

## George Lamb the Fervent

### Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Grapho

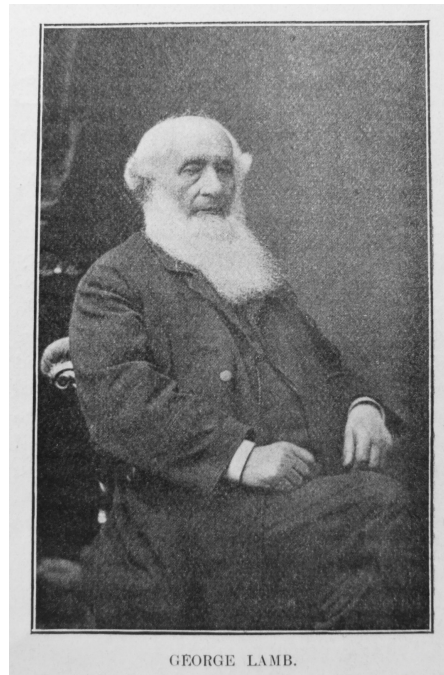
“A man approved of God among you.”

CHANNING says, “religion ought to be dispensed in accommodation and adaptation to the intellect; but also to furnish nourishment, and appeal to the highest and profoundest sentiments of our nature. It must not be exhibited in the dry, pedantic divisions of a scholastic theology; nor must it be set forth and tricked out in the light drapery of an artificial rhetoric, in prettiness of style, in measured sentences with an insipid floridness, and in the form of elegantly feeble essays. No; it must come from the soul in the language of earnest conviction and strong feeling”

And this is no mere personal judgment; nor simply a criticism of method, but the statement of a universal fact, and the expression of a world-wide need. Man is more than the sum of his intellectual powers, whether preacher or hearer. Religious truths do not solely supply thinking for the head, but bring experiences for the heart. Devotion is not piety, but piety is devotion plus experience. Truths are not intellectual problems, but experimental facts and springs. And preaching is not a mere intellectual task, it concerns the heart as well as the head, and finds the man oftener through his sentiments and emotions than through any other avenue. Some few may be reached through their reason, but the multitudes have more heart than head, and the history of all the religious awakenings prove that the fervid appeal to the conscience and heart of the people is the surest way of winning them from wickedness. Some of our Fathers were masters in the art of a fervent and winsome evangelism. The truth in their heads and hearts glowed like a molten mass, and streamed from their lips like torrents of beseeching appeals, or rivulets of warm and healing benedictions.

Among such George Lamb has his own unique place. He was born at Preston in Lancashire in the year 1809. His mother was a godly woman, and belonged to the Society of Friends. To the “meeting house” the son regularly resorted with the mother, for worship. And in these early influences, and associations we may without hesitation go back to discover the formative forces which made the after years possible to the youthful George.

He was about seventeen years of age when he went to a camp-meeting which the “Primitives” were holding in Preston, this seems to have been the time when he consciously surrendered himself to God. And from that hour he became identified with our Church. At once he entered the Sunday School, as a teacher, and in a short time his name appeared on the circuit plan as a local preacher.



It was in the year 1829 that Hugh Bourne was at Preston in connection with a missionary meeting, and George Lamb was one of the speakers. Hugh Bourne was so struck by the ability and enthusiasm which characterised his address that he immediately desired him to go at once to Pocklington as a minister. To that request George Lamb acceded, and thus commenced a ministry, as remarkable in its power, and as rich in its influences as any church can record or desire.

Commencing at Pocklington, he subsequently toiled on the following stations:- Halifax, Scotter, Jersey and Guernsey, Leeds, York, Grimsby, Hull and London. And for fifty-seven years he gave himself to his work, which to him was supreme in his affections, with an abandon which was unique, even in those early days of our denomination's fiery evangelism. Some men do not find in salvation its secret bliss, and some ministers do not find in their ministry its hidden joys, because there is wanting that consecrated *abandon* which is the supreme condition of the best being possible to them. George Lamb could never be content with any half measures, either in personal religion or in personal service. The poet describes him, and the whole-souled fraternity to which he belonged thus:

“Henceforth I’m Thine, and only Thine  
Content with little store,  
I’ll let the red gold sleep in peace,  
And sell my soul no more.

