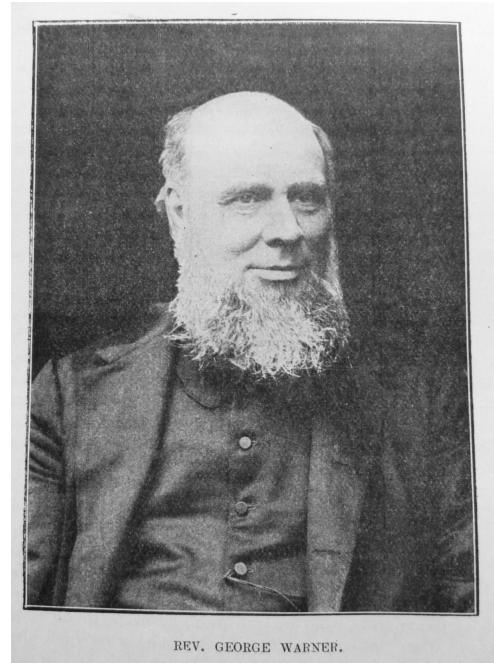


George Warner the Evangelist

Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Grapho

“A man that hath told you the truth.” - JOHN.

EMERSON has written: “Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion. He inclines to do something which is easy to him, and good when it is done. Every man has this call of the power to do something unique, and no man has any other call. By doing his work he makes the need felt which he can supply, and creates the taste by which he is enjoyed and is successful.” If the writer had known George Warner he could not have penned a better description, and while his words hold a universal principle, they have an application and expression in this case of remarkable vividness. He was one of our denomination’s Great-hearts. Possessing the talents for his calling, and in his calling demonstrating a unique fitness, and in his fitness for a needed work, gathered abundant results for our Church.



He was born at Holt Farm, Southam, in Warwickshire, on November 8th, in the year 1829. His father and mother were frequent, if not regular attendants at the Parish Church. The father seems to have been a shrewd, industrious, and successful business man, but without at this time any experience of religion. The mother, however, was regarded as a woman of piety, and this is supposed because she instituted family worship, and at eventide gathered the servants and children together for prayers. The outward observances of religious duties may not mean everything, but they mean something, even much. There may be the outward show of religion without its spiritual inwardness, but there cannot be the inward life of godliness without some external manifestation. Leaves there may be without fruit, but there is no fruit without life, and no life rich and full without fruit.

Thus George Warner was in childhood familiarised with religion, and added to this the sound and robust physical constitution and health he inherited he started life with the two primal blessings - the wealthiest advantages that can fall to the lot of a child. Little or nothing is left us concerning his early years. When he was about eighteen or nineteen he went to live near Worcester. An elder brother was a railway contractor, and George went with him as a clerk or book-keeper.

It was during this time that in a small Wesleyan Chapel he became converted. From the beginning it was evident what a change had taken place in him. Conversion to George Warner was no surface matter, it was a revolution and transformation. His religion was no mere profession, it was a divine passion.

After leaving the neighbourhood of Worcester, he returned to his home in Warwickshire. Hereupon he connected himself with our Church at Napton, in the Leamington circuit. He was converted in the year 1848, and from the first evinced the strenuous and enthusiastic godliness which characterised his after life and ministry. Such exceptional strength of piety and capacity for usefulness which marked his beginning soon won for him high commendation, and it is no surprise that we find him on the plan as a local preacher not long after his conversion. As a local preacher he displayed such conspicuous talent, aptitude, fervour and sanctitude, and his labours were so richly rewarded with results, that he was designed without doubt for the regular ministry was the unanimous opinion of the circuit.

The Conference of 1851 was held at Yarmouth, and it was at this time that he began the life of a minister of our church. And what a ministry it was? There were giants in those days. Men massive and mighty, both in body and soul qualities, and George Warner was one of them, and not the least of the princes of our Israel.

George Warner commenced his ministry in the Banbury circuit, afterwards he laboured on the following stations: Malmesbury Branch of the Brinkworth circuit, Marlborough Branch of the Newbury circuit, Sturminster Newton Branch of the Motcombe circuit, Banbury a second term, Belfast, Exeter, Kingston-on-Thames. At the Conference of 1874 he was set apart as Connexional Evangelist, and for twelve years served in this specially designated work. In the year 1886 he returned to circuit service, and was stationed at Ryde and Ventnor. The following year he sailed to Australia and New Zealand. He returned to England in 1890 and was stationed by the Conference of that year to Torquay.

