



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

FATHER REEVES, METHODIST CLASS-LEADER

A Brief Account of Mr. William Reeves, Thirty-four Years a Class-Leader
in the Wesleyan Methodist Society, Lambeth.

By Edward Corderoy

1. LAMBETH CHAPEL

“The great ends of Christian biography are instruction and example. By faithfully describing the lives of men eminent for godliness, we not only embalm their memory, but furnish ourselves with fresh materials and motives for a holy life. “ — Fuller.

A little more than forty years ago, the active men in London Methodism made considerable efforts at chapel extension, and Lambeth chapel was among those erected, through their instrumentality, in the year 1808.

Churches were few, evangelical preaching rare; and the ministry of such men as Benson, Clarke, Moore, and others, was a powerful attraction, and a large congregation was soon gathered. The Lambeth Society was an excellent one; there were men of intelligence, piety, and good social position at its head: by degrees, however, many of these were removed, either by death, or to other localities; by degrees, also, other places for worship were opened, and both the society and congregation frequently changed in its leading features.

Very few remain who were connected with Lambeth Methodism in 1808. One aged saint, who has survived all her contemporaries, and many of her juniors, and two or three gray-headed men, who were then in the prime of early manhood, are about all (who now worship at the chapel) who were at all known in the society at Lambeth forty-four years ago.

But Lambeth chapel has not been opened in vain; multitudes have there heard the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, embraced its invitations, and died in the faith; and though manifold changes have taken place, the present generation of worshippers listen to the same truths, sing the same hymns, and converse, in their class-meetings, of the same heaven, as those who first crowded within the chapel walls.

In the winter of 1808, a poor young countryman, who had lived some three years in the neighborhood, but without God and without hope, softened through affliction, found his way to Lambeth chapel. It was the first Monday evening in December: he was entirely unknown to preacher and congregation, but the service was for him, as though no one else was present; he listened — he trembled. The message to the Laodicean Church was read: the tones struck sharply and terribly on his conscience; it appeared as though the Saviour once more uttered the words — “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me.”

Here was Christ's appeal — here the sinner's opportunity. The young man opened his heart to the heavenly visitant, tears of repentance were shed, holy resolutions formed, and the way of life deliberately and decisively chosen.

Mr. William Reeves joined the Methodist Society immediately, and about a month after obtained peace with God. He had reached the age of twenty-eight, and yet was scarcely able to read. He wanted to read his Bible, and he spread the book before the Lord, and, praying for divine aid, he spelt out the words, and accomplished his wishes.

His prospects in this life seemed limited, for he possessed only very humble abilities; yet devoting these with singular entireness of purpose to the service of God, he was borne at length to the grave amidst the lamentations of more than two thousand people, who recognized and “glorified the grace of God” in him.

Few among the congregation where he was so powerfully and effectually convinced of sin, would think anything of the probable course of the poor and ignorant young man before them; they would rejoice that another soul had yielded to the Saviour, but think little more of the event! Yet in that young countryman there lay an earnestness of intention, a consecration of soul to one object, which God, notwithstanding educational deficiencies, so abundantly honored, that, as far as human judgment can form an estimate of usefulness, the Lambeth Society has never had a man, no matter what his station or advantages, so eminently useful as the late loved and honored Father Reeves. A few pages of this little book are devoted to the exhibition of his character — as a class-leader, prayer-leader, visitor of the sick, and private Christian. But first, however, let the reader take a fragment of autobiography.



2. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“Who that hath ever been, could bear to be no more? Yet, who would tread again the scene He trod through life before?” . Montgomery —

“William Reeves was born in the parish of Cudham, in Kent, December 15, 1779. My parents had no saving knowledge of God, though they lived a reputable moral life. Having a large family, they could not put their children to school, so that we had no learning; only our dear parents taught us the Lord's Prayer and the Belief, and told us of heaven and hell, for which I pray that God would bless them.

“As soon as I was able, I went to work with my father as a farmer's boy; and when a child, I often had the fear of God before my eyes, and felt His Spirit striving with me; but not knowing what it was I soon quenched it. I remember also the sore temptation of the devil. When I was about ten or eleven years of age, Satan tempted me to curse God. I trembled at the thought of it, and knew not what I should curse God for; however, this temptation followed me for many days, and became stronger and stronger, till one day — I shall never forget the place — Satan got the mastery, and I, O wretch! — I cursed God in my heart; and then, whenever I went to the place, or thought of it, I was miserable.

Again, two years after, in 1792, as I was gleaning, in the month of August, there was an eclipse of the sun, and Satan tempted me to curse. Here I also yielded, to my sorrow. All these things I kept to myself, and it was of God's mercy that He did not send me to hell.

“About 1794, I left my dear parents and hired myself to a farmer for one year. There were

many in that place that had no fear of God before their eyes, and I joined with them in all their excesses of riot. I stayed there two years, and then went to another and a worse place: here Satan had his will of me; the fear of God left me in a great degree, and conscience became hardened. I stayed there one year. In 1797, I returned to my parents; and, for a little time, refrained from some sins, and thought a little more of God. This did not last long. I now thought myself a man, and resolved to leave my dear parents again. Then my dear father gave me the advice he had often given before, whenever I left him, and which I never entirely forgot. These were his words: 'Will, do not forget God; always say your prayers, wherever you are.

"So, in the year 1798 I went to Eltham, in Kent. Here I lived in all manner of sin for two years, and yet the good Spirit of God would strive with me, and I would then make resolutions to serve Him; but O, how soon did I forget to perform them! But God in His great love found out a better place for me. In the year 1801, I agreed with a master wheelwright to be apprenticed to him for three years. This was at Wigmore, near Bromley, Kent. I believe he was a good man. He belonged to Mr.

Wesley's Society, and he used all the means he could to get me to join the society. I did so, and attended the prayer-meeting on Sunday morning, the preaching, and my class, very regularly for three quarters of a year; and here I was more deeply convinced of sin than I had ever been; so that I was often obliged to go into the outbuildings and fall on my knees, and cry to God for mercy.

"But my master had an ungodly son near my own age. I gave way to him, and followed the pleasures of this world again, and so broke off from the means of grace a little at a time, and only went when it suited me; but by the mercy of God I was kept from gross sins. Thus I went on for a year and a quarter longer; then, being annoyed by the younger sons, tempted by the devil, and by trials in the world, I left my master before my time was out.

"I then sought work as a journeyman in my trade. God had so blessed me in two years with readiness to learn my trade, that I could do almost anything at it. I then went to Woolrich Warren, and got some work promised; but, before beginning, I went to see my parents. My dear father, fearing the dreadful company that was in the Warren, got me employment with a wheelwright near home.