I’m happy - as my heart can hope -  
Since my sin has been removed,  
I envy no man's wealth nor power,  
I love - and am beloved.

Spin round, big world! thou’lt trouble me not!  
Flare Pomp! thou’rt nought to me!  
And strive, Ambition, there’s joy in the world  
Unknown to thine and thee!”

And so it is, only to the whole-hearted does religion bring her choice experiences, and service its divine music and strength. Into such a life heaven pours, because there is no hindrance, the softest and sweetest harmonies, like flowing chordal chimes of blessing, rest and love, the melodious pledge of present acceptance, and warrant that all which is promised shall yet come true. What more can a human heart ask or even desire?

We have chosen the word “*fervent*,” as the one above all others to express our idea of George Lamb - the quality which made him distinguished, and the characteristic by which thousands remember him. In thus characterising him we do not even hint that he was lacking in other qualities, which were equal both in quality and quantity in him, as in his contemporaries. Some of his elements of character would have made others distinguished; but every other noble trait and aspect of service were simply attendants to this one regnant and reigning characteristic of fervency. When we think of some men their names stand for some one thing or quality which is the water-shed of their character. So to us, out of his many excellencies, this one of fervour rises highest when we think of George Lamb. He was naturally a happy, sunny soul. Genial and generous, bright and blithe. In him

religion found no hindrance to its gracious in-working, in an ingrained moroseness, constitutional dyspepsia or cultivated conceit. Neither did he find religion repress his native buoyancy and overbrimming vitality; but it hallowed and enriched them. To a nature like his religion was tropical - warm and bright in climate, and luxuriant and beautiful in fruitfulness. His whole nature was aglow with the inner fire which God's love had created in his soul, and his ministry was aflame with the intensity of his burning thoughts and affections for his work.

“The generous feeling pure and warm,  
Which knows its source to be divine,  
The pitying heart, the helping arm,  
The fervid, burning heart of thine.”

And this fervency compensated for the absence of, and made effective all his other gifts. Many of his brethren excelled him in some things. Some were more erudite, scholarly, pretentious in manner, commanding in appearance, musical in voice, gaudy in wordiness, profounder in thinking; but in the solid qualities and paramount influences which constitute a useful and successful minister, few were his equal, and none surpassed him.

I see him now in the prime of his strength, and on one of those occasions when he rarely or never failed to rise equal to the expectations. It was an anniversary time in the Midland Chapel. George Lamb was the special preacher. That visit made a lasting impression, it is present while I write. There was no commanding presence, the voice was deep and sonorous, even unmusical; the manner was devoid of every trick and artifice of the studied orator, the matter was without the garnishings of rhetoric; or the superfine analysis of logic; but there was present that subtle and inexplicable power which these things cannot command, and which sometimes are utterly unacquainted with, even an overwhelming fervour and unction, which caught up the hearer into the burning spirit of the speaker's message.

This did not come from mere loudness of voice nor vehemence of gesture, nor mechanical or artificial methods. It was a divine soul-kindling. It was a man ablaze with his theme. It was a man in such direct communication with God that he had brought men a message from Him. The aim and purpose were transparent, and the sincerity and earnestness captivating, as if a magician wielded a wand.

And nothing becomes the preaching of eternal verities more than a consistent conviction and an absorbing fervour. A heart-stirring earnestness is the worthiest vehicle through which God's message of love can flow, it best suits the essential needs of human hearts. The multitudes prefer a fanaticism which is fervent to a pompous and pretending intellectuality which leaves unaffected all the deep springs of men's souls, which never makes to vibrate the pulse of their veneration and love, fear and wonder, hope and joy.

The preacher should be a man of glowing earnestness whatever be the kind and order of his gifts or the manner of his style and method. To be mechanical is treasonous, to be pretentious is criminal, to be cold is self-defeating in preaching the Gospel.

“Time flies, death urges, knells call, heaven invites,  
Hell threatens, angels look, and God welcomes.  
On such themes 'twere impious to be calm,  
Passion is reason, and rapture transport, here.”