The following year he was obliged to seek superannuation and thus closed his active ministry which comprised forty laborious and remarkably useful years. These were the spheres in which he toiled, and these the number of years he was permitted to serve, but what we are most desirous to do, is to attempt to describe the man, as we knew him in the maturity of his strength, and to picture his work - unique and mighty, proving as it did a blessing to tens of thousands.

“Channel of God’s grace abounding;
Bringing peace and joy and light;
Purifying, overcoming,
Linking weakness with His might.”

And in describing the man we cannot but mention his fine and splendid physical build. There was nothing diminutive and dwarfed about him. He was a man of considerable bodily proportions, and from outside appearances suggested strength, soundness of health, and mightiness of energy. He towered above many of his brethren, like Saul among the prophets. But he was not merely a lofty figure, he was large limbed, and inclined to be corpulent.

But George Warner was more than a massive physical presence. His mental and moral qualities were of more than a common order. We have no information as to his early education, but with his conversion came a mental awakening as well as a spiritual transformation. And those of us who

knew him knew the vigour and strength of his intellectual faculties, their alertness and scope, if rugged and uncultured, and as some would pronounce them wanting in breadth and compass.

He was well read in Methodist literature. Biography was an especial field in which he roved and gleaned. The Scriptures were his constant study and Christian history and doctrine were mainly his storehouses of knowledge and inspiration. However, to all this must be added his sublime renunciation, surrender, consecration and sanctity of character. He was a man of lofty principles, unserving loyalty to conscience, impatient with compromisings and temporisings of any form whatsoever; strong in convictions which not unfrequently manifested themselves in an unattractive brusqueness, and which were sometimes interpreted as harshness and severity.

But added to his noble moral qualities must be those things which divine grace wrought in him. He brought to God an uncommon abandon. He did not keep back part of the price. He made no reserves. He withheld nothing. He laid himself on the altar of service, and heaven accepted the offering so holily offered, and put a distinguishing approval upon it.

“Precious ointment, very costly, of chief odours pure and sweet,
Holy gift for royal priesthood, thus for temple service meet;
Such the Spirit’s precious unction, oil of gladness freely shed,
Sanctifying and abiding on his consecrated head.”

George Warner’s ministry was unique, and in many aspects was remarkable. During the period of his local-preachership a passion for souls possessed him, and this burning, fervent and consuming aim accompanied him into the ministry and characterised his whole years.

At Banbury, his first circuit, it was a rare thing for a week to pass without souls being saved. He never waited for what so many deem seasonable occasions. He made the occasions seasonable. And it is said that at tea-meetings, public meetings, business meetings, social gatherings, family visitations, wherever he met man, woman, or child, he was desirously endeavouring to win them for Christ.

And as we trace him from circuit to circuit he never wavered in the aim with which he started, and never diminished in the consecrated abandon and holy covenant with God with which he began.

His entries in his journal are revelations of a soul unfolding Godward, of a mighty wrestler in prayer, and a successful pleader with men, of seemingly insuperable difficulties and discouragements yielding to a consecrated persistency of a man who lived with, and for God so whole-heartedly, of a simple, artless servant of Christ, swayed and dominated by the constraining love, that of him it may be fitly said, “he knew but one thing, and aimed ever for it, and accomplished it,” which was to glorify God in the salvation of others. In his several circuits he did Herculean service, and realised abundant in-gatherings, but perhaps the outstanding period of his ministry was the years when he was the Connexional evangelist.

He is best known as the denominational evangelist and the holiness advocate. To many it was evident that there was room in the Connexion for such labour, and it was equally recognised that George Warner was the suitable man for the work. So to this task he was appointed by the Conference of 1874. Amid the multitudinous cases of improvement in our chapel accommodation

and the adjustments of our churches to the new conditions which had come with the years, evangelism, which had been our differentiating feature as a church, was, it was thought, waning. And amid the commendable prosperity of our members, and the social betterment of thousands in our churches it was thought that scriptural holiness was little known, or indifferently recognised, so George Warner was set apart to visit the length and breadth of our Connexion to revive the old fervour, and to remind our churches of the nearly forgotten truth and rarely realised experience of inward and outward holiness.

