

Transcription of article in the Christian Messenger by W.M. Patterson in a series 'Preachers of Thirty Years Ago'

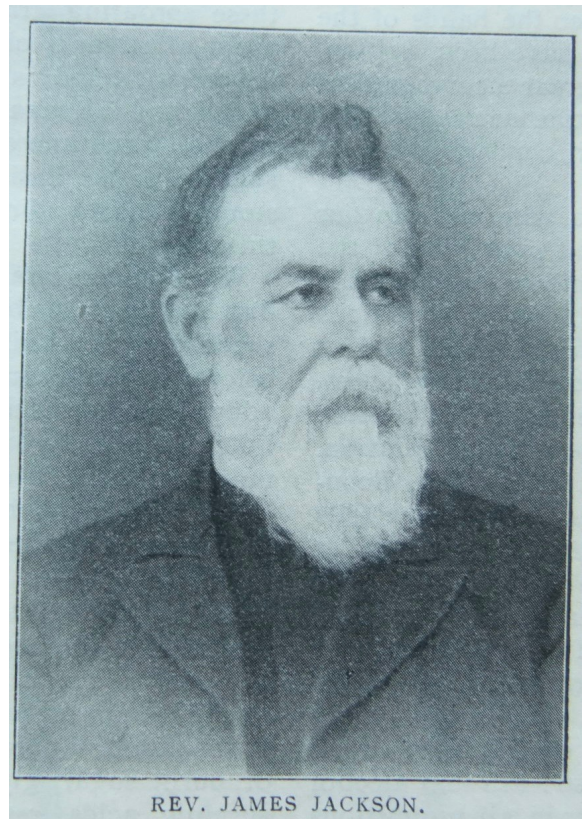
Taking up a copy of the Minutes for 1869 the other day, I found that the following constituted the Sunderland District Committee: Moses Lupton, Sampson Turner, John Lightfoot, William Dent, William Antliff, James A. Bastow, Colin C. McKechnie, Peter Clarke, Thomas Southron, Ralph Fenwick, Henry Phillips, James Jackson, John Atkinson, Thomas Greenfield, Thomas Gibson, Joseph Fawcett, George Charlton, William Stewart, Robert Hewison, John Spence, Thomas Fairley, John C.

Richardson; Ralph Shields, Secretary. What a galaxy of Connexional worthies was therein contained! And James Jackson in the centre! It was a few years before 1869 that I first came under the spell of the orator. I am using the words "came under the spell" advisedly. Being young, and living away on the outskirts of the Connexion, I knew very few of our ministers in those days. It was our missionary anniversary,

and if I had heard that the Rev. James Jackson was the deputation, the information had made little impression upon my mind. But the missionary meeting was a triumph never to be forgotten. What a delightful surprise it was for all of us youngsters! The mellow tones of Mr. Jackson's rich voice captured us, and we melded ourselves to him. He bore us along, and when he had given the climax to his argument by the historic confession of Julian the Apostate—"O Galilean, thou hast conquered!"—we were transported. It was good to see the face of Barnabas Wild that night—Mr. Wild was then our superintendent—and when afterwards he asked some of us, with a twinkle in his eye, how we would like that gentleman for our minister, we felt he was poking fun at us. He did become my minister, however, though in another place. The marvel of that night was increased by the fact that Mr. Jackson had got out of a sick bed to give that remarkable speech.

Lest I should omit it, let me say before I proceed further that James Jackson was a handsome man—a gentleman—a man people looked twice at as they passed him in the street. His attire proclaimed his avocation; his well-groomed person told of his orderly habits; his bearing spoke him a leader. Clear in his thought, he went straight to the expression of it in speech and act. He always knew where he was going, and he got there. His strength of personality, power of will, coupled with his intellectual perception and spiritual enthusiasm, gave him an early standing amongst the stalwarts of the Connexion. But for the inscrutable break in his ministerial career—when his commanding voice gave way, and he passed into the silences of seclusion for years—his name would have been written in more brilliant characters in every section of his church's life in the three decades of the last century, and been an authoritative guide to the captains of the twentieth. It was a strange providence. The skein is too intricate for mortals to unravel.