"I kept in work one year, and had much of the fear of God before my eyes, and my father and I attended very often a little chapel at Knockholt, belonging to Mr. Wesley; and I often found God so striving with me, that in the fields I have been obliged to fall on my knees and cry to Him; but I did not fully understand the way of salvation, therefore I did not enjoy it.

"I had a sincere friend in London in the coach-building trade, and he was so kind as to get me work in that trade, which was much better than my former business: so, in the year 1805, I came to London. Here I was exposed to many temptations I had not seen before; but at first the fear of God kept me. I often used private prayer; this, however, soon ceased, and I began to break the Sabbath, to get hardened, and to run into all sin with greediness.

"But my conscience would sometimes smite me, and then the devil would tell me that that was not the time to serve God, but after I had got more of this world's goods, or after I had seen a little more of this world's pleasure; and thus the devil led me on for two years, and at last he told me I should give myself to God after I was married; and I never shall forget the promises I made to God, on my knees, in the shop, a day or two before I married. I promised, if He would give me the desire of my eyes I would then give Him all my heart. God gave me my wife on October 5, 1807; but O, how soon did I break my vow to Him! Here I would say, indeed God is long-forbearing, and it is of His mercy that I was not consumed. Here also I would notice the love of God to me, in giving me a wife so agreeable to my desire — a sober, honest, industrious, loving one, that strove to make us comfortable

in this life; and I bless God, notwithstanding my other sins, He kept me from idleness and drunkenness.

“But my poor dear wife knew nothing of God; she had sometimes attended her church, but knew not how she should be saved, and very seldom thought of God at all! So I kept God's dealings with me to myself.

“I had but little money: for, what with putting myself apprentice at twenty-two years of age, and learning two trades before I was married, I had only six pounds after the wedding was over, and there were no friends on either side to give us so much as one shilling; so I took a ready furnished room at seven shillings a week, for seven weeks, and then my employer advanced me money to get a bed, a table, and chairs; and thus we began this life together.

“All this time I neglected the vows that I had made, till — O, that blessed date! — July, 1808.

Lord help me never to forget it! My dear wife was taken ill, confined to her bed for many weeks, and her sufferings were so great, none but those who saw her can have more than a faint idea of them.

This affliction continued, more or less, for seven years. But she had not been afflicted more than a week before I was taken very ill, so that we did not know which would die first, for we lay together on the bed, and could not help one another; and though I was not so full of pain as my dear wife, yet the care I had what we should do to live was great, for one day we had only twopence left, and I knew not where to go for more; but the Lord provided in a way unknown.

“But this was not the greatest of my affliction; for then all my sins and unpaid vows came before me, so that I saw and felt, if I died, hell must be my portion. O, the agony of the soul I then felt! I began to cry for mercy, and for God to raise me up again; and that kind and merciful God, who had been so many times merciful to me, once more heard me and restored my health. As soon as I was able, I went to a place of worship, and as often as I could. For several weeks I went from one place of worship to another, seeking to find one of Mr. Wesley's, for I thought I knew more about his preachers than any others. So it pleased the Lord, on the first Monday evening in December, 1808, to lead me into Lambeth chapel. O, the blessed hour I ever set my feet over that sill! That dear man of God, (for so he was to me,) Mr. William Vipond, preached that night from Revelation iii, 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock,' &c.

“He then described the many ways God made use of to knock at a sinner's heart; and every way he described was just the way God had knocked at my heart; and I had shut Him out. O, the agony I then felt! Every description was like a two-edged sword to my soul. This was much deeper conviction than ever I had felt before; my knees smote together, and I thought I should sink into hell.

“As soon as the sermon was ended, I was constrained to go trembling by myself into the vestry, to the dear man of God, to know what I should do. He then tried to give me some comfort, and spoke many comfortable words to me: but, alas! I could take no comfort. He then spoke to Mr. Shaw, to take me to his class, which he did the next night.

“After chapel, I went home to my dear wife, and took the Bible, and sat down and wept. She asked me what I wept for: I told her I was such a great sinner; and if she and I died in such a state we must go to hell. I then began to pray in secret, and read my Bible at all opportunities, [1] and strove for some time to make myself better by my own good works.

“I could get no rest day nor night, and what added to my sorrow was, my dear wife began to persecute me. This was a new and heavy trial, because it came from one I loved, and from

whom I expected comfort — but, O! To my sorrow, she got worse.

“I then began to pray with her, which at first was a great cross: but blessed be God who giveth grace, my prayers were heard and answered — the Lord convinced her of sin, she went to class with me, and this gave me great joy.

“Our worldly companions then began to forsake us, because when they came to see us our conversation was changed, and this they did not like; so they soon all forsook us, and we forsook our Sunday pleasures. We gave up buying on that day, and cooking Sunday dinners, and I hope we shall never return to the practice. We then began to get a new company with the people of God, and they now became our delight. In about a month the Lord was pleased to set my soul at liberty. O, that happy moment! The Lord help me to praise Him, and never to forget it! I then began to see the worth of precious souls, and that I had something more to do than merely to save my own soul. I began to rebuke sin wherever I saw it, and when I heard of any person sick, I could not rest until I had been to see them and told them of heaven and hell, and that they must repent, and what God had done for my soul. I was so ignorant that I thought they would believe all and receive all I said, and be saved.

If they were in distress, I gave them all I had in my pocket. I then heard of the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, and was recommended to it by my leader; so I joined that blessed work of the Lord, to the joy of my heart.

“My dear wife and I continued in Mr. Shaw's class till he went to America, and then that dear man of God, Mr. Milburn, took the class, and he not only became my leader, but my father, brother, and friend. O that the Lord may make me thankful! In that class I continued till it seemed good unto the Lord to remove me to be a leader of a class, December 3, 1818. O that the Lord may make me faithful in that important work, and help me to speak for eternity! This was, indeed, a trial almost too great for me to bear, as I felt my own unworthiness for that great work. O that this may lead me nearer to God, who only can keep my soul!”



3. PROVIDENTIAL GUIDANCE AND CARE

Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God; He made the sky,
The earth and sea, with all their train;
His truth forever stands secure,
He saves the oppressed,
He feeds the poor;
And none shall find His promise vain.

Dr. Watts (Paraphrase) —

In one of the many closely-written books which Mr. Reeves has left behind him, he has recorded “the especial and particular providence of his ever-blessed God and Father.” He narrates that in early youth he had “a strong and covetous desire to become rich,” but praises the goodness of the Lord who would never permit him “to have a god of silver and gold.” When he was convinced of sin he besought the Lord “to give him neither poverty nor riches, but His pardoning love; to give him bread and water with the love of Jesus”; and then he vowed “to devote all his life to the glory of God.” The Lord pardoned his sins, and added the moderate but sufficient comforts which a mechanic could command.