A friend had offered a hundred pounds if a minister was set apart for this work, believing that there was not given that prominence to sanctification by faith in our ministry as the subject demanded. Other friends sympathised with the new departure, and the financial means were almost entirely secured by private generosity.

George Warner appeared to many to be the most suitable man for this special work. His exceptional soul-saving success in his circuits was his credential. Moreover, he had been undergoing preparation for this exalted task.

Soon after his conversion he became acquainted with the doctrine of “entire sanctification,” and so profoundly impressed was he of its importance and necessity, both as regards a crowning experience, and as the worthiest fitness for service, that he at once sought the blessing and found it. Then for some considerable time his reading and studies were confined exclusively to this subject. The subject became to him not only a grand theory, but a blessed experience – a passion - a flame which burned on his altar-heart. It was seen then that he was to all appearances, by preparation, providential opening and call of the Church, the one man elected to undertake this sublime mission.

It was at Croydon that Mr. Warner commenced his special work as Connexional Evangelist, then for twelve years he carried his mission throughout the denomination. It is a remarkable chapter in our church’s history is this dozen years of Connexional missioning - remarkable from the standpoint of the man and his methods, and the vast numbers converted, and of those who were brought into the experience of purity of heart.

Never did a man give himself in a greater whole-hearted abandon to any work than George Warner did to this evangelist commission. He ranks with the brotherhood of heroes who gird themselves for a destined work, and who do it with a singleness of aim and a concentric energy. Xavier said, “Whatever form of death or torture awaits me, I am ready to suffer it ten thousand times for the salvation of a single soul.” Sufferings and hardships never daunt men of such noble breed. A consecrated vow seals them, and a divine constraint urges them. They are the King’s servants who stand continually before Him, ever listening to know and always eager to do His will.

The record of these years that Mr. Warner served our churches can never be worthily penned by us, and we think, were not adequately appreciated at the time he was so mightily aiming to advance the denomination’s interests. Still many of us remember those days when he was forcing upon the churches the supreme questions of evangelism and holiness, and some accounts are left us of remarkable awakenings in many parts “of our Connexion through his labours.

In nearly every great centre of our denominational life be rendered valiant service, and multitudes were saved, and believers were awakened to a better apprehension of the things for which they were apprehended of God, and workers were stirred and kindled into an intenser enthusiasm in service.

However, as we look back, we do not think that the maximum of results followed the labours of George Warner as might have done. And two causes it seems to us were conspiring to minimise so mighty a mission, and so valiant a missionary. We are interjecting this not in any critical sense, but to indicate some of the things which tended to hinder this mighty worker, and which stood in the way of even more abundant results. Two words express our meaning, unsympathy and method.

And the word unsympathy represents much of the attitude which confronted George Warner's work, and the word method will summarise all we mean about the worker which inclined to reduce the influence of it among many.

There was no open opposition to Mr. Warner that I am cognisant of, but there were many ministers and officials who did not look upon Mr. Warner's appointment as a special Connexional Evangelist with an unmixed favour. And the unsympathy, if not prejudice, was never absent during the years that he served in this capacity. It was said, "such an appointment was invidious and was a reflection upon his ministerial brethren."

Happily we have grown wiser! Amid the multitudinous duties and demands of circuit life we cannot all do the aggressive work required to be done. The conserving and nurturing of those we already have, absorb all the time of the ordinary minister. The evangelist and minister are not rivals but co-workers. The one sows and the other reaps, and both share in and should rejoice because of results. There is no room for mutual distrust and jealousy. The seed-basket must precede the sickle. And the wise minister welcomes the evangelist, and the evangelist will know he only reaps what has been previously sown.

The other cause which militated against this mighty man was what we have called method. And this relates to the man as an instrument, and equally to the state of things by which, as a worker, he was surrounded.

