Chapter 10: THE EVENING OF LIFE.

EARLY in the year 1818, Lorenzo Dow felt ‘his mind drawn towards Europe.’ In May he embarked in New York in the *Alexander Mansfield*, and arrived safely in the Mersey on the 18th of June. After resting for a few days in Liverpool he commenced his tour of the churches, by holding religious services at Warrington. On Monday, July 6th, Hugh Bourne received a letter stating that Dow had arrived in England. Without delay, Bourne started from his home in Staffordshire to give the American Evangelist a hearty welcome. In his diary, Bourne writes: ‘I set out between one and two o’clock, and went thirty miles to Mr. Eaton’s, Stockton Heath. On Tuesday, I heard L. Dow speak at five at Warrington; at night at Stockton Heath; during the day I had some talk with him. On Wednesday, I heard him at five and was with him part of the day. Heard him at night at Statham.’

Dow, having remained at Warrington and neighbourhood for a few days, proceeded to the Staffordshire potteries. Hugh Bourne says, ‘Sunday, July 19th, camp meeting at Tunstall. Lorenzo Dow was there. We had some rain about noon, with thunder and lightning. Monday was at Tunstall, we had a number of preachings. L. Dow spoke at five in the morning and again at five in the evening. On Tuesday L. Dow spoke at five in the morning, then took coach, having to be at Preston Brook at night.’ Dow, after spending a few weeks evangelistic labours in Lancashire, began his mission in Nottingham on the first Sunday in September. In the earlier part of the day, Lorenzo Dow, along with Dorothy Ripley - a preacheress of considerable usefulness, and belonging to the Society of Friends, and who had returned from mission work in America - and Hugh Bourne held an open-air service. In the afternoon and evening they held crowded services in the Primitive Methodist Preaching Room, and many souls were born into the kingdom of God. During the week, Dow preached to multitudes of people in the neighbouring towns of Basford, Hucknall, Bulwell, and Lambley, and scores of people professed conversion. The following is a specimen of Dow’s arduous labours. After the exhausting services of the Sabbath, Dow preached on Monday morning at the early hour of five o’clock. At mid-day, he conducted and spoke at an open-air service, and in the evening preached again. On Tuesday morning at half past five he spoke to a large company in the preaching-room at Nottingham; at ten o’clock he preached at Basford. At two o’clock he spoke at Hucknall to ‘a great multitude’ of eager listeners.
On the following Saturday, Lorenzo Dow passed through the villages of Burton Joyce and Gunthorpe, where he preached from a vehicle to large congregations. In the evening he held an open-air service at East Bridgford, which was attended by hundreds of devout worshippers. He selected for his text, ‘How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him.’ (1 Kings xviii. 21.)

Acting upon a sudden impulse, Dow stopped in the middle of his discourse, and unceremoniously came down from the preaching-stand. He passed through the vast congregation to a young man who had been recently converted. Placing his hand upon the young man’s shoulder, and looking him full in the face, Dow asked: ‘How long halt you between two opinions respecting your call to preach the gospel? You are called of God, and woe unto you if you preach not the gospel! ’ Dow then told him that he would meet with considerable opposition, but urged upon him to be faithful to his personal conviction and life’s mission. He then reverently laid his hands upon the young man’s head and offered an earnest prayer. This strange method of procedure was entirely new to the Nottinghamshire congregation. They stood with the greatest orderliness while Dow performed this impromptu ordination ceremony. Dow then returned to the preaching-stand and finished his discourse. A gracious influence rested upon the people, and many felt it good to be there.

On Sunday, September 14th, 1818, Dow conducted the opening services of the new chapel at Bingham, which was the first chapel erected by the Primitive Methodists in the County of Nottingham. At the morning service the chapel was crowded to excess, and scores of people were unable to get in. In the afternoon he held a service in the Market Place. The people had come for miles to see and hear the distinguished American Evangelist. He commenced the service by singing one of his popular American hymns, in which the huge congregation joined. After delivering a practical discourse, which was full of the gospel of Jesus Christ, many of the hearers were conscience-smitten by the Spirit of God. He formed the congregation into a large circle. In a short time no fewer than two hundred penitents came into the open space, fell upon their knees, and were earnestly seeking the priceless blessing of pardoning mercy, many of whom were brought into gospel liberty. At the evening service the chapel was crowded. After a powerful discourse preached by Dow, a prayer-meeting began, which lasted until nearly midnight, and scores of men and women were soundly converted.

