Chapter 8: EVANGELISM IN ENGLAND.

DR. DOWLING, of New York, in a prefatory note to a new edition of Lorenzo Dow’s works, observes ‘He was a remarkable individual. His whole appearance was such as to awaken a high degree of interest and curiosity. One month he would be heard of, labouring for the good of souls, in his New England home; the next, braving the forests and snowy forests of a Canadian winter; the next, on his way to Ireland or England, in the prosecution of some benevolent enterprise.’

Owing to Dow’s excessive labours, his physical strength was gradually declining. As he required rest and, believing that he had an inward call to Europe, he determined on a sea voyage to England. After a tedious passage of some forty-four days’ duration, Lorenzo Dow, in company with his wife, landed in Liverpool on Christmas Eve, 1805. His first service in England was held in a Liverpool chapel, belonging to the Methodist New Connexion. It was Dow’s great joy to witness the conversion of a woman at this first English service, which was the commencement of a religious revival in the city on the Mersey. Mr. P. Phillips, of Warrington, founder of the Independent Methodists, attended one of the services conducted by Dow. He gave the American Evangelist an earnest invitation to conduct a series of meetings in the Independent Methodist Chapel, Warrington. On the first evening, Dow and the members of the Church entered into a solemn covenant to pray and labour for a genuine revival of the work of God.

After conducting a fortnight’s services in London, at which good was accomplished, Dow returned to Warrington, where he held both in-door and out-door services. At his first open-air service held at the Cross, an incident occurred which made a deep impression upon the minds of those present. Whilst he was praying, he suddenly stopped and, after a solemn pause, exclaimed: ‘O Lord, Thou knowest what a heinous sin is committed in this town, but Thou wilt very soon bring it to light.’ A few days afterwards a man called upon Dow at Mr. Phillips’ and introduced himself by saying: ‘I am a great sinner, and have come for you to pray with me.’ Dow looked at the man, and in an abrupt manner said: ‘Go into the sitting room, and Mrs. Phillips and my wife will pray with you.’ After earnest prayer, the man - who was an entire stranger to Dow, left the house. Dow remarked to his host, ‘That man is so wicked I dare not ask God to bless him.’ Shortly afterwards, it was accidentally ascertained that a gang of men living in the town were banded together for unlawful purposes - this particular man being one of the ringleaders. He was subsequently arrested, tried at the Lancaster Assizes, found guilty, and hanged for his misdeeds.

Another remarkable incident occurred at the neighbouring town of Frodsham. While Dow was preaching in a house, he suddenly stopped in the middle of his sermon, and approached a young woman, who appeared to be in the best of health, and who was wearing a beautiful rose. Taking the flower from her dress, it immediately shed, leaving the bare stalk in his hand, He said, ‘In less than twelve months you will fall like this rose, by death.’ He then resumed his discourse. His remarks made a deep impression upon the young woman’s mind. She remained to the after-meeting, and got converted. A few months later, she gradually began to droop, rapidly sickened, and ultimately died triumphant in the Christian faith. These remarkable incidents led the people of Warrington and neighbourhood to look upon Dow in the light of a prophet.
Dow visited Dublin, where he met with a cordial reception from Dr. Paul Johnson, who had manifested such great kindness during his former visit to Ireland. He entered upon a spiritual Campaign, which lasted for several months. The Churches he visited were quickened, and many persons professed conversion. In company with the pious doctor he returned to Warrington. They entered upon an evangelistic tour in south-western Lancashire and the villages skirting the Cheshire Forest. In this neighbourhood the gospel had been faithfully preached by James Crawfoot, who subsequently became the first minister in the Primitive Methodist Church. This visit was attended with an outpouring of the Divine Spirit, and much lasting good was accomplished.

Dow visited Macclesfield, a town famous in Methodist annals as being the birth-place of the saintly Hester Ann Rogers, and the scene of the Rev. David Simpson’s earnest ministry. The towns-people were strongly prejudiced against the American Evangelist, and his reception was most unfavourable. A poor man who had suffered from an affliction which had robbed him of both speech and hearing, attended one of Dow’s open-air services. An extraordinary spiritual influence rested upon the people. To the great astonishment of the bystanders, the man, who had been both deaf and dumb, suddenly began to clap his hands, and praise God for what He had done for him. This remarkable occurrence was the means of popularising Dow, and people flocked to his services by hundreds. A great religious awakening was the result of his visit.