Mr. Reeves probably never earned more than forty shillings per week — in most of his best days rarely more than thirty-five; yet he always maintained a comfortable though frugal home; always sustained according to his ability the institutions of Methodism; saved a trifle for old age; and late in life records rejoicingly, “that the Lord blessed him in soul and body, in basket and in store,” and “had indeed led him into green pastures, and beside still waters, and had given him all he required.” This is strong language for a journeyman coachmaker, who, at the time it was written, was not able, from advanced age and other causes, to earn twenty shillings a week; who had infirm health, a wife to maintain, and many claims on his charity from the sick he delighted to visit: but, strong as it is, it was fell.

For twenty-seven years, from 1814 to 1841, he was employed on the same premises, and by one family. This he deemed a great blessing, and daily during that long period did he seek one particular spot in the yard, where, under shelter of some planks leaning against the other, he poured out his soul in earnest prayer for himself, his wife, his class, the sick, the Church, and the world, never forgetting his master and his family.

The following note from the son of his respected employer is a testimony to his worth: “Lambeth, November 27, 1852

“Dear Sir, — In reply to your note, I have personally known Mr. Reeves for upwards of twenty years. I have, while learning my business, worked in the same shop with him. He worked for my father before I was born, and for my father's brother and self altogether twenty-seven years. I have under these circumstances known him intimately, known him in his everyday life, and sometimes under trying and provoking circumstances, yet I never once knew him to forget his obligations as a Christian. He was universally respected by his shopmates; and although it frequently happened that some would revile and make a mock at his religion, yet, as they were longer acquainted with him, they were bound to respect and honor his consistent character. It has never been my lot to meet with a more truly humble, consistent, zealous Christian, in my life.

“I am, dear sir, yours truly,

“Henry Heffer.”

A few years after the appointment of Mr. Reeves as a leader, his classes were largely increased: then came a time of trial.

He found that working “from six o'clock in the morning to eight at night,” left his “time to visit the sick and the absent members too short.” He felt called upon to make sacrifices: his faith in God's promises was put to the test, for to secure the time he required he must give up six to seven shillings per week. But by faith in God and from love to souls he did it: here is his own account of the conflict and the triumph:

“I felt it my duty to sacrifice much more of my time for the Lord, to look after the little flock, so that they be not lost or wander back; and now the enemy and carnal reason (who ever stand united to prevent if possible any of God's dear children, however mean, from doing the will of their heavenly Father) began to set me a reasoning thus: 'Why, you will soon begin to grow old, you are now much afflicted in body, your club is broken up, and it is sinful not to provide for your own household before sickness and old age; and you know it would be a grief to your mind as long as you live to be a burden to the Church of Christ; and besides, six or seven shillings is a large sum to sacrifice; and your Christian friends will think you have been a very lazy man.' These, and a great number of such like vain thoughts flowed into my mind for several days; but I took them all into my closet, and, like Hezekiah, I spread them before my heavenly Father, and prayed Him to make His blessed will known to me, and by the strength of divine grace enable me to do it.

“And, glory be to God, who is ever standing ready to hear a poor sinner's prayer, He soon

made His will known to me by the power of His Holy Spirit convincing poor sinners of sin, and manifesting to them His pardoning love when I went to visit the sick; and so He increased the number of our classes. Thus I went on trusting in the mercy of the Lord Jesus for about twenty years.”

A poor mechanic sacrificing six to seven shillings per week that he might give the time to the Lord, is an act of faith and devotion rarely performed, and is worthy the consideration of men of superior social position, who will willingly give a subscription to a benevolent object, in order to do good by proxy, but who shun personal service. “Obedience is better than sacrifice”; a subscription costs a rich man little, and it is not clear from Scripture that anything short of personal devotion to the cause of God will be accepted by Him who has said, “Occupy till I come.” After Mr. Reeves' employer died, the business was curtailed, so that for many months our friend had but little work; he felt himself feeble, and could not stand to do a whole day's labor. These were trials, but providence appeared. A beloved friend, hearing of his position, invited him to his house, talked of his circumstances, and, with two others like-minded, arranged to pay his rent quarterly.

This was needed, for his earnings after 1840 appear to have been very small — considerably under twenty shillings per week; and in 1846, they had diminished to £36 8s. 8d.; in 1847, they were reduced to £21 8s. 11d.; in 1848, they only came to £8 2s. 2d.; and at the close of the last year's accounts he adds,

“Received the last fruits of my hands' labor in this world, of Mr. John Baker, a coachmaker, when I was past seventy years of age. O that I may at last be able to say, 'I cease at once to work and live,' Lord, help me. Wm. Reeves”

In another place he says, “I commenced working at six years old, and by the mercy of God I was able to work hard till I was seventy.”

His small stock of savings was diminishing; but in 1845, another dear friend, who went before Mr. Reeves to heaven, saw a placard stating that a vacancy had occurred among the pensioners on the Walcot Charity; and finding Mr. Reeves entitled to become a claimant on this fund, provided for parishioners of Lambeth, by an act of piety in olden time, he, with others, moved the trustees to place Mr. Reeves on the list of pensioners, and thus £16 16s. A year were secured for life.

For this, dear Father Reeves was full of gratitude to God and his friends. “It is the Lord's doing,” he writes, “and it is marvelous in my eyes, who am not worthy of the least of all His mercies, and yet the Lord thought of a poor sinner, when I never thought of or expected either of these unspeakable benefits and blessings. Now I am old and very feeble, being full of bodily pain; so here I prove the Lord is a faithful God of love. He hath said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' O, how much better and sweeter is all this than thousands of pounds of gold and silver laid up in store, and then to get lazy, and not have one desire or one hour's time in the day to visit, in Jesus, the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the thirsty!

‘When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.’”

“And now,” added the good old man, “I have been thanking my heavenly Father for the gifts of His special and particular providence bestowed on me; and it just occurs to my mind, I have left off where I ought to have begun — 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,' 2 Cor. ix, 15; and thanks be to my blessed Jesus, 'who loved me and gave himself for me.' Gal. ii, 20.

'I thank Thee, uncreated Sun,
That Thy bright beams on me have shined;
I thank Thee, who hast overthrown
My foes, and heal'd my wounded mind;
I thank Thee whose enlivening voice
Bids my freed heart in Thee rejoice.'"



4. The Religion of Relatives Sought

"A sinner saved myself from sin,
I come my family to win,
To preach their sins forgiven;
Children and wife, and servants seize,
And through the paths of pleasantness,
Conduct them all to heaven."

