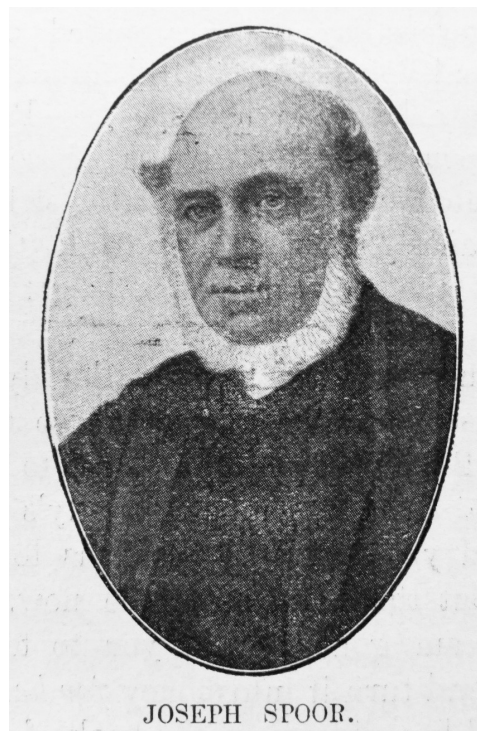


Making of a Mighty Evangelist by B. Wild

Reminiscences of Rev. Joseph Spoor

Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by B. Wild

AMONG the men whose names are worth cherishing in the memories of Primitive Methodists, is that of the Rev. J. Spoor. He did a great and noble work for Christ and the Connexion. More than forty years ago the fruits of his zealous labours could be found in most of the circuits of the North of England. In the ranks of our ministry, on the plans as local preachers, in our societies as class-leaders, and in other spheres of usefulness were men who had been brought to Jesus in services conducted by him. His popularity was very great not only in the extensive district in which he spent most of his life, but also in many other parts of the Connexion. The requests for his services were so numerous that he might have been preaching at special services almost every Sabbath of the year.



Occasionally there was a little ripple of complaint about his being so often out of his circuit, but to those who knew the numbers of applications for his services that received a negative reply, the number he did comply with seemed comparatively few. This popularity was not a meteoric flash, but permanent. The vast multitude that attended his funeral, manifested the hold he had on the affections of the people, and the high esteem in which they held him. At great inconvenience many of them came long distances to show their esteem for him, and to express their sympathy with the bereaved family.

Mr. Spoor's education was only poor. It was such as was commonly given at that time in village schools. He was early sent to work. After his conversion he felt a strong desire for mental improvement, but his opportunities were so few that he could not make much progress. The same thing may be said of him after he entered the ministry. The extent of the circuits on which he laboured, the great number of societies that demanded his care, the amount of time he had to spend in walking to his appointments, and in many cases the inconvenient accommodation at the houses where he was entertained, made it nearly impossible for him to devote much time to the acquisition of knowledge and the culture of his mind.

Mr. Spoor could not be classed amongst great readers; as a consequence his acquaintance with the realms of literature was only limited. The Book of books, a few volumes of Theology, chiefly Methodistic, and Biography formed the staple of his reading. In the Biographies of the Revs. William Bramwell, John Smith, David Stoner, William Clowes, he greatly delighted. They suited his taste, fanned his zeal, intensified his anxiety for the salvation of men; strengthened his confidence in God, and helped him to preach. His sermons and speeches were often enriched by illustrations drawn from the lives of those eminent Evangelists. It would be all the better for our rising ministry if a little

more attention were paid to reading the memoirs of men who have been distinguished for holiness of life, and success in securing the salvation of souls.

But if Mr. Spoor was not eminent for his scholastic attainment and intellectual power, he possessed what some erudite men have lacked - the gift of common-sense, which someone has pronounced very *uncommon*. From lack of common-sense some ministers have got into serious trouble which has injured their influence, damaged their character, and in some instances terminated their ministerial life. Mr. Spoor possessed this quality in a high degree. It was manifested in his treatment of officials, in his demeanour in the homes where he was entertained, in conversation on the road, in the management of his home, in family visiting and in the social circle.

His sanctified common-sense was one of the elements that largely contributed to his power and usefulness.

Converted in his youth, Joseph Spoor never doubted the reality of the change. It was deep, radical and thorough. It was not a pleasant dream, nor a superficial stirring of the emotions that quickly passed away. It influenced and hallowed his whole subsequent career. It filled him with joy unspeakable, and caused him to shout aloud for sheer gladness. His companions, workmates, and neighbours, were constrained to acknowledge that if there were such a thing as the Methodists called conversion, Joseph Spoor had experienced it. His holy joy beamed in his countenance, breathed in his grateful songs, and carried gladness to the hearts of others. He became deeply desirous that others should, participate in the same joy. He could not keep the glad news to himself, but declared that Christ had saved him, and that He was willing to do the same thing for others. The old hymn describes him at this time:

"I praised the Lord from day to day,
And went from house to house to pray,
And if I met one by the way
I always found something to say
About this Heavenly Union."

