

**The Late Mrs Cronkshaw  
Of  
Haslingden**

Published In The Haslingden Guardian 29.8.1902.

**Memorial Service.**

On Sunday evening last a special memorial service was held in Grane-road, Chapel to commemorate the decease of Mrs James Cronkshaw, of Grane-road, Haslingden.

There was a large congregation, which listened with sympathetic attention to the Rev. S. I. George's delineation of Mrs Cronkshaw's life and character. Mr Fred Schofield presided at the organ and played "Angels ever bright and Fair," as the collection proceeded and "The Dead March In Saul" at the conclusion of the service.

Mr George took for his text. Judges 2. 7. "A Mother in Isreal"  
Proverbs xxxv 28. "Her children shall come up and call her blessed."  
The following is taken from Mr George's funeral address.

Once again we have to chronicle the sad fact that death has made its inroad into the ranks of our Church membership. This time it is the oldest, and most beloved, and certainly one of the most devoted members of this Church who has been called from the service of patience on earth to the joyous service in Heaven. Her association with the cause of Primitive Methodism in Haslingden dates back to the pioneer days, when the "Ranters" were the butt of the profane and bore the opprobrium of nearly all classes. In those days of toil and persecution, it was no high thing to be a "Ranter." But Jane Holt gave in her adherence to the cause in its infancy shared its struggles, grew with the growth of it, and rejoiced when the days of strength and prosperity came.

Her life covered nearly the whole of the history of our Church. She was born in 1820, the year in which the first Conference was held at Hull.

The sect which had been everywhere spoken against had then been in existence ten years, but in that decade had passed through times of peril and difficulty in which it was uncertain whether the loosely organised evangelism would survive the internal trouble and the external attacks which threatened to put an early termination to its career. But it overcame its initial antagonisms, and in 1820 met at Hull to give the new movement a stronger constitution and to devise measures for the more vigorous prosecution of its work.

Since then great changes have taken place and great progress has been made. Few hearts during the past eighty years have been more loyal than hers, and none have rejoiced more truly in the prosperity of her Church than she.

For many years she kept herself well posted in the progress of our Church institutions and had been a constant and devoted reader of the "Primitive Methodist" ever since its publication in 1870. But while later developments gave her pleasure she sometimes

sighed for the old times of heroic zeal and pentecostal power which were bound up with the memory of her youthful days.

She was born at Holt Mill in the Rossendale Valley, but removed with her parents when yet a little child to Helmshore. At that time there was no Primitive Methodist cause in Helmshore, but she at once became a scholar at the Haslingden Sunday School, bringing her dinner with her Sunday by Sunday; that she may be able to be present in the afternoon as well as morning. The bit of zeal and self denial was in harmony with the spirit of the young Church. They were earnest in their religious services terribly earnest. Preaching service was held three times on each Sunday. Sunday school began at 9 a.m. and 1-15 p.m. But these did not satisfy the zeal of the converts in those days. Sabbath morning prayer commenced at 6-o'clock, class meetings were held at 9-o'clock, and again at 1-o'clock. An open air mission preceded the Evening Service, which itself was followed invariably by a prayer meeting. Sunday was a very busy day of rest to the early Primitives. Much of the worship of those days took place in the open air or in cottages, the class meetings and prayer meetings being held in cottages in various parts of the town.

The preaching rooms of those early times were very primitive structures. A barn, a disused smithy, any shed with a roof over it served as a sanctuary for the zealous "Ranters."

Those conditions were exemplified in the history of Primitive Methodism in Haslingden.

Somewhere between 1815 and 1820 the Blackburn people missioned Haslingden. They asked if any one would lend them a cottage in which to hold service, Mr John Cronkshaw, afterwards Jane Holts father in law who then lived in Burgess Nook, placed his cottage at the disposal of the Primitives. Here a society was formed which grew so rapidly that it became necessary to seek larger accommodation which the growing congregation found in a old disused warehouse on the other side of the "Nook."