C. Wesley —

In his own account it has been seen that no sooner was Mr. Reeves effectually convinced of sin, than he faithfully admonished his dear wife. He prayed and wept alone; she derided his fears and troubles; then with true devotion to his duty, he prayed "with her" — in her presence and aloud; and soon her heart was touched. She lived to witness a good confession, and died happy in the Lord. In the morning on which she experienced the attack of illness which proved fatal, Mr. Reeves was so abundantly and peculiarly blessed at the throne of grace, that he was led to cry out, "Lord, what doth all this mean? If Thou art about to bring me into the furnace, help me to glorify Thy most holy name"; and then he entered into solemn covenant with the Lord "to give body and soul afresh to Him through Jesus Christ."

He came home to dinner: the devoted husband and wife knelt in prayer together, according to their daily habit. Mr. Reeves had just uttered the words, "O blessed Lord, prepare us for a lingering sickness or for sudden death, but prepare us for Thyself" — and had scarcely more than risen from his knees, when his wife fell into his arms in a fit of apoplexy.

She partially recovered, testified for many days her trust, confidence, and joy in the Lord; and on November 11th, 1826, while her husband was praying by her side, she sweetly slept in Jesus.

Next to his wife, Mr. Reeves' concern was for his dear parents; these he entreated, with filial reverence, to embrace the Saviour; and his prayers for them were happily answered. He records that "On January 24th, 1823, my dear and much-beloved, and the best of all parents, departed this life, aged seventy-two years"; and he blesses God's holy name "for the good hope he has that his dear mother is now in glory."

One of his earliest books has "a few plain and short remarks of dear mother's conversion." She came to town in July, 1813, her soul filled with grief on account of her sin, and determined, if possible, "to know if she were in the right way or not"; and her son seems to have been honored as the instrument in the Lord's hands in leading her to accept "a present salvation," to the joy of her soul.

In 1823, Mr. Reeves' aged father entered into the enjoyment of God's forgiving love at the age of eighty-two: our departed friend rejoices to enter in one of his books, "Thou hast set my aged father's soul at liberty; Thou hast answered my prayers — he is now joined to Thy Church below; also a brother and sister; so that, glory be to Thy dear name! I have now an

aged father, a dear wife, two brothers, and a sister, that love Thy name. I pray that Thou wouldest keep them faithful unto death.” At the advanced age of eighty-six, Mr. Reeves' father died rejoicing in Christ; and even when his voice failed, he cheered his family by signs indicating his happiness and hope.

Mr. Reeves was married a second time in 1827, to an exemplary and useful member of the society at Lambeth, and she survives to cherish the memory of one who ever hallowed his home by the admirable consistency of his Christian course.

Next to his family, our dear friend sought to win all the members of his classes to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had no children; but he rejoiced in his members as his family, and numbers of them recognized him as their father in the Lord.



5. PRAYER-MEETINGS AND STRANGERS' FRIEND SOCIETY

“Free service from the heart is all in all to heaven.” Felicia Hemans —

“Go visit thou, in their distress,
The widow and the fatherless. “

J. Montgomery —

No sooner did Mr. Reeves find true religion, than, as he himself has recorded, he began to try to do good to others; and greatly did he rejoice when the Society with which he had connected himself found him employment as a prayer-leader.

The Sunday evening prayer-meetings were arranged by plan in April, 1809. “One of the first places used,” says Brother Reeves, “was the Sunday School in High Street, Lambeth; another, the house of Mr. Nash, sen., Fore Street; another, Brother Cook's, Lambeth Walk; and another, Brother Slatter's, Walnut Tree Walk, when there were only two or three houses built, and walnut-trees were growing!”

For many a long year these walnut-trees have only existed in the memory of very old inhabitants; but the breath of prayer and praise which stirred their leaves reached heaven, and blessings in answer have come down on the family that opened their house, and the society that sent out the praying men.

“But,” adds Brother Reeves, “let it never be forgotten that Walworth, Southville, Vauxhall, and Broadwall [2] chapels, all date their origin from the Sunday evening prayermeetings in the little rooms. To this I am a witness, having had the honor to be present at the opening of each place.” Why are these house prayer-meetings so little regarded now? And why are the services in our chapels so protracted as to render it inconvenient at so late an hour to go to an appointment? Surely the present population of our large towns are not much more easily brought to the house of God than our fathers were. If there is not the same opposition to religion that there was fifty years ago, there is something quite as formidable to its progress, viz., the spirit of indifference. If our neighbors will not be attracted when we build a chapel, we must remember our duty, and, from house to house, convey an invitation to the public worship of God; and if our chapel prayer-meetings fail to bring the dwellers in the back streets to their knees, we must go among them, get someone in the fear of the Lord to open his house, and carry the prayer-meetings to them.

Father Reeves delighted in this service: he was the treasurer to the prayer-leaders' meeting, and as such presided among them. One of his associates says: “His advice to the prayer-

leaders was affectionate, faithful, and practical, especially to newly-appointed members. He used earnestly to exhort them to cultivate their minds by a diligent study of the word of God in the spirit of devotion, in order that the language used in prayer should be in accordance with divine truth. On no account would he sanction the use of any hymns that were not found in our own collection." This conduct of Brother Reeves did not arise from bigotry; though he knew nothing better than the Methodism which he loved, and nothing richer than the experience of the Wesleyan hymns, his endeavors were mainly to repress certain extravagances, both in tune and words, in which many zealous people are too apt to indulge.

In one of his papers, Brother Reeves writes: "O, how I wish all my dear brethren, the Sunday evening prayer-leaders, would learn to sing." Col. Iii. 16.

He read his Bible with scrupulous attention, and seemed to prefer comparison of one Scripture with another, to the search of commentaries. He did not, at all events, adopt any of the ordinary explanations of Matthew xxvi, 30, for he says:

"O, what a pity it is that the precious hymn was ever lost which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ sang with His disciples at His last supper! O how I should have rejoiced to have heard it! I think I should have learned the tune. I think this hymn of Mr. Wesley's suits me now in its stead — Hymn 28, page 32."

Until advancing years and failing health obliged him to desist, Father Reeves was the regular attendant of the Sunday morning prayer-meeting, at 7 o'clock. Thus he began the service of the Sabbath rejoicingly; and up to the time of his death he was the invariable attendant on the Saturday evening prayer-meeting; and then, this good man, without one single educational advantage, would often on his knees pour forth such a rich strain of holy praise, such a full tide of earnest believing prayer, that at times, both for sublimity of thought and beauty of diction, he equaled the unsurpassable liturgy of the English Church.

There were of course frequent occasions when Brother Reeves seemed more left to himself, and his ideas struggled to find suitable language in which to clothe themselves; but even then grammatical and other mistakes were lost or disregarded because of the atmosphere of devotion which ever surrounded this favored suppliant of the throne of grace.

