

## The Secret of Power

### Reminiscences of Rev. Joseph Spoor

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

A FORMER article dealt with the making of perhaps the mightiest Evangelist ever known in northern Primitive Methodism. We now proceed to inquire as to the cause of Joseph Spoor's marvellous power.

It had many contributory causes: one was his intense desire for the conversion of sinners. This characterised him from the day of his conversion to the end of his life. With him it was an all absorbing passion. It glowed within him like a furnace. He saw men in terrible danger and he longed to rescue them. If sinners were not being saved he felt that there was something wrong.

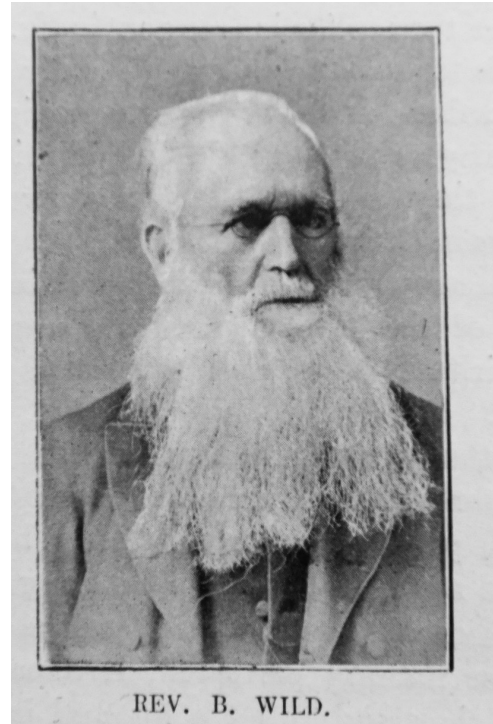
This led him to agonise in prayer. He knew what it was to travail in birth for souls. If the usual vacancies in the membership of the church were not filled and more than filled he was deeply troubled. It seemed as if his ministry were failing. To revive the members of the church and get a revival was the burden of his soul, and the object of his efforts. All his energies were directed to this end. Ought not this solicitude to save men to distinguish every minister's life? Is there no danger of getting it into our heads that to save men is altogether the work of special Evangelists?

Joseph Spoor was a man of much prayer. His faith in the power and prevalence of prayer was mighty. The scientific difficulties that distract some minds did not disturb him. It was enough for him to know, that God had promised to answer prayer; how He could do so in accordance with this law or the other did not concern him. Encouraged by the promises and past personal experience, he confidently looked for an answer to prayer. Prayer was his habit and delight. In the closet, at the family altar, in the public services, and in prayer meetings, he poured out his soul unto God. Whatever opinion people entertained of Joseph Spoor as a preacher, they were constrained to acknowledge that he was powerful in prayer.

"I heard your Super pray last night," said an eminent Congregationalist minister to me.

"Did you? Well, what of it?"

"Why it went through me like a new kind of electricity, and if I had not taken hold of the rostrum I believe I should have fallen."



“You are not the only one that has felt that way,” I replied. “ Mr. Spoor knows the way to the throne, and how to bring down a holy power.”

A few years after Mr. Spoor’s death, two ministers and an intelligent layman were conversing on different subjects, when the talk drifted on to Joseph Spoor. One of them, a cool, hard-headed man, of a meta-physical proclivity, said:

“Well, there was something about Mr. Spoor that there is not about ministers in general. No man ever moved me as he did; I have trembled under his prayer like an aspen leaf.”

The speaker was not of an excitable temperament, for I scarcely ever saw him move out of his ordinary calm, easy, and somewhat sluggish mood.

Mr. Spoor believed that the agency of the Holy Ghost was essential to a revival of religion. He used means of various kinds to attract people to the House of God, and when there he faithfully and plainly proclaimed the vital truths of the Gospel. But after he had made the best preparation possible he did not expect success apart from the power of the Holy Spirit; hence his earnest pleadings for the descent of Divine Power. In one of the meetings at which I was present, he urged believers to pray for the Spirit to apply the word saying, that He could make a passage of Scripture, a verse of a hymn, or a sentence of a sermon, the means of conviction and conversion. The following incident was given as proof:

“One night,” said he, “I took the last train home. In the compartment which I entered there were a well-dressed lady and a man that looked like a sailor. The lady seemed uneasy, as if she were afraid of the sailor. I looked at them both and soon saw that the man was in a state of great excitement. So I said, ‘You seem very happy to-night, my friend.’ ‘Bless the Lord,’ said he, ‘I am happy.’ ‘What is the cause of it?’ ‘Well, on Sunday night I was walking about the streets of London in a lazy fashion not knowing how to spend the evening. A number of people came by singing, I followed them into a Hall. There was a plain looking man conducted the meeting. He spoke about Jesus Christ having come into the world to save sinners, and lifting up his voice he said, ‘Jesus Christ can save all sorts of sinners, even that Jack Tar.’ The words went through and through me. I trembled, wept, and prayed. At the close of the meeting most of the people went away, but I remained behind. I felt as if I could not move. Then a few men gathered around me and began to pray. One of them told me to believe in Christ just then and He would save me. I did believe, and I was saved, and I have been happy ever since. On Monday I began to think very much about my mother and I am now on my way to Newcastle, to try to find her; I know not whether she be dead or alive, for it is fifteen years since I heard from her, but I must find her if possible and cheer her in her old age.”

Then the application rang out in Mr. Spoor’s electric tones:- “Pray on, ye godly fathers and mothers, and though your prodigal children may be far away, the Holy Spirit knows where they are, and He will answer your prayers in their conversion.”

