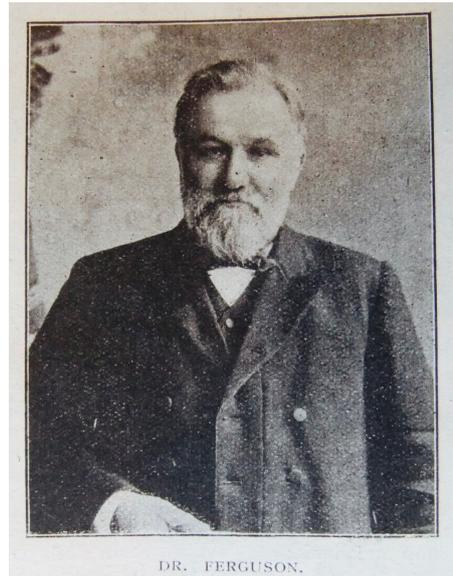


Joseph Ferguson, F.R.A.S., D.D.

Transcription of article in the Christian Messenger by Rev. R.W. Keightley

DR. FERGUSON was born at Brierley Hill in 1838, and closed his ministry and earthly career there in July, 1904. Of his forty-three years' ministry thirty-eight years were spent in his native district. During his itinerancy he was thrice stationed in Birmingham, twice at Tunstall, and five years at Old Hill. By the Conference, 1904, he was placed on the retired list, and within a month of that event he passed to his reward in heaven. During the last four years he had the joy of knowing that one of his three clever sons was giving a good account of himself in the ministry of our Church, and it was a great loss to the denomination when a year or two ago death put a period to his fruitful ministry.



DR. FERGUSON.

At the age of eighteen Joseph Ferguson was converted, and at once he set about self-improvement and the service of his fellow-men. His early years were spent in lowly circumstances, and while he was quite a child his father died. He earnestly gave himself to study. He had a passion for work. To him difficulties were a challenge to more strenuous endeavour. Soon he became a Sunday school teacher and local preacher, and nothing was allowed to deter or detain him from the prosecution of God's work. His secular employment was at the forge, and he has been known to go direct from work to week-night appointments, and go through his ablutions and take his tea afterwards. Mere conventional proprieties meant little to this man of sturdy physique and spiritual zeal. It does not surprise us to learn that he acquired a working knowledge of Greek and Latin. He read widely in science, philosophy, theology and literature, and helped many a young minister in his choice of books and methods of study. He had a passion for astronomy and earned the right to use the "F.R.A.S." When the Hartley Lectureship was founded he was selected to deliver the first lecture of the series. He was a member of all the Methodist Ecumenical Conferences which took place during his life. His love of knowledge prompted him to give unstinted labour in the founding of Bourne College.

One who owes Dr. Ferguson much gratitude for help received from him, says, "Instead of having command of language, language had command of himHe hated the manuscript, he loved the freedom of spontaneous speech. The first Hartley Lecture was never published because it was never written." He was essentially a preacher and orator. His power of evangelistic appeal was very great, and to few preachers has been granted larger success in bringing men and women to decision for Christ. On his first station hundreds upon hundreds of conversions were witnessed. Still larger results were won on the Old Hill Circuit where he spent five of the middle years of his ministry. In the Methodist churches there will ever be the need for such men as Dr. Ferguson.

We have had greater administrators, men of profounder learning, and preachers of more polished and stately eloquence than he; but our chronicles contain but few records of greater devotion, and larger and abiding success. Our Church honoured itself by calling him to the Presidential Chair at the Northampton Conference in 1891, at the close of his five years' term as Secretary of the Sunday

School Union. The latter appointment must have been greatly to his mind as it gave him enlarged opportunities of contact with the young life of the Church.

In politics Dr. Ferguson was an enthusiastic Radical. In addressing crowds of working men his happiness was great, and so also was theirs. In the Home Rule controversy he took the Unionist side, and henceforth, being unable to forsake the traditions and principles he held so dear, he went into comparative quiet. He was in hearty sympathy with all measures of social reform. Temperance and education had in him a mighty and fearless protagonist. He was a great human. His own struggles after efficiency bound him by strong ties to the masses of the people, and the toilers of the "black country" were not slow to appreciate his endeavours on their behalf. He was emphatically a man people, and both on distinctively religious lines and in civic endeavour, he ever sought to serve them.

Although all his appointments save one were within the borders of the Tunstall District, Dr. Ferguson enjoyed for many years a Connexional reputation as preacher and platform orator, while the other Free Churches gladly availed themselves of his efficient help. Those who knew him best cherish his memory chiefly as that of a successful evangelist. His passion for the salvation of men was an undying fire. He was wont to urge his colleagues to hold prayer meetings at the close of their week-evening sermons. He looked for conversions between Sundays! We can best honour the memory of these worthies of a departed generation by imitating their glowing zeal for spiritual results. Dr. Clifford and many others are calling us to the glorious work of personal evangelism. This is the prime requisite for the success of the "Spiritual Advance Campaign." Along this line are to be found our own highest good and joy, and the expansion of the Kingdom of our Lord. Unprecedented facilities for mental culture and equipment are ours. Financial burdens which have long sapped the energies of the Churches have been greatly diminished. The course is clear for evangelistic aggression. Such lives as Dr. Ferguson's slimy that ordinary means and methods may result in wondrous revolutions in the Church and in the world.

References

Christian Messenger 1923/330