The secret of George Lamb's acceptableness - popularity and abundant success was his passion for winning men to Christ. And this was no spasmodic and periodic thing with him. It was the set aim of his soul and the characteristic feature of his long ministry. It was the uniform and habitual atmosphere of his life. He was fervent in spirit. And this fervency was always in evidence in the pulpit, on the platform and in committee room alike. It was the *enthusiamos*, the fulness of a divine life, an absorbing, passionate devotion to God's work, a boiling in spirit, the soul of the man uplifted, transported and dilated by God's Spirit. And this marked his labours from the beginning hour of his ministry. It was the unctuousness of the youth which won so readily the heart of Hugh Bourne. It was the glow of sacred and hallowing fire which won multitudes during the fifty-seven years which followed.

In Scotter and its neighbourhood he went forth like a holy fire-brand, kindling men's hearts to a worthier devotion to their work, and lightening and melting the frost-bound souls of multitudes of hardened sinners. So much so, that in five years nineteen societies were formed and eleven chapels were built.

And this same spirit was ever-present – it was no mere youthful enthusiasm, which waned and expired when physical energies decreased, or when surroundings changed. He was the same glowing soul in Hull amid all our growing prosperity in social betterment, where he toiled for twenty years. And in London amid the burdens of official life and the difficulties of circuit work, where he laboured seventeen and a half years.

How much the “Metropolis of Primitive Methodism ” owes to him, perhaps the most strenuous of his admirers could never guess. And how much the work of our Church in the “Metropolis of the Empire” benefited by his labours, none can fully tabulate. In Hull his name is like spikenard poured forth after the flight of so many years. And in London his memory is still green in the hearts of the remaining few who were favoured to listen to his gracious messages.

It was in July, 1853, that George Lamb came to London and so blessed were the results of his first year's ministry in the then called London Second Circuit with Elim, Fetter Lane, Holborn, as its head, and the wealthy co-operation he won from the people that five hundred and forty members were reported, being sixty increase. During his three years' residence in this circuit several places were missioned, and the number of members increased one hundred and eighty-two.

In the year 1856 he removed to the Walworth Branch and had one year's unbroken success, great numbers were saved, and his kindly ruling won the most insubordinate to him.

In 1857 he was stationed to the Third Circuit with Sutton Street as its centre, and during the following four years the work extended, and after all the wear and tear of the years there was a solid increase of forty-five members.

In 1861 Mr. Lamb was re-stationed to the second circuit; and his second term was marked with the spiritual intensity and prosperity which characterised his former period of labour. In 1864 he removed to Hull; here was his native air, and kindred spirits, and the congenial surroundings. Into his work he threw himself with his characteristic *abandon*, and few men have done so much as he to gain for Hull the proud distinction it claims, as being the metropolis of Primitive Methodism.

In 1870 he returned to London as the Connexional book steward, which office he filled with his own unique methodicalness, painstaking, industry, and urbanity. His industrious oversight and kindly obligingness, and uniform attention to details lent no small contribution to the prosperity of our book establishment during the five years following.

In 1876 it was a critical time in connection with our churches in Canada. Mr. Lamb was the one man above all his brethren elected to serve as a deputation.

It was a happy selection, as his wide experience, his deep sympathies and unwearied patience, his intense connexional loyalty and spirit of fairness, his wise head and loving heart, his strong firmness and suave manner fitted him for the critical and crucial business, which he discharged to the honour of the churches at home, and to the advantage and satisfaction of the Canadian churches, ministers and members.

Upon his return from Canada he was again re-stationed in Hull, which appointment was as welcomed by the people, as it was gratifying to himself. He was growing old in service, but his heart had lost none of its youthfulness, and his ministry no perceptible diminution of its fervency. Nor was his usefulness confined to the ordinary work of the minister. He was an active member of the Hull School Board, and in addition was a most strenuous worker and supporter of several of the town's philanthropic institutions. He held no narrow and mere denomination concept of usefulness. He spread his abounding energies over a vast area, and was successful in all. He was the succourer and support of virtue's cause everywhere.