In a few years this also became inadequate, and a move was made to a loft over some stables in Hindle-street. It was in this room that Jane found her first Sunday school, and many a time she would tell of the difficulties while attending their worship here while the horses were being attended to below. There was a primeval simplicity a freedom from later day conventionalities both in the old warehouse and stable loft, but there many a brand was plucked from the burning, foundation of the piety of many a staunch follower of Jesus Christ was truly laid, and the ancestors of not a few of those now occupying prominent positions in the town "turned to the Lord and sought Salvation."

In 1830 a "forward movement" was made, and the next year saw the erection of the old Chapel in Deardengate, Mrs Cronkshaw remembered well the laying of the foundation stones, the opening services and the work carried on within it in the 1830-40's. She had a tenacious memory for events and persons, and nothing delighted her more than a chat over old times and old preachers. She knew Hugh Bourne, George Herod, John Verity, Samuel Smith, C. Hallam, and a host of the old preachers well, while men like Dr William Asquith and James Macpherson were frequent visitors to her home, She could tell characteristic anecdotes respecting them, and remember their text and sermons which she would quote with pleasure.

In 1841 she was married to Mr James Cronkshaw, after which she kept open house for the preachers and such members of the congregation as came long distances to service. She had a large family, six sons and three daughters and it was no light task to meet its many needs, but whatever the struggle, the preachers always found a warm welcome and a genuine hospitality in her home. Her wondrous memory made her a living encyclopedia of scenes which be so far in the past that they seem to us like ancient history. She could speak with clearness on the celebration of the Coronation of Queen Victoria of the festivities and processioning which took place in the town, she of course walking with our Sunday school.

She could vividly describe the unhappy events which led to the disruption of the Baptist Church in Haslingden, events now happily forgotten, and which have been providentially over ruled for good.

Whether she ever became a teacher in the Sunday school is uncertain. One thing is sure, that she never lost her attachment to nor her interest in it. We know that her husband became an enthusiastic Sunday school worker, and at one time or another filled nearly every office of that institution.

She encouraged him in the work, and took her children in very early life to the school. A few days ago an old woman accosted me in the street and said Mr, you've buried Mrs Cronkshaw have you?" Yes, I replied she has finished her pilgrimage, as we all shall bye and bye: "Did you know her?" Yes I knew her more than fifty years ago. Ah, she was a good woman then, I know how she used to take her children to Sunday school with her. She didn't stop at home for them, even when they were little ones in arms she took them with her. She was a good woman was Jane; said the old woman as she went on her way sad at the death of her old acquaintance. But I could not help thinking that she had unwillingly described one secret of Mrs Cronkshaw's influence over her family, at the same time that she had testified to her devotion to the Sunday school. The example of Mrs Cronkshaw's devotion by carrying her children to it Sunday after Sunday had had a lasting effect upon one life. Too many parents to-day are content to "send" their children to school while they stay at home. We want parents who will take their children with them, and who will thus give proof of their concern for their children's good.

In early life Mrs Cronkshaw had one gift which for many years she used freely in the Lords cause. She possessed a good clear voice which she used ungrudgingly for her Master.

She joined the choir in her girlhood, led as it was then by Robert Brierley, an enthusiast who wielded the Primitive Methodist leaders baton for fifty years; and though family duties compelled her to leave it, the love of music was always strong with her, she imparted this love to her children, and it is no wonder that so many of her children and grandchildren are singers who seek to imitate her in the use of their gift. She made music one of the education forces of her family life, and many a night was spent in the singing of the quaint tunes of early days. Thus kept her boys and girls out of the temptations of the streets at the same time that she taught them the messages of salvation so forcefully conveyed by the simple hymns then in vogue.