The reason of his power in prayer, apart from the spirit of faith and devotion, arose from his intimate knowledge of Holy Scripture, and his thorough acquaintance with Wesley's Hymns.

In losing this exemplary man, numbers at Lambeth have lost an invaluable friend. Of "silver and gold" he had indeed little to give, but such as he had was more valuable to many than the riches of a gold mine. His prayers bore the case of many an afflicted, many a tempted friend to the footstool of mercy; and numbers of us have doubtless had happier moments, and have been more useful in our efforts at Lambeth, than we should have been but for his powerful pleadings on our behalf. "Help Lord! For the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from the children of men!" It is not a slight loss to lose a praying friend.

But Brother Reeves was not only "instant in prayer," but indefatigable in work; and in visiting the sick he took an especial pleasure. He sympathized with suffering, but his desire was to turn this to profitable account; he remembered the order in which the psalmist placed human maladies, spiritual first, bodily afterwards — "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases"; and while he pitied physical suffering, he pitied the unsaved but immortal spirit more.

The Strangers' Friend Society, which he early joined, and which he only left, it is believed, because of the amount of work which large classes imposed on their leader, afforded him an opportunity for usefulness he gladly embraced; he returned to this employment when he was relieved of two of his classes, and continued a visitor to the day of his death. In one of his books there is a list, entitled "Several cases that have been made happy in God, through the

Strangers' Friend Society"; then follow names, addresses, and the places of worship to which the parties attached themselves when they became well.

Systematic in the arrangement of his time, he devoted Monday in each week to the visitation of his cases from the Strangers' Friend Society. The Monday previous to his decease was a day of incessant rain and wind, such as would have deterred many a young and hardy man from going out but out Father Reeves went, visiting the sick; and when, having taken cold in consequence, he was remonstrated with by a younger man, he merely remarked "it was his day for sick visiting, and if he did not go then, it would disarrange his plans for the next day." On the last day of his life he pursued this loved employment, and realized his own desire — he "ceased at once to work and live."



6. As A Class-leader Seeking Members

"And first he taught them to respect themselves,
And then with goodness lured them on to virtue;
He hated sin, but the poor outcast sinner
Was still his human brother. This was goodness,
And this was greatness too."

Mary Howitt —

Unconsciously to himself, Brother Reeves was led, directly after his conversion, to a course of preparation for the office in which he was best known and preeminently useful — that of a Methodist class-leader.

The prayer-meeting gave scope for his spirit of intercession; the Strangers' Friend Society, to his sympathy with the spiritual and temporal necessities of the afflicted; and, in order that he might talk effectively about salvation to persons either sick or well, he committed multitudes of select passages of Holy Scripture to memory. A little book, apparently begun in the very month of his conversion, is nearly filled with texts, and references to texts of Scripture, with this remark inserted at a later period: "This was the first book I began to write, after the ever-blessed Lord convinced me of sin; and most of these texts of Scripture I got by heart, to talk to poor sinners about. O, what a blessing it has been to me through life!"

On December 3, 1818, ten years after he became a member, he undertook, by appointment of the leaders' meeting, the charge of a class. It was not without fear on the part of some that he was placed in the position of a teacher and a guide, and the vote of the meeting in his favor was scarcely unanimous; his moral excellences were undoubted, but his educational deficiencies were at that time many.

But none trembled for his success more than he did himself. He had no self-confidence; his troubles led him always to his knees and the Holy Bible, and he obtained such qualifications from the Source of all good, that few of those he gathered into society "were able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake."

There were no class books in 1818; his members' names were entered on a class-paper; they numbered fourteen. From 1820 the whole of his class-books are preserved, and evidence an amount of attention to the duties of leadership such as few have ever equaled, and, it is confidently believed these pages will show, none have surpassed.

He was very soon the leader of two classes, one on Sunday afternoon, the other on the week day; and as early as 1822 his numbers had grown so large that the first class was divided.

This class remained ever after a very large one; though repeatedly divided, yet it constantly grew.

It was admirably trained; and in late years, out of eighty members on the books at one time, more than seventy have been known to present themselves for their quarterly tickets; and the preacher has had especial aptitude for his work, who could, commencing with the leader at two o'clock, speak appropriately, from him to the last member, and conclude at halfpast four.

In 1830, in addition to the Sunday and Wednesday classes, he commenced one on Friday evening.

In 1833 he gave up for a short time his Wednesday class; but not finding work enough, and knowing poor sinners willing to accept an invitation, he commenced another on Sunday evenings, in July, 1834. Three months after, he had his Wednesday class again, and met the whole four for four years.

In 1838, however, he found the toil of four classes too much, and he relinquished the last formed to another leader. He continued to lead three classes until 1847.

How he loved those to whom he had ministered in spiritual things, and with what pain he parted from them, may be gathered from the following extract: "October 22, 1826. I divided my Sunday class; it was a tearing asunder, indeed, and that to every one. I cannot forget my feelings, when I saw their love one to another, and their grief at the thought of parting. They could not have overcome the trial if they had not seen the necessity for separation, for we were now fifty in number. O that God, whose they are, may increase them a thousand times in love and faith, and numbers, is the prayer of their unworthy servant. O that not one of them may be on the left hand when Jesus shall come to gather His saints into His glorious kingdom, nor rise up in judgment against me for my unfaithfulness!"

He then adds a list of the names of those "the Lord parted; I say the Lord, because they all volunteer." To the names he adds a description of their spiritual state, and the time calculated, in years and months, that each had met with him.

Again, in 1847, he writes: "I have of late had much painful affliction, so that my body is become very feeble. I now find I am no longer able to do justice to all my classes, to meet them and visit them all as I have done, having now one hundred and sixty members. Now comes the trial — to give up one class. This has been a hard struggle, to part from those for whom I have wrestled and prayed till Christ was formed in their hearts the hope of glory; and then, we have rejoiced together so many years. And now which of the three classes must I give up? My Sunday class is the first to which I believe the Lord appointed me; therefore I could not think of giving that up. The next is the Wednesday class, but that was my first-born taken from my Sunday class; then how can I do this? My nature shrinks and cries, 'How shall I give thee up?' The only one that is left is the Friday class, the son of my old age, and therefore I cannot, no, I cannot give up that. And now I had to go again to my heavenly Father in secret, and wrestle for an increase of faith and wisdom to know His blessed will, and then it should be mine."

To gain sufficient strength between the labors of Sunday and Friday, the Wednesday class was now finally relinquished, with this quotation:

"Since 'tis Thy sentence I should part
With what was nearest to my heart,
I freely that and more resign:
Behold, my heart itself is Thine.
My little all I give to Thee,
Thou hast bestow'd Thy Son on me."