Lorenzo Dow visited the neighbouring town of Congleton, noted for its bull and bear-baitings, and other demoralising pastimes. Dow’s preaching and revivalistic fame had preceded him. The inhabitants eagerly anticipated his visit, and they flocked in hundreds to his services. A great revival took place, and many persons were converted. In April, 1807, after visiting Ireland, Warrington, and Liverpool, he paid a second visit to Macclesfield and Congleton. Although Dow was exceedingly unwell, he accepted the request of Hugh Bourne to preach in the Harriseahead Methodist Chapel, a building which had been erected through Bourne’s energetic labours, and which is still standing and used as a Sunday school. At this service Hugh Bourne saw and heard Dow for the first time. The American camp-meetings formed the theme of Dow’s address, in which he observed that ‘occasionally something of a Pentecostal power attended them, and that for a considerable time in America as much good had been done and as many souls brought to God at the camp-meetings as at all other meetings put together.’ This wonderful description of American camp-meetings made a deep impression upon the mind of Hugh Bourne. The same day Dow preached at the unusual hour of four o’clock in the afternoon in the Methodist Chapel at Burslem. He asked those present to enter into a covenant to meet him twice daily at the throne of Grace to pray for a revival of religion, and to express their willingness by a show of hands. In the evening he preached at Tunstall. After the exhaustive services and journeyings of the day he returned the same night to Congleton.
The following morning Dow preached at the Lawton Street end of Kinsey Street, as early as five o’clock, to the factory operatives before they began their daily labour in the silk mills. By a strange singularity, in this Congleton congregation were two men who ultimately became the pioneers of the English camp-meeting movement and whose names are known far and wide. On that Spring morning Hugh Bourne had walked some seven miles from his home at Bemersley, and William Clowes had travelled nine miles from Burslem, in the heart of the Staffordshire Potteries. At eight o’clock, the breakfast hour of the silk-workers, Dow delivered his farewell address to a large assembly in the Congleton streets. Dow subsequently visited Lymm, Preston Brook, Frodsham, and Chester. After being in England and Ireland for about eighteen months he and his wife left Liverpool for the United States, on May 6th, 1807.

The memorable visit of Lorenzo Dow to England resulted in the holding of the first English camp-meeting and the ultimate formation of the Primitive Methodist Church. At Dow’s farewell service at Congleton, Bourne purchased from him two pamphlets. The one, written by Dow, gave a general description of the holding of camp-meetings and the great good resulting therefrom. The other was entitled: *A Defence of Camp-meetings* and was written by the Rev. S.K. Jennings, M.A. The reading of these publications enkindled Hugh Bourne’s religious enthusiasm. He determined to hold a camp-meeting at Norton - the village adjoining Bemersley, to counteract the riotings and drinking customs of the Wake, which is the Parish annual feast.

On the following Monday evening, at the close of the Harriseahead class Meeting, Bourne laid his proposals before the members. They readily assented and promised their assistance. Someone in the meeting reminded them of Daniel Shubotham’s long-talked-about and unfulfilled promise that they should ‘have a meeting upon Mow some Sunday and have a whole day’s praying and then you’ll be satisfied.’ These earnest Staffordshire colliers and reclamed drunkards and cockfighters examined the Burslem Methodist Circuit plan. One of their own preachers, Thomas Cotton by name, and an ardent believer in camp-meetings, who was present that night, was appointed for Harriseahead for May 31st. The day was opportune. Then and there it was unanimously decided by that numerically small church that the camp-meeting should be held on Mow Cop on the last Sunday in May. The members earnestly knelt in prayer and besought God’s blessing to rest upon both the forthcoming Mow and Norton camp-meetings, and to crown them with great spiritual success. As Thomas Cotton was wishful to inform his friends in the Congleton Circuit, Mr. Bourne wrote several announcements and ‘the report flew through the country as if it had gone on the wings of angels.’ Prayer was unceasingly offered by the Lord’s people throughout the entire neighbourhood.

This ever-memorable Camp Meeting was held in a field belonging to Mr. Joseph Pointon, on the Cheshire slopes of Mow Cop. It commenced at the early hour of six o’clock. The graphic account given by Dow in the towns of Lancashire, Cheshire, and Staffordshire of the American Camp Meetings influenced many people to arrive on Saturday night, so that they might be ready to take part in the opening services of the first English Camp Meeting. Preachers were present from Congleton, Macclesfield, Wheelock, Knutsford, Burslem, Tunstall, and from places in more remote Yorkshire and Ireland. Bourne, in his description of this epoch-making day, says: ‘Thousands heard with attention solemn as death. All the preachers seemed to be strengthened in their work, persuasion dwelt upon their tongues, while the multitudes were trembling or rejoicing around. The
congregation increased so rapidly that a fourth preaching-stand was called for, and four preachers were preaching with all their might. About half-past eight this extraordinary meeting closed - a meeting such as our eyes had never beheld, and for which many will praise God both in time and eternity.'

William Clowes gives a similar, striking testimony. He says: ‘the meeting presented a magnificent spectacle - four preachers simultaneously crying to sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Thousands listening with devout attention, many in deep distress, and others pleading with heaven in their behalf. Some praising God aloud for the great things brought to pass, and others rejoicing in the testimony of sins forgiven. The glory that filled my soul far exceeds my powers of description. Much of the good wrought at the great meeting remains, but the full amount of that good eternity alone will develop. Myriads of saints and angels will everlastingly laud the Eternal Majesty on account of the days praying on Mow.’