During the following week Lorenzo Dow preached at Sileby and other places in Leicestershire. He also conducted camp-meetings in the county town and at Barleston, the latter lasting for nearly a week, where much permanent good was accomplished. He then returned to Lancashire. Before leaving English shores he published a small pamphlet entitled: ‘A Word to the Methodists,’ and it was specially addressed to all those who had benefited by his public labours. Dow says:—‘Being about to sail to the land of my nativity, I entreat all into whose hands this may come, to pay attention to first principles; therefore it is not amiss to read the old magazines to see if there be any contrast. Hate vice and love virtue; and in all you do, act with a single eye to the glory of God, as you can answer for it in the day of final decision. The only way to fare well is to do and act well. Let us strive to live every day to God, beginning, spending, and closing the same with Him, that we by His grace may meet in the regions of eternal glory. May we be one in heart when separated by an unfathomable ocean!’
In March, 1819, he paid his last visit to Ireland. During the next month he was on his way to America. With little intermission, his subsequent years were spent in preaching and travelling through the United States and the Canadian Settlements.

The following lines, which Dow composed, give a poetical description of his labours and sufferings during his eventful ministry.

‘Oh that poor sinners did but know
What I for them oft undergo;
 Permit me now my friends to tell
What my poor frame doth often feel.

Of God I’m called to bear the news
To heathens, Gentiles, and the Jews,
Of Gospel grace that all who hear,
May seek the Lord while He is near.

With weeping eyes and troubled heart-
From friends and parents I did part,
To preach in regions far and wide,
Where friends are scarce, and foes deride.

In sultry glebes I often faint.
Where vapours rise and make me faint,
The scorching sun darts down his rays,
And overwhelsmes me in the blaze.

Often with hunger faint I grow.
Far distant from my friends below;
And have no money, food to buy,
And almost at the point to die.

Thro’ creeks and rivers swift and wide,
Shallow and deep I have to ride;
Perhaps beat down sometimes, before
I can in safety reach the shore.

The clouds arise, and thunders break,
And ground beneath seems to shake;
The mountains tremble at the sound.
And wet all through I’m often found.

Sometimes at night in sheds I go,
To shelter from the driving snow,
And there fatigued I sleepless stay,
Smother’d with smoke, or chill’d till day.
Sometimes I with false brethren meet,
Whose hearts are full of vain deceit;
They seem quite faithful at the first,
But of all men these are the worst.

My natural brethren oft cry out:
‘We wonder what he is about
Why does he so fatigue himself?
We cannot think he loves his health.’

But oh! if they would look around,
They’d know why I’m thus often found,
A view of souls exposed to hell
Has made me bid to ease farewell.

The worth of souls lies near my heart,
Which causes me with all to part;
To call poor sinners home to God,
Far wandering from the heavenly road.

With arguments, Lord, fill my mouth,
While I am preaching north and south;
And may poor sinners east and west,
Turn to thee, Lord, and find true rest.

And when I’ve done my work below,
I’ll gladly quit this vale of woe,
And mount above the lofty sky,
To praise Thy name eternally.’

In January, 1820, his wife breathed her last while resting in his arms. For fifteen years his faithful Peggy had been the companion of his voyages and journeys on the Master’s business; and had shared his toils, sorrows, privations, and triumphs. As a ‘compliment’ to his first wife’s memory he married a second before the year was out. Although his second wife is said to have been an excellent sensible and godly woman, yet life with her as companion was not so pleasant as it had been with ‘Peggy.’ She very wisely insisted on controlling her own private property, and presiding over her domestic concerns. In her temporary absence from home, the eccentric husband had the words, ‘Women Rule Here,’ painted over the front door.

As Dow got older, he became more eccentric in manner, and more extravagant in speech. With his advancing years he got further away from Methodism. The Methodism of 1820 was so largely altered from the original pattern that, according to his description, ‘It was like the Irishman’s jackknife, which was twenty-nine years old; had it from his father; it had worn out five new blades and three new handles, and still was the same good old knife.’
Dow’s indiscreet outspokenness led him into trouble. In his published journals, he charges the late Rev. William Hammet, the South Carolinian Seceder from the Methodist Episcopal church, with ‘crooked work,’ and that his motives were impure. In May, 1821, Dow was tried at Charleston for giving currency to these printed statements. Dow significantly says ‘that he was tried under the old feudal law, whose maxim is the greater the truth, the greater the libel.’ He was found guilty, and was sentenced to be imprisoned for twenty-four hours. He was also fined a dollar, and mulcted in the costs of the prosecution. Dow paid the fine, the costs were relinquished by the court officers, and the governor released him from jail on the afternoon of the day of trial.

After faithfully preaching the gospel for thirty-eight years, Lorenzo Dow suddenly passed away on February 7th, 1834. Feeling suddenly unwell, while on a journey to Washington, he entered an apothecary’s shop in Georgetown, which adjoins the city, and asked for medicine. The physician quietly informed him that it would be useless, for he would be dead in less than six hours. ‘Is that your honest opinion?’ asked Dow. ‘It is,’ said the physician. ‘Amen, so be it,’ reverently said Dow. In one short hour he breathed his last, and his spirit passed from the toils of his great world-parish to its everlasting reward in the presence of the enthroned King.

References

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