The Sunday afternoon and the Friday evening classes were regularly met by Father Reeves

until his decease.

For several years a list was regularly kept under the following head: "A memorandum, to know what becomes of my members." These papers give the names, dates of entrance, indicate whether the persons were new members, or backsliders, whether from other classes or from other circuits, when received, the religious state when removed, the reason for their removal, and the date. A specimen or two is subjoined:

1819 STATE

March J.S. From another class. Removed to another Class nearer home, December, 1822.

June T.M. Do. Removed when Class was divided, October, 1822.

Sept. J.W. A Backslider restored. Died very happy in the Lord, May 11, 1823.

Dec. R.S. A new Member. A Drawn back, overcome by the world, July, 1821.

1820

June E.B. A Backslider restored. Removed to a weekday Class.

"H.S. A new Member. Left us and went to the

Tent Preachers, January, 1822.

"A.H. Do. Expelled for breaking the Sabbath, August, 1844.

In a similar list, a few years later, is the following:

1824.

June. Saml. D. Waddy. From another Class. After meeting with me 16 months, left to become a Traveling

Preacher, November, 1825.

The following papers will show Brother Reeves' care for his flock, and the honor his Lord and Master put upon him:

"December 1832. — The number of those who have been convinced of sin, those who have been converted, the backsliders restored, and the happy deaths, in my three classes this last year: Convinced of sin . . . 60

Found peace . . . 40

Backsliders recovered . . . 6

Happy deaths . . . 2

and many now enjoy perfect love. Among the happy number of those who have found peace, are these three strangers — Hessundne Ilbesume, [3] from Egypt; his name signifieth 'Comely and mighty': the next is a black from the borders of China, John Robson: and the third stranger is a woman from Tilston.

"Another stranger from Egypt is only convinced of sin; his name is Goudin Shaffee, which signifieth 'Intercessor.'"

Brother Reeves records it as a privilege that he had always occupied the same sitting in the chapel.

Here, during service, none was more devout than he: but at the close of the sermon, who among his fellow-worshippers does not remember how quickly the spectacles were mounted; how soon the good little old man was up; and how, during the announcement and the singing of the last hymn, (while he shared his hymn-book with his dear wife,) his active eyes would scan the neighboring pews, but especially the free seats, to see whose moistened eye gave evidence that the heart was touched? Many times and oft, the service over, was the good man found planted just in the right place, beside some poor broken-hearted sinner, begging him to come to class.

Perhaps no Sunday ever passed, scarcely a public prayermeeting went by, that Brother Reeves did not urge one, frequently many, to embrace the Saviour's proffered mercy, and join in Christian communion with those who were the professed disciples of the cross.

And this he did like everything else, systematically; a copy of the Rules of the Society is

thus supplemented evidently for distribution.

“The time and places where my classes meet:

“1. — Sunday afternoon, at half-past two o'clock. [4] Free seats, Lambeth chapel.

“2. — Sunday evening after preaching, in the same place.

“3. — Wednesday evening, at seven o'clock, in the lower vestry.

“4. — Friday evening, at the same time and place.

“Wm. Reeves.”

At another period of his life our friend had a card printed, to advertise his classes just as another man would his trade; it was Brother Reeves' business to get men out of the world and lead them to heaven. It made the announcement thus—

William Reeves,

No. 25 Union Street, Lambeth Walk,

Leader To Two Classes Which Meet At

The Time And Place As Under, Etc., Etc.

And on the back of this card was written, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” Numbers x, 29.

In 1850 the Rev. John Hall wrote a paper entitled, “An invitation to Church-membership.” Brother Reeves at once secured a number, and turned them to practical account, by causing his classes and the time and place of the meeting to be notified in writing on the back, adding “and we shall be happy to see you.”

Sometimes persons in search of good wished to remove from other classes to his: over such applications he watched with jealousy, and one of his entries runs thus — “It may appear as though I robbed other classes, but five of these had strayed.” His talent for the acquisition of new members was considerable, and perseveringly employed; he deemed it almost essential to the life and spiritual health of a class that penitents should be constantly brought in. Sometimes it was thought that he ought to recommend fresh members to other classes than his own; when this thought found expression, he noted it, and in one of his papers is this answer:

“I have long thought I have been a strange and peculiar being, and thereby fear I have often grieved some of my dearest and best beloved friends at Lambeth, but not designedly and willingly.

I mean, because I continue to invite and strive to get so many persons to join my classes, and am not so willing as they could wish to give them up to others. This is not because I think myself the best teacher, or a better leader than my dear brethren; no, for I have often thought that this ought to be written on the front of every one of my class-books, 'A preparatory Class-Leader.' I Sam. ix, 21. But ever since I have had the unspeakable honor of being a Methodist class-leader, (though so unworthy.), I have invariably proved that only whilst I am adding to my heavenly graces, I am kept alive and growing; so I daily prove that only while I am getting new members to my classes we keep alive the old members. I mean here that spiritual life which our blessed Saviour came to bestow.

“Now new members being the means to bring or to keep this life, therefore not to strive to get new members would be to depress this life; and to send them away would be to give up this life as far as it concerned our classes.

“I feel the force of these words, and I think I may apply them to this case without doing violence to the blessed word of God — 'He that gathereth by labour shall increase.' Prov. xiii, ii. Matt. xiii, 12; xxv, 29; Psa. cxv, 14. Glory be to God, I still find these are the means.” And dear Father Reeves inoculated his members with the same spirit. An estimable

female friend, a member of the Sunday class, thus writes:

“He was greatly beloved by his class, had most unbounded influence over his 'dear children,' and was always successful in securing their cooperation to help forward the ark of the Lord.

“He had strong faith in the power and willingness of God to save the world, and therefore his mind was on the stretch for accessions to the Church of Christ. This feeling would sometimes carry him beyond what might seem prudent to many, for he would occasionally introduce those to the class in whom there appeared little promise.

“They were not intended to be a dead weight, or brought in merely to swell the numbers — this he could not have endured; but he had most entire confidence in that Scripture, 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven'; and if he could entice 'a dear friend' into his 'beloved class' he conceived he should there have influence and strength for the accomplishment of his wishes, and seldom were his large expectations disappointed.

“He would stimulate and encourage us with a zeal surprising, and when some victories were gained, would congratulate most heartily the 'dear people' whom God had so honored; wondering much that so 'unfaithful and unworthy an individual should be allowed the privilege of sharing such happiness.