This unwavering faith in the divinity and power of the Holy Spirit was one cause of the spiritual power and success of my old friend.

Another striking feature in Mr. Spoor’s character was the manner in which he conducted prayer meetings. Here he often evinced much skill and tact. Long prayers that seemed like well studied

essays on anything or nothing particular, he abominated. "Pray short and to the point, and in quick succession," was the advice he often gave at the beginning of the Sunday evening prayer meeting. There was seldom any ground to complain of coldness, dullness, and slowness. He seemed to know when to strike a hymn, and what hymn would be especially suitable. He encouraged everyone to join in the singing and to look for a present blessing. He would say, "If we cannot pray the glory down, let us sing it down." And the glory came down.

Frequently people remarked, "What a glorious prayer meeting, it is worth walking miles to such a meeting." The first prayer meeting I saw him conduct was in September, 1853. It was in Carlisle. The public service had been fairly good and in the service had been fairly good and in the prayer meeting some of his best qualities were manifested. Some of the people shouted for joy, others laughed, others wept, and others looked on with amazement as if they could not understand what these things meant. If it had not been for the powerful prayer meetings, Joseph Spoor's services would not have been so well remembered nor would there have been so many conversions.

Mr. Spoor's general management of his circuits is worthy of notice. He did not shine amongst the ecclesiastical lawyers, but he knew the laws of the Connexion and faithfully observed them. He attended to the business affairs of his stations with promptitude, diligence, and carefulness. For the quarterly and other meetings he was always ready. The plans were made and circulated, and letters and documents properly filled up, and sent to their proper courts in due time. Considering the large circuits he superintended, and the time occupied in special services, he could not have got through such an amount of work had he not been a man of prompt, regular, systematic and painstaking habits. District meetings and other courts were not troubled and robbed of time by his negligence, or carelessness.

One of the most striking features in this flaming Evangelist was his attachment to the Connexion. He loved its ministry, approved of its polity, cordially accepted its doctrines, and cheerfully supported its institutions. He was not a half-hearted Primitive Methodist, nor one for the sake of convenience. He was true to the core. With him there was not a doubt that its origin was providential, and that in toiling and suffering for its interests and prosperity, he was doing the will of God.

True himself, he had little patience with people who were not loyal. The hardest words I ever heard him utter were respecting a minister, whom he did not think was true to the Connexion.

It was not the lot of this saintly man to escape the common trials of life. He was the same man in the hour of trial as when free from it. Calm, submissive, trustful, resting on God with full assurance of faith. Death entered his household and took a daughter away from its midst. She was a quiet, meek, sympathetic, pious young woman. No one that knew her could help liking her. In her general habits and conversation she reminded me of a gentle, well-educated Quakeress. She got happily married and had a bright prospect before her. But alas! in a few brief months the lovely flower was blighted in its early bloom, or shall we not say, transplanted to flourish in the Paradise of God. I saw Joseph Spoor when he was on his way to Sunderland to the funeral. His strong frame shook with emotion.

"Oh!" he said, "this is hard; many a trial I have had, but this is the hardest. Still it is the doing of our Father and it is all right. He doeth all things well."

For long after that, dear Kate's name could not be mentioned in their hearing without bringing tears in the eyes of her parents. But they sorrowed not as those who have no hope. Their loved one had gone before them, and they also with other members of the family have followed after.

Another source of trouble at this time was the great uneasiness among most of the societies under his care, relative to an increase of salary. Conference had decided that the salary of the married ministers should be twenty-five shillings per week. The subject was named at the June quarterly meeting. The superintendent was not at the meeting, having to attend the funeral of a near relative.

The officials came in great force to the September quarterly meeting, determined to prevent this advance of salary. When the payment of salaries came on the storm arose. Amid great uproar and confusion Joseph Spoor rose to his feet, and with his usual calmness and firmness said, "Brethren, will you calm yourselves and listen to me? Let us try to act like Christians and gentlemen. Years ago I laboured in the ministry for seventeen shillings a week. I got it, and did not expect more. My brother ministers got the same, and did their work well and cheerfully. Our people were few in number and poor in circumstances, and they did the best they could. God favoured the Connexion with prosperity. Our numbers largely increased, and the salaries were raised to nineteen shillings: in a few years more to twenty-one; and this last Conference has thought it just and wise, to raise the salaries to twenty-five shillings a week. Now why should you object? We have a large balance in hand, and the number of our members is so many more, that we can pay what is required quite easily. And if we pay according to rule it will not make an extra demand on any one of you. If you were in the same circumstances as our members were when I received seventeen shillings I would be willing to serve you with all my might, but inasmuch as our members are so much larger in number, and many of them very much improved in circumstances, for the honour of the Connexion, and in due respect to your ministers, and the peace and prosperity of the cause of Christ, we ought to pay according to rule."

This speech had a good effect for the time being. But after the officials returned home a number of the more forward and restless spirits began to agitate the matter and made it worse. Public meetings were held in different places, letters were printed in one of the Durham papers, and misrepresentations and exaggerations in abundance were circulated.

The superintendent came in for a full share of abuse. But he went about his work as usual, kept his temper, and refrained from harsh language. He remained in the station till the storm swept over, the ministers' deficient salaries were paid, and prosperity returned. My impression at the time was, and still remains, that if someone rash and impulsive had been the superintendent, the discontent and strife would have been more disastrous.

Those who want to know more about this hero of the Cross and of our Connexion should buy or borrow "The Earnest Preacher," which contains a faithful and graphic narration of many of the stirring incidents that distinguished the life of this good minister of Jesus Christ.

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1906/944