

Elizabeth Bultitude: The Last of the Amazons

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Primitive Methodism has not been rigid in its forms of service, nor in its choice of agents to carry on the work of winning men to Christ. Long before Birmingham Unitarians called a lady into the ministry of the Church as a kind of protest against the idea that the functions of the Christian ministry can only be fulfilled by men, Primitive Methodism called devoted women into the ranks of its regular ministry, and sent them forth to toil in labours more abundant for Christ and His Church.

How many such workers have had a place in our Church it would be interesting to know, but certainly the last, and possibly not the least, was Elizabeth Bultitude, whose labours were largely confined to the Eastern Counties, although she did good work in Berkshire during the later period of her life, and left a name fragrant with precious memories in the minds of many whom she had won to Christ.



A short, thick set, sturdy woman, with strong masculine voice and an equally strong masculine will, she entered into the full ministry of our Church when such ministry meant long journeys, great hardships, scanty fare, and poor, very poor remuneration. She has left on record the simple statement that during her thirty years of toil she "travelled thousands upon thousands of miles." Quite a woman's way of putting it, but nevertheless absolute fact. "I have walked between five and six thousand miles in one year, I have visited from ten to forty families in a day and prayed with them. I have preached five and six times in the week and three and sometimes five times on the Sabbath." Truly these were really amazonian labours, heroically performed and wonderfully successful. She was the colleague and companion of such outstanding pioneers as Robert Key, Henry Gunns, John Winkfield, and John Smith. Her trial sermon was preached in the presence of John Smith and "trial" sermon it was, for she "broke down" in her effort, but she says, "Mr. Smith helped me up" as he helped many a soul by the wondrous power of his mighty prayers. He was not a great preacher, but he was mighty in prayer. Men quailed beneath his prayers, when they were not moved by his sermons, and many a soul was prayed into the kingdom by this great Evangelist. In the old Lakenham Chapel Mr. Smith helped her up, and put her on the plan and then sent her out into the ministry, where for thirty years she did valiant service for Christ. "I only missed two appointments in all these years, one when there was a flooding rain and the other a heavy thunderstorm, and being planned out of doors I did not think it wise to go." Certainly not. But what self-denial and hardship were crowded into those thirty years. Norwich Circuit with its journeys stretching away to Loddon on the one side and Bungay on the other; Mattishall extending from

Shipdham to Swannington; N. Walsham with its Continental area, and Lynn with its extensive missions. Yet only twice did she fail to go to the appointed service in thirty years! In early life she had known what hardship meant. She had been born in a little Norfolk village, of labouring parents in the hard days preceding the abolition of the Corn Laws. She attended one of those memorable Camp Meetings held in the Lollard's pit on Mousehold Heath, where Kett and his rebellious army was defeated, but which is now the people's pleasure ground for the City of Norwich, and whilst there she heard the truth and yielded to it; she listened to the message and responded thereto, and like many another in those days made her decision for Christ in the open air, in the presence of multitudes who were there. It was a bold decision, but it was real and lasting. For sixty-four years she adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour by a consistent life, and by heroic and strenuous service she made for herself a place in the annals of our Church and died at the ripe old age of eighty-one years.

No one can measure the good done by this quaint, impassioned, earnest soul. Quaint she was. She had a mighty notion of a lady's rights. No frivolity was allowed in her presence. Flirtation was altogether out of the question. The glance of her eyes and the stern rebuke of her masculine voice would settle once and for all any thoughtless intruder. Whether she ever thought of anything else beyond her message is an open question that no one has ever attempted to settle. Certain it is that even in later years, after superannuation, no one was allowed to enter her cottage home after dark. In those days appointments were filled up by the Circuit Committee Meeting after the preaching service, and if it was resolved to ask Miss Bultitude to take an appointment, which otherwise would be neglected, and the minister called at her cottage on his way home to inform her of the request, no door was opened for him that night. "What do you want?" was the enquiry from within. "I have just come from the Circuit Committee and we want you to go to — — on Sunday, will you go?" "Here's a time of night to come to one's home," was the only answer, "You must come in the morning." And in the morning the visit had to be paid if the appointment was to be supplied. There was not much of the milk of human kindness in her strong, stern nature, no tender sentiment of home or family. But a strong, stern desire to save men and women from the power of sin, which grieved her so deeply, and to win them for Christ.

And that was her message. To that task she had been called. She had but one talent and she used it. She was not gifted in song, nor stirred with poetic imagination, nor endowed in winsome or charming style of speech. But she knew that men were in sin and that Christ could save from sin, and this she wanted to tell out. It was like a fire burning in her heart. Of schooling she had but little, of books she read few, but one book was her daily companion. She knew the Bible. She read it day by day. Five or six chapters of the sacred Book was her daily portion. She fed her soul upon its hidden manna and nourished her life by close fellowship with God. If she did not indulge in poetry she knew how to pray. Ah, those prayers. Real pleading with God. No shadow of doubt respecting Him. She knew Him. She lived in His presence. She walked in the light of His favour. She believed in the promises of His word; they were "Yea and Amen" to her; they were written in His book, and she used them, pleaded them, "hung" to them, went forth believing that those promises were hers, until as she entered the little pulpit or took her stand on village green or wayside, men knew that she had been with God. No personal charm, no subtle winsomeness of manner, but a strange, mystic power that made men and women quail as she spoke of the wrath to come, or the terrors of the law, and then pointed to Christ the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. That was her

message. She knew no other. Of politics or business, of domestic joys and sorrows, of Circuit affairs, or Connexional statecraft she knew nothing and cared less. It was hers to proclaim salvation to the lost. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And though to some this scope of life seems small, yet her life was not small, her influence was not narrow. East Anglia was steeped in a sad and stolid indifference to the higher things. Its clergy were so deplorably careless and indifferent that even in Ecclesiastical circles it was called "the dead See;" its labouring population was seething with social discontent and bitter dissatisfaction. Faith was dead and hope dying. But these stern unpolished messengers of the Cross awoke the people to new hopes, aroused in them new desires, turned their thoughts into new channels, saved them from the bitterness of despair by opening to them the gates of a spiritual experience which thrilled them with joy unspeakable. They saved the nation by saving the individual from sin and "the sorrows of their time." Their record is on high. But it is well for its in these brighter days to remember how the change has been wrought, and who its illustrious agents were, and in that long roll of splendid workers no name will have a more conspicuous place than the last "lady minister in our Church, Elizabeth Bultitude, who turned many to righteousness and helped to evangelize the villages of East Anglia.

References

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