“As he knew no cessation from constant arduous labor, so he longed for us to partake of the same spirit, and plenty of work he always found us in the exercise of faith and love. There were 'penitents he wanted his dear friends to help into liberty'; 'the backslider whom he was sure we all mourned over; or 'some dear brother or sister afflicted or peculiarly tried needing our especial intercession'; and he would pour out fervent supplication for the Holy Spirit's anointing, that we might be united together in love. Nor would he work on our sympathy alone, but would excite our emulation. While he was looking out for new members, could not each try and get one during the quarter?” Another friend writes: “I think it must have been about the year 1834 that my acquaintance with the deceased grew to an intimacy. My presence at week night preaching, and the Saturday evening prayer-meeting, attracted his attention. He would intercept my departure from the chapel, or vestry; the aisle, pew, form, or door-way were the points of contact. The expedience of meeting in class had not presented itself forcibly to my mind, and a repugnance to such a step was for a period decisive.

His grand object, my personal salvation, appeared to him more certain if external communion were secured. With patient love, unwearied diligence, and great forbearance, in season and (I often thought) out of season, did he invite, reason with, and exhort me to that decisive point.

“It was in his mind a demonstrated fact, that the turning point of moral and religious history would be found just at that juncture where resolve was taken for visible Church union or the converse. It was this that caused him to esteem the class-meeting of the highest value; here, he would observe, 'an individual draws the line of demarcation between the world and his adopted choice. He makes a new election of friends, pursuits, and interests. In Christ's Church he will find every solid pleasure and permanent happiness.’”

Thus did Father Reeves labor to get men to join the Church of Christ, and so truly did he enjoy the meetings of his flock, that never would he accept an invitation to any, even the most agreeable and profitable company, at the class hour; never was he absent except when in the country, or confined by sickness at home, and these occasions were extremely rare.



7. HOW HE LED A CLASS

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. “ — Malachi iii, 16.

“The lips of the righteous feed many. “ — Proverbs x, 21.

Father Reeves was never known to be late at any religious service, [5] never behind time at his class.

“A leader,” he held, “should be the first and the last in the class-room”; and, says one who met with him, “memory cannot recall, through a period of several years, a solitary deviation from this practice. At the close of the meeting he took his position at the doorway, grasped each member's hand in turn, while sententiously asking the divine blessing upon them. Grouping or gathering in little knots for supplementary conversation, was to him most objectionable, and never allowed by him to gather strength. He thought the practice possessed the germ of many evils.

Imagine, good reader, a little old man, about five feet four inches high, with a compact well-knit frame, slightly bald, a tolerably high but rather narrow forehead, prominent cheekbones, small but expressive features, standing on one of the free-seats of Lambeth chapel on a Sunday afternoon. He has mounted his spectacles, the hymn-book is opened; he has just referred to his watch, the hand indicates the hour of two; the large majority of his members are present — they have learned by example to be punctual and regular; and now, with a sharp, clear voice, he says, “Let us begin the solemn worship of Almighty God.” He pitches the tune, and all are encouraged to try to sing. His hymns are carefully selected beforehand; not a moment is lost — time is too precious to be wasted, for sixty or seventy souls have that afternoon to be warned or entreated, wept over or rejoiced with, according to their varied states of religious experience. His prayer is brief, but earnest; he knows his members intimately, it is therefore suitable. Still standing, his own experience (very nearly in the terms of Scripture, aided, perhaps, by a line or two from the hymn-book) is related. Then pertinent questions, such as none can ask twice by accident, and happily chosen, condensed Scriptural admonitions or encouragements, follow rapidly, but without haste.

“It has often been matter of surprise,” says the female friend before quoted, “that he could manage so large a class, and do justice; it was immense labor, certainly, but he knew his work, and, with much tact and skill, he always acquitted himself well. His soul held close and deep communion with his God; therefore bustle and hurry he could not endure. Serene, calm, and collected, with much fervor of spirit, and an abundance of material carefully arranged in a well-disciplined mind, he could as well meet sixty members as six. Our meetings were always orderly and quiet, never dull. In some of our prayer-meetings, when rich blessings have been given, and many penitents set at liberty, there was no confusion.”

When his numbers were at their highest, before one of the later divisions of the Sunday class, conversation had arisen in the Lambeth leaders' meeting respecting very large classes. Father Reeves did not always defend his position on the instant as fully as he might have done; but on this occasion, as on others, he went home, thought, and wrote. And here is the statement and defense: “It has been said, at our leaders' meeting, and very reasonably too, when they consider the number of members, eighty, in my Sunday class, that it is impossible the end of the class-meeting can be answered. Now what is the end of class-meeting?

“1. That the members may be instructed to know their lost state by sin.

“2. That they may be led into a state of justification, by faith in the blood of Jesus, and feel the Spirit of adoption enabling them to cry 'Abba, Father,' without a doubt.

“3. That they may be led on to perfect love, to holiness of heart and life, till they are made meet for glory.

“Now let me say to my beloved friends, and I do indeed say it 'as a fool,' let them take out of that class twenty members, whom they will, and compare them with any other twenty members from another class in Lambeth, and see if they do not come up to the above standard as fully as those who have been fed with the finest wheat, although we have been, like Daniel, and his three brethren, fed upon pulse.”

This was no empty boasting, nor does it evidence to those who knew the man any feeling contrary to humility; but he loved his members, and was jealous of their honor. He felt deeply the responsibility of his position, and was not satisfied until each member could for himself prove from Scripture every doctrine he professed, and quote from Scripture the warrant for each promise on the fulfillment of which he relied.

The brother who has had charge of this class since Father Reeves' decease, fully bears out the statement, that the members generally are well grounded in scriptural proof of all our doctrines, and can give, in the terms of Scripture, a reason for the hope that is in them. No wonder: for their leader, fearful of conventional phrases — fearful of the commonplaces of Methodism being put instead of heartfelt experience, adopted, some years ago, the plan — several times renewed — of setting apart a Sunday, on which every member should search for and read a text descriptive “Of his or her own state or present experience.”

A paper dated July, 1845, is evidently an address delivered to his classes at that time, on this subject; it expresses so well his reason for the practice alluded to, that it is inserted nearly at length.

“For my classes, when each member is to read a text from the blessed word of God which will truly and clearly express his or her own experience: and for this reason, because the hope of eternal life is not to be taken upon slight grounds; it is a question to be settled between God and your own soul. I would not despise the advice, nor reject entirely the opinion of others; but I would be careful not to trust too much to such advice and opinion, since you are to stand or fall by the word of God.