From her earliest years she was a strong antagonist to drink. Sixty or seventy years ago there was little abstinence. Men thought that Ale was absolutely necessary to enable a man to do a good days work. But such was not Mrs Cronkshaw's view. She believed it was "a mocker" and avoided it. Not long after her marriage her husband signed the pledge and thence forward they were one in abstaining principles. Needless to say, all her children were brought up on rigid temperance lines they are life long abstainers not one of whom has broken the pledge. Mrs Cronkshaw's family are good robust specimens of teetotalism, and out of the best and most palpable arguments in favour of total abstinence:

She was ever a staunch and loyal "Primitive" in dark days or bright her fidelity never wavered. When the zeal of others grew cold her's burned on. Once when the life of their class meeting almost died out, and their leader gave up; she and Mrs William Warburton held on, and kept the class from extinction and toiled till better days came. When the unfortunate strife took place, which ended in the great recession of 1868, she with her husband and family stood resolutely by the old cause and toiled hard to win back prosperity and strength again. She was ever ready to work for the material prosperity of the Church. Though eighty years of age, I question if any one took greater interest in the recent debt extinction effort or if any rejoiced more genuinely than she when this sanctuary was declared free from debt.

Though possessed of little education she was a considerable reader, and was able to converse intelligently on not a few subjects. She had a fair acquaintance with the great essentials of the Christian faith. A few months ago we had a conversation on the recognition of friends in heaven. She showed that she had a clear apprehension of the difficulties surrounding the question, and displayed a masterly of the arguments which I am afraid few women of to-day possess.

But this was only one example of her grasp of Christian truth. She knew her Bible well, knew it with the intimate knowledge of love. She herself could quote it accurately and never liked to hear it spoken incorrectly or unreverently.

Closely connected with this was her strong unwavering faith. She thought much on Christian doctrine, knew something of the perplexities and controversy thereon, but she had no doubt of Gods Providence and her own salvation. The evidence of her own acceptance in Jesus Christ was clear and steadfast.

The old Methodist doctrine of "Assurance" was a reality to her. The Anchor of her hope was fixed on Calvary That Jesus Christ died for her sins and rose again for her justification was a literal fact in her soul's experience; was the cardinal article of her creed. Out of her strong confidence in Jesus Christ, her life arose. This gave vitality to her religion, and reality to her prayers. It was always a pleasure to pray with her. Her responses were always so fervent, and withal so simple. They told of her love within, that trusted and followed God unflinching to the end.

She was a loving and most loveable woman. Few were more venerated than she. Whatever may have been the piques or animosities of her earlier years, there was perfect peace at the end. The charm of her character drew others to her and won their love. But it was because she gave love that she got love back again. For it is always love

and love only, which begets love. Ability, enthusiasm, devotion, service, these may win respect or admiration or honour, but they cannot win love. It is only love that produces love. If we could gather a rich harvest of it in our after years, let us sow it now. It will bear fruit in due season. In all my life I have never known a woman who had the tender reverence of grown up sons and daughters as she had. This was the light and joy of her old age. Many a time I told her she was a rich woman, and she would reply "Yes I know and I am thankful" She thought of them all, prayed for them and their children, and delighted most of all that all her children and many of her grandchildren were on the Lords side, and were all associated with the Church of her youth and love.

What her life as a wife was I cannot say; because, when I first became acquainted with her she was quietly waiting for the Lords call to put off the weeds of widowhood and rejoin her husband beyond the shadow. But of her influence in the home; who can have any doubts. "By their fruits ye shall know them" Judged by results her motherhood must have been a great sacrament. How jealously she watched over her lads! How wisely she directed their opening years, training them to do the right, to speak the truth, and to live pure upright lives. It is mothers like her that we need to-day, instead of the careless happy go lucky women who neglect the first duties of their motherhood by caring nothing for the moral well being of their children. Mrs Cronkshaw's ideal of motherhood was gained from Holy Writ. Her children were regarded as a heritage from the Lord, to be nurtured for him. And her reward was that her children rise up and call her blessed.

Her last illness was borne with the patience of Christian fortitude though her glances were cast longingly through the opening gates of the City of God. Death had no terrors for her. Jesus Christ gave her the victory over.

She welcomed it as the release from pain, and gladly entered into the rest and quiet of the eternal home. She has come to her reward in a ripe old age. We will not mourn for her, but rejoice in her translation, and follow her even as she followed Christ.

"At our Fathers loved abode  
our souls arrive in peace."