A second Camp Meeting on Mow Cop followed in the month of July lasting three days. Forty persons were converted on the Sunday, and twenty on the Monday. The same month, a third Camp Meeting was held at Brown Edge - a mountainous range running parallel with Mow Cop, and Bemersley, the home of the Bournes. Camp Meetings were becoming vastly popular. They had passed through the experimental period, and were likely to become a permanent institution. The holding of these meetings raised considerable opposition on the part of the Methodist superintendents of the Burslem, Congleton, and neighbouring circuits. Conjointly, they published a manifesto disclaiming all connection with them.

The Conference of that year, held in Liverpool, passed resolutions which were not only printed in the official Minutes but, to give them wider publicity, they were also printed in the September number of the *Methodist Magazine*. On the subject of Camp Meetings, the Conference decided: ‘That it is our judgment, that even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief; and we disclaim all connection with them.’

At this Conference the question was officially asked ‘Have our people been sufficiently cautious respecting the permission of strangers to preach to our congregations?’ The following resolution was thereon adopted, viz: ‘We fear not. And we therefore again direct, that no stranger, from America or elsewhere, be suffered to preach in any of our places, unless he comes fully accredited; if an Itinerant Preacher, by having his name entered on the Minutes of the Conference of which he is a member; and if a Local Preacher by a recommendatory note from his Superintendent.’ Reading between the lines of this resolution, there is a censure upon those societies that had employed the American Evangelist in conducting services. The Conference may have been sincere in adopting these resolutions, but looking at them after an interval of years, they have the appearance of imprudence.

Some six days after Dow’s departure from New York for Europe, letters had been written by Nicholas Snethen, one of the American Methodist preachers, to the Rev. Joseph Benson, of commentary fame, and the then Editor of the Methodist Magazines; and also to Rev. Matthias Joyce, the Dublin
Book-Steward. In penning these letters Mr. Snethen so far forgot his Christian charity as to denounce Dow as ‘an ape,’ ‘a shameless intruder,’ and ‘a most daring imposter.’ The consequence was, the leaders of the Methodist Conference did not rejoice at his appearance on English shores. Dr. Jabez Bunting, then stationed in Manchester, would not give Dow an interview. The Rev. Charles Atmore shut the door in his face. The Rev. Thos. Taylor thought that Dow ‘was not settled in his head.’ At the time of Lorenzo Dow’s visit, Mr. Taylor was chairman of the Manchester Wesleyan District. His biographer, in speaking of him, says: ‘Next to Mr. Wesley Mr. Thomas Taylor filled the place of an effective man considerably longer than any other Methodist preacher. The learned Dr. Adam Clarke, however, ‘treated Dow as a gentleman,’ but he was too fond of religious order to unbend to Dow’s fervour, noise, and irregularities. These were the men who led the Conference of 1807, and issued their anathemas against the holding of English camp-meetings.

The fourth camp-meeting was held at Norton on Sunday, August 23rd, some eleven days after the closing of the Conference which had prohibited the holding of camp-meetings. It was conducted by the Bournes and their friends. This meeting was attended by Dr. Paul Johnson, the friend of Lorenzo Dow, who had travelled from Dublin to take part in an English camp-meeting. Hugh Bourne writes: ‘Dr. Johnson was an excellent speaker, and his coming was looked upon as an extraordinary interposition of Divine providence.’ Both Bourne and his brother were fully ‘satisfied that camp-meetings were of the Lord.’ Notwithstanding the uncompromising objection of circuit authorities and Conference administrators, Bourne arranged for the holding of subsequent camp-meetings. In September, 1810, the camp-meeting Methodists, including the Stanley class, were numbered at one hundred and thirty-six. In 1812 this little community had two ministers, seventeen preaching places, and two hundred members, when they issued their first printed plan as Primitive Methodists.

Dow regarded himself as being one of the originators of the Primitive Methodist Church. In the year 1818 Dow paid a second visit to England. In his published journals he refers to the Mow Cop camp-meeting of May 31st, 1807. He writes: ‘Visited the Potteries in Staffordshire. Here I found a new sect of people, known by the name of Primitive Methodists, as they call themselves. Their origin appears to have been something in the following order in miniature. When I was in this country before, a meeting on Mow Hill had been talked about, and I was drawn to speak particularly on the origin, progress, and consequences of camp-meetings in America. This affected the minds of the people,
who were in the spirit of a revival, and from a combination of antecedent circumstances, they now resolved to spend a whole Sabbath-day in prayer together for an outpouring of the Spirit of God, which they had agitated, but could not bring to bear until now.‘ Referring to the action of the Methodist ministers, he remarks: ‘The old preachers had opposed the meeting, and strove to prevent it from taking place.’ Some one has pithily said:

‘If there had been no Dow
There would have been no Mow,’

thus meaning that if Lorenzo Dow had not visited this country, in all human probability there would not have been an English camp-meeting nor a Primitive Methodist Church.

References

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