Mr. Jackson was a young man when he took his place in the administrative circle. Let anyone who has knowledge of the chiefs of Primitive Methodism of the seventies and eighties run over the



names mentioned above, and let him think of the status of the Sunderland District at that period. Its territory extended from St. Hilda's country in Yorkshire; to St. Ebba's in Berwickshire, on the east coast, and from Whitehaven to Motherwell (Scotland) on the west. Its representatives dominated the councils of the denomination, and the glamour of the Northmen lingers yet in the imagination of the southern people. Behind those stated were such men in 1869 as *John Watson, John Hallam, John Welford, H.B. Kendall, William Johnson, William Bowe and W.A. French, who subsequently rose to official rank, and all of whom are yet "on this side Jordan's wave"; and in strenuous Circuit work were Joseph Spoor, Edward Rust, Henry Pratt, sen., Henry Yooll, sen., Adam Dodds, Andrew Latimer, Robert Clemitson, Barnabas Wild, William Fulton, William Graham, Hugh Gilmore, John Taylor, and many, many more, whose names and work and worth cannot die. Those were the contemporaries of James Jackson, some of them touching the beginnings of Primitive Methodism, and others remaining with us until this present. Then there were the laymen so-called; but it is not needful to mention others than those already named. George Charlton and Thomas Gibson were hosts in themselves in the most literal sense.

In such an array it is not difficult to see what ability and force of character were needed to obtain a place in the then restricted "seats of the mighty," and having got there, to be and to do sufficient to keep it. As a legislator James Jackson shone conspicuously. Persuasive in speech, he was also agile in debate; and there were full dress debates in those days, as Mr. Kendall reminds us, for in any change proposed the authors of the original scheme had frequently then to be faced, and their fondness for their own projects to be reckoned with. Jealous guardians of 'things as they were' were the elders. The youngmen of larger outlook had to fight every inch of their way. But they had also a large slice of the conservatism of the northern men they addressed as fathers, and not a little of what was called their autocratic spirit. Their people of the time fostered it in them. As a whole, the multitude believed there were no preachers—well, just one here and there—no administrators, like the men in the Sunderland District, and their opinion infected the south. What a to-do there was over the "throwing down of the district barriers," and what a pother over the college! What stratagems and intrigues went on at the stationing in District Meetings! Quarterly Meetings, District Meetings and Conferences are now very, very faint semblances of their former selves. In my ignorance, I remember, I had the audacity to fall athwart a proposal which had the support of John Atkinson and James Jackson. They were present at the meeting, but not members of it. Of course, they did not remain silent. I never attempted anything of the kind again.

When first stationed at Newcastle, James Jackson made his reputation as a preacher on Tyneside. The late Robert Foster, than whom it would have been most difficult to find a more competent judge in any church, formed a high estimate of his pulpit work, and retained it to the end. Old Nelson Street at that time was an arena of preaching power. At Stockton Mr. Jackson rose to the zenith of his strength, and Paradise Row Chapel was crowded whenever he appeared in the pulpit, prominent Wesleyans as well as notables in other communities attending the ministry of "that prince of preachers," as he has been called.

After his voice was restored, he came to Newcastle for a second term; but during the years the great Circuit had been divided into three, and it came to pass that the second and third Circuits were governed by father and son. Orderly in his person, James Jackson was pre-eminently orderly in the construction of his sermons, and everything was laid under contribution to elucidate the subject. His discourses were "built up" on a plan clear to his own mind, to be made clear to his hearers. The great verities of the faith had in him an able exponent, and his fine presence, and address, together with his tastefulness of expression both in tone and diction, gave an attractive dignity and inspiring

instruction to his utterances. He was in every sense an orator who compelled attention and assent. Of this the entire Connexion had a share during his Presidential year. Ay, but I had heard that voice in its fullest beauty.

James Pickett recently wove into his lecture on "The One-eyed Preacher of Wild Wales" a tender note for preachers' wives. Mrs. Jackson lived for her husband. He owed her much. Nor will her distinguished son attempt to minimise his own debt to her. She yet lives to enjoy in her quiet eventide the fruitage of her care for father and son. The memory of the one is revered, and increasing honour has come to the other.

*Since this sketch was written. Dr. John Watson has been called to the higher service.

References

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