a little suffer, because of the irritations and frictions consequent upon business neglects. Joseph Toulson never lost grip of his circuit. He kept his hand upon every detail of his circuit's life. He was aware of the value of the temporalities of the societies. He never put finances first; but he knew their relation and significance, even in spiritual work. He was specially fitted to be a London minister. This is not the place to compare provincial and London work; but all who know are cognizant of the vast difference between the two. Joseph Toulson was the type of minister London needed in those days - yes, and continues to need. When he entered his circuit he undertook to superintend it, and not in name only. He *tended, intended, superintended*. But he not only directed others, he led the way. He not only told people what to do, he showed them, and they caught the contagion of his enthusiasm and example.

His work survives. Our beautiful Caledonian Road church, our commodious Dartmouth Park church, our useful Hackney Memorial church, our spacious Lavender Hill church, are among the monuments of his tireless energy. Harrow road was secured to the Connexion through his interest; and, if we mistake not, the missioning of Woodberry was mostly through his devotion. Of course, I am fully aware that these churches have increased, through the years, our London responsibilities, and have been a heritage of hard work to brave men who have followed. But to have gained such places in those days was thought of as next to miraculous. He, like others we could name, did the best under the circumstances; and if he and they had not been daring enough to venture, heedless of the probable financial burdens, we should never have had such valuable property as these trusts represent. Some of us know what chapel debts mean with a vengeance; still, we honestly and gratefully say that, in a thousand cases, if our fathers had waited till the requisite amount had come to hand, we should have been excluded from many localities, and Primitive Methodism, as a whole, would have been a much smaller church than she is to-day. We honour their faith and daring, and are thankful that we can link hands with them in completing what they, through lack of means and opportunities, were unable to accomplish.

Looking at Joseph Toulson to-day, after a period of thirty years since first we knew him, he is a greater object of admiration than ever. As a young minister he took us by the hand, and so he did others. His own educational deficiencies made him intensely sympathetic with young men. He could not do much for us students: but what he did in the way of encouragement, and in the more subtle and pervading direction of influence and example, can hardly be adequately appraised. He was, and remains an inspiration to us. He was a priceless friend – a true helper in Christ Jesus. His home was a sanctuary of affection, and Mrs. Toulson was the happy and worthy possessor of so noble a soul as he for a husband. His manliness – thoughtfulness - ever-burning fervour - genuine friendship, and

sterling worth, abide as imperishable memories, and cast their sweet influence to quicken and enrich our lives.

Joseph Toulson lived at high pressure. A magnificent unselfishness ruled him. He had "a baptism wherewith to be baptised, and how was he to be straitened until it was accomplished!" But such abandon, and such expenditure told: even upon his strong and hardened constitution. The Connexion had crowned him, but the penalties of the honours were heavy. Some men find their honours garlands: but not such men as Joseph Toulson. He brought to the Book Room Stewardship and the Presidential Chair his consuming fervour - careful mastery of detail - unselfishness and anxious obligingness; and little wonder that the strain was too severe, and the burden, undertaken with such a concept as his, proved in the end too heavy.

On Sunday evening, March 30th, 1890, he preached his last sermon in Stepney Green Tabernacle. The following Saturday he started for Dereham. As he was hurrying down Houndsditch to Liverpool Street Station, he fell in the street - nay not fell, but ascended. It was more like a translation than a death. Elijah leaped into the chariot of fire: so did Joseph Toulson, only he left behind him the well-worn garment of mortality. The inwardness and spirituality of the events were the same in either case, we think.

In the midst of labour he ceased to toil. No long wasting sickness his; but a sudden promotion in service.

"A faithful workman he
In God's great moral vineyard: what to prune
With cautious hand he knew, what to uproot;
What were mere weeds, and what celestial plants
Which had unfading vigour in them, knew;
Nor knew alone, but watched them night and day.
And reared and nourished them, till fit to be
Transplanted to the Paradise above."

Yes, What he sought to produce in others, he himself was - "*fit to be transplanted.*" The summons came and he was ready. "He had this testimony that he pleased God." He lived for God, more, he lived with God. And the last scene is best described in the words "he was not, for God took him."

References

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