"He established the strong, restored the weak,  
Reclaimed the wanderer, bound the broken hearts.  
And led the sacramental host of God's elect  
To glorious war and victory."

His was an honoured and laborious ministry. And in recognition of his worth and work he was twice elected as president of the Conference at Chester, in 1866, and then again at Tunstall in 1884. He was made a permanent member of Conference in 1880, and his interest in connexional things, and his ability to discharge his expected duties never failed to secure confidence and admiration.

Probably no man in our denomination served on more deputations to arbitrate on cases of disputes and disagreements more than he. Because his practical wisdom and sound judgment, his conspicuous sincerity and sense of fairness, his clear headedness and noble-heartedness seldom, or ever, were without success in winning even unreasonableness and turbulence to connexional loyalty and religious devotion. His ministry covered a period of over fifty-seven years which comprise his active service and official life, and during the term of office he was in constant demand for the pulpits and platforms throughout the whole of the Connexion.

To most of our ministers there is the anticipation of the season called superannuation, but George Lamb seems never to have had such an idea in his head. It is not given to many to wear and work so well and so long. To him there was no retirement at eventide. The evening had come to him, but rest was no thought in his heart; he would toil till the tool dropped from his hand; or his hand was no longer able to hold the tool. He never became a supernumerary; he laboured to the close of the day, and passed from the work to the reward. He was strong and alert to the week of his death. And it was a beautiful sight to see his venerable and patriarchal form going in and out among the people, ever cheery and welcome. For he was a wonderful family visitor, and in the homes of the people no small amount of his saintly influence was exercised.

The secret of his long ministry can be in part explained by his almost excessive abstemiousness, the methodicalness of all his movements, the constant care of his health, the husbanding of his strength and time, the uniform cheerfulness of his disposition. Thus to the surprise of us all he continued to work at an age when so many deem retirement imperative.

The evangelist, Luke, designates Mnason "an old disciple," and such an one was George Lamb. The years are the test of piety, as they are of most things. So many live on experiences and traditions which have long passed, and belong to an order of things which has ceased to be. Age is not always, even very rarely, hopeful and receptive. To so many their sympathies are wholly with the past, while their antipathies are with the present. Old age so often brings bitterness, sourness of spirit, and impatience and prejudice as to present and passing demands. George Lamb was a disciple from the beginning to the end. The growing years had not dried up the fountain of his sympathies, nor fossilized his mind, neither made him wearisome, even to the most buoyant and progressive about him. It was only his body that grew old, his soul grew in youth immortal amid every sign of age.

"The light he followed step by step where'er  
It led, as in the vision of the seer  
The wheels moved as the spirit in the clear.

And terrible crystal moved, with all their eyes  
Watching the living splendour sink or rise,  
Its will their will, knowing no otherwise.

Within himself he found the law of right,  
He walked by faith and not the letter's sight,  
And read the Bible by the Inward Light.

And if sometime the slaves of form and rule,  
Frozen in their creeds like fish in winter's pool,  
Tried the large tolerance of his liberal school,

His door was free to men of every name,  
He welcomed all the seeking souls who came,  
And no man's faith he made a cause of blame.

But best he loved in leisure hours to see  
His own dear friends sit by him knee to knee  
In social converse, genial, frank, and free.

These, in the charm of a holy purpose blend,  
Guided, attracted unto some nobler end  
And left them worthier of the name of Friend.”

Sometime before his death he dislocated his shoulder, but this hardly interrupted his work. The severe winter of 1885 was very trying to him, but not enough to deter him and not sufficient to cause him any serious apprehensions. In the beginning of February, 1886, he suffered at times painfully, but he, notwithstanding, took his appointments. On Thursday, the 11th of February, he was visiting and was seized with symptoms more grave, and was obliged to be assisted home. On the following day he seemed to rally, but in the evening a relapse set in, and on Saturday, the 13th, he peacefully passed away to the recompense above. His remains were laid near the tomb of William Clowes, in the Hull Cemetery, amid the crowds of those who had loved him so well, and for whose spiritual good he had laboured so long.

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#### **References**

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