Saved himself he began to use means to save others. By cottage prayer-meetings, the distribution of tracts, and personal appeals, he sought to persuade men to give themselves to God. These youthful efforts were not in vain. Many were induced to attend religious services and yield themselves to God. To assist the cause of Missions he and one of his companions, afterwards known as the Rev. T. Jobling took a box and went through the village soliciting donations once a month. They called at every house save one. The person who lived in that house was notorious for greediness; it was said that nobody ever got anything from her either for a good, or a bad cause. Their last round before the Annual Meeting had come, and not feeling very comfortable respecting their omission to call they resolved to pay the woman a visit. Having entered the house they presented their box, and respectfully asked for a donation.

The old lady at once gave them a positive refusal.

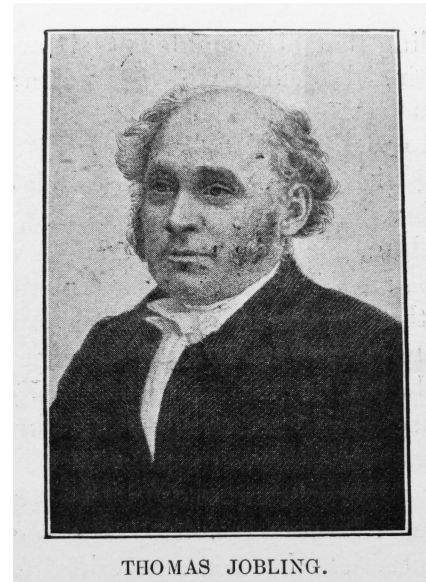
"Well," said Mr. Spoor, "if you have naught to give us, we will give you something."

With a more pleasant aspect on her countenance she said:
“Why, what have you to give me?”

“We will pray for you,” said, Mr. Spoor, and suiting the action to the word the youths knelt, and one of them began to pray.

But that was a gift, the old lady did not appreciate, so going towards the fire she took the poker and began to strike the fender to drown their voices.

But that did not stop the praying, having rather the opposite effect. The two youths prayed on, when one ceased the other began.



Finding that she could not silence them by beating the fender with the poker, a happier thought struck her, so she quietly walked upstairs. Young Spoor listened to Jobling with one ear and to the old lady with the other. Presently he exclaimed, “Pray on, Jobling, glory be to God, she is rattling the keys: we are going to get something.”

Shortly she came downstairs muttering and grumbling and holding sixpence in her hand, she said: “Here, tak’ this an’ gan oot o’ my hoose and niver let me see your brazen faces again.”

They thankfully took the money and invited her to the Missionary Meeting. The two youths left the house thankful for what they had got, and when the villagers heard of it they talked about it as a wonderful achievement.

The earnestness, devotion, and Christian consistency of young Spoor led the Rev. J. Coulson to think that he would be useful in a higher and wider sphere, and as they needed a young minister in the Hexham circuit, at Mr. Coulson’s recommendation Joseph Spoor was invited. After much prayer and thought he complied with the invitation. Many thought him very unfit for such a responsible office on account of his youth and deficient education. But like the famous Gideon Ouseley he knew from his own experience the disease and its remedy. So in the name of God, and with full confidence in the power of the Gospel of Christ, he went forth to proclaim to men a full, a free, and a present salvation. Fifty years ago I heard many of the old members in Hexham circuit speak with gratitude of “Young Spoor” as they called him. I remember how the eyes of some of them used to beam with pleasure at the mention of his name, and how they would often conclude by saying, “He could not preach much, but he was a rare singer and very powerful in prayer. O! we had such grand meetings, sometimes people fell to the floor under the power.”

At that time his own conversion and the conversion of others formed the substance of his addresses. He did not remain in Hexham circuit long. In his next circuit he gave a little more attention to sermonising, so that there was more variety in his preaching. But he never had at large stock of sermons. He frequently preached the same discourse to the same congregation. And the hearers did not simply tolerate it, they actually enjoyed it. An intelligent local preacher said that he had heard

Joseph Spoor preach one sermon more than a dozen times, and he would rather hear him the sixteenth time than many preachers the first time.

There was a pathos, unction and power attending his preaching, that rendered it acceptable notwithstanding the frequent repetitions. He and I were often together at public meetings, and having at that time a good memory I knew his speeches almost as well as himself; yet I was often amazed how excited I got when he was speaking; I have not met with any man equal to him in this respect. The causes of Spoor's marvellous power must be dealt with in another article.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1906/898