George Warner was not wanting one iota in sincerity, whole-heartedness, holy abandon, and untiring devotion to his work. But he had the faults of his excellences. Strength is not always gentle, and goodness is not always attractive. The evangel of love is more winsome than thundering. Holiness means patience and kindness as well as purity. And many a grand presentation of God's Gospel has been spoiled by some harsh tone of the Imman messenger. And often enough has the imperative need of entire surrender to God been resisted because of the manner and severity of the speaker.

The spirit and method of presenting truth are no small factors in its advance. George Warner belonged to the old school of evangelism. And a new age was dawning, and men were less affected by the old evangelism than they had been in prior generations. We are not speaking of a new gospel but of a new concept and method. A new evangel is not needed, but a new evangelism is

periodically demanded, for the very nature of truth demands from time to time changes in its presentation to constitute it the Gospel for the altered conditions.

The old sensational and emotional methods were beginning to produce no results. Men were less influenced by excitement and fear than before. Men refused to be driven and dragooned into salvation. And who among us who have watched the trend of events do not see a marvellous change in the concept of Christian truth and its presentation in our pulpits, and also the difference in the tone and approach of the evangelist as he speaks to men of salvation and endeavours to persuade them to accept it?

The Connexion has travelled a long distance from the old methods of evangelism. The old order changes, and it is true with reference to evangelism as other things. The crude and uncultured gospelising is powerless. The appeals and denunciations of the old type of evangelising have been left far behind. And men are more approached by reason than feeling, and are more drawn than driven than they were in the years gone. The evangelist to-day is of a new order. The old Gospel speaks in a new tone. It is more ethical, human, tender, and wooing. It is less assertive and demonstrative.

George Warner did our churches an incomparable service during that period when we were passing from the old into the newer methods. We had almost called him the Baptist John, last of the old prophets, with his "axe" and winnowing wind, and at the same time the herald and pioneer of the coming and better representations of the searching love.

The elements of George Warner's power were his rich store of scripture knowledge, his unflinching devotion to his work, his sanctity of character, and his habitual communion with God. He was a mighty man in prayer, because secret fellowship with God was his very life. That he was eccentric in manner, and erratic in style, and sometimes masterful in spirit, is simply to state matters very mildly, still underneath was the sanctity of character which told the fact of a soul that lived in friendly relations with God. The wall in the study of Fletcher of Madeley, it is said; "was stained with the breath of his long and oft-times prayings." And the knees of George Warner bore the marks of his habit of prayer, for when he went to undergo an operation the secret was made known by the hardened and horny knees of how much he prayed.

Here was the secret of his power and success. His public life was sustained by private nurture. He prevailed with men because he had power with God. It is estimated that not fewer than twenty thousand of souls entered the kingdom of grace through his labours, and add to this the thousands who were enlightened, and induced to desire and seek for the higher experiences and fuller realisations of Christian life and service; then we have a record of service which gives him a place among the greatest of our church's workers.

Such exhaustive labours began to leave their marks upon even his leonine strength and massive constitution. And in 1891 he was obliged to retire from the active ministry, however he could not wholly rest, for during the eight following years he served six months in Bristol, one year and nine months in Nottingham, twelve months in Barnoldswick, nine months at Settle, which declare how little he thought of rest and how much he still longed for toil.

At the last-named place the call to the higher service came. His old trouble, the malady which had afflicted him for years returned like a strong man armed, and it became evident, although he had previously undergone two serious operations for it, that to it he was now to succumb. His sufferings were acute, but his last days were harmonious with the years of his Christian life, brave, bright, and blessed. On April 14th, 1899, the summons came, and the mighty worker passed to his reward and rest.

To many of us who were young ministers when George Warner was in the zenith of his might, his memory is blessed. We did not understand him, he more terrified us than drew us, but the years have interpreted his worth and power.

On one occasion we read a paper on the "Essentials of a Ministers Training." George Warner was present, we made it quite clear to our own satisfaction, that a minister ought to be an encyclopaedia of every kind of knowledge. When the criticism came he, with an unusual patience and kindness for him, did not dissent, but added the word, "Do all that, get all that, then set it on fire." Yes, we have been learning through the years what he meant - mere knowledge and culture are insufficient without God's Fire.

References

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