It is to that, and that alone, you must refer for testimony. The advice and opinion of ministers and private Christians you will seek and respect, but you must not regard them as infallible, nor place your reliance on them. There is, in most persons, a strong tendency to lean upon the judgment of others, rather than to take the pains of severe and strict investigation for themselves. You cannot be ignorant that such a course must be unsatisfactory and unsafe. How much better to go at once to the Bible: if we there find our character to be that of the saints who have gone before us, what joy and assurance shall we have when we know we are standing on a Rock stable as eternity! Therefore I hope you will feel more deeply the importance of settling the question over your Bible, between God and your own souls.

“My very dear children, whom I dearly love in the Lord Jesus, permit me to say, 'I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy,' and 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.' Our ever blessed Saviour ever lives and prays for us, 'Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.'

“The concern of many people is nothing more than an ignorant anxiety to be religious; they have scarcely one definite idea of what religion is: it is not mere excited feeling, as they suppose, but a clear and perfect knowledge of divine truth.

“Our heavenly Father has encouraged us to bring with us words, and come before the Lord; therefore I shall take this blessed part of His most holy word, which will fully and clearly express my past and present experience, and, if faithful unto death, my everlasting salvation. Isaiah lxi, 10.

When I speak in my class my own experience, I have not found it enough to satisfy my soul,

by saying, as many of our members do, 'us,' 'we,' 'they,' 'you'; it is not 'we,' 'you,' 'they,' and 'us,' but it is 'I,' 'my,' and 'me.'

“Wm. Reeves.”

Sometimes, instead of having an ordinary class-meeting, he would hold a Bible-class, giving his members a month to prepare for the subject. His anxiety that his members should “search the Scriptures is evidenced, not only by the above, but by numerous papers, evidently carefully prepared addresses to his classes on the subject; but as Father Reeves was ever at work among the poor, he frequently brought into society men of middle age, and old men, who knew not how to read. What was to be done with them? Might not they be left to hear the word of God from others, instead of enduring the toil of learning to read it for themselves? By no means. “We teach them,” says this admirable leader, “by their children that were taught in the Sunday school, and we set apart a Sunday for them to read a portion of Holy Scripture to us, to hear how they improve, and to stimulate others to learn.”

And thus many a new convert, but an old man, has evidenced the genuineness of the religious change wrought in him, by toiling through verse after verse, chapter after chapter, till he has been able to read before his classmates the story of the cross.

And then he turn'd unto the Book,
And read in English plain,
How Christ had died on Calvary,
How He had risen again.
And all His comfortable words,
His deeds of mercy all,
He read, and of the widow's son,
And the poor prodigal.

Mary Howitt —

The subjoined, rather lengthened but important extract, will show how he managed to turn such an occasion into a means of instruction.

“Hymn 87, page 88, to commence the meeting.

“We set apart this day (instead of meeting the class in the ordinary manner) to read the sacred Scriptures; and especially that those may read who did not know a letter when they began to meet in class; but now, glory be to God, they can read any chapter in the New Testament well. We do this especially for the encouragement of those who are now meeting with us who cannot read, that they may see the benefit and joy there is in reading the word of God for ourselves, and may be provoked to learn.

“I, William Reeves, am the oldest member of the class, and I could not read a chapter in the word of God when I was converted; but now, blessed forever be the Lord, I can say, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'

“I shall begin by reminding myself and you, for our unspeakable comfort here and happiness hereafter, of the authenticity of the word of the ever blessed God, and the love of Jesus, and this from its own truth.”

Here Brother Reeves refers extensively to the fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture relating to our Saviour — prophecies delivered several hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Then he adds:

“I shall now read the 53d chapter of Isaiah.”

Then this verse was sung:

“See, from His head, His hands,
His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down;

Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

Then Brother P_____ was directed to read the 3d chapter of the Second Epistle of St. Peter, after which the class sang this verse—

"Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart."

"Now," says our friend, "as God, insomuch love to us, has given us His dear and well-beloved Son, that we may be saved, our duty is to repent and believe the gospel. This is needful for all. So we find it in the word of God; what is necessary for one is necessary for the whole world. Daniel ix; Jonah iii; Psalm li; Acts ii, 37, 38; xvi, 30, 31."

Then Sister K_____ was appointed to read the 51st Psalm, but first this verse was sung:

"When quiet in my house I sit,
Thy book be my companion still;
My joy Thy sayings to repeat,
Talk o'er the records of Thy will,
And search the oracles divine,
Till every heartfelt word be mine."
The 103d Psalm was then read.

"And now," continues the leader, "we will remind ourselves again, that it is by faith alone in the precious blood of atonement that the poor, broken-hearted, repentant sorrowing sinner can be justified. Romans v, 1; Romans lii, 21 to the end; Galatians ii, Titus iii, 5, 6; Matthew ix, 20 to 22; Mark v, 28 to 36. Let these suffice."

Then a verse was sung:

"The thing surpasses all my thought,
But faithful is my Lord;
Through unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word;"

and Brother H_____ was called upon to read the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

After this the leader again exhorted: "We would not forget to remind ourselves of our unspeakable privilege; for it is the will of God, our heavenly Father, that we should be sanctified wholly, 'spirit, soul, and body,' and so be 'preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 1 Thess. V, 23, 24.

"But all the work of genuine religion, from first to last, is carried on in the soul by the Holy Spirit; this, so to speak, is His department in the economy of our redemption. The Father is represented as originating the scheme, the Son executing it, and the Spirit as applying it. O then, my dear and beloved friends, you must see how very necessary it is, in all divine things, to have right knowledge of God's holy word. How can you get on in the way to heaven without studying the Bible? The reason why so many turn back, and others get on so slowly is, because they do not study to make themselves acquainted with divine truth. O hear the ever-blessed Saviour's own words: 'Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth.' John xvii, 17; Ezek. Xxxvi, 25-29; Ephesians I, 13, 14; iii, 15 to the end; Eph. V, 26, 27; I John iv, 17, 18; I Peter I, 21-23." The members were then called upon to sing:

"Satan, with all his arts, no more
Me from the gospel hope shall move:
I shall receive the gracious power,

and find the pearl of perfect love.”

One more exhortation did the leader give — “Not to forget our glorious rest with Jesus in His everlasting kingdom”; and a number of references to the sacred volume are made, to excite the faith of his class. Finally, Brother K_____ was called upon to read the 14th chapter of St. John and Brother W_____ to read the 7th chapter of the Book of the Revelation. Another verse was sung:

“Out of great distress they came:
Wash'd their robes by faith below,
In the blood of yonder Lamb
Blood that washes white as snow.”

One more hymn, the 728th, page 656, was sung; the whole service was sanctified by the word of God and prayer, and this unique class-meeting separated.

Rather novel this, some may be disposed to exclaim. Yes; but let them that say so think again, and they will acknowledge it undeniably good. This excellent leader would not have his members satisfied until they could prove, from Scripture, the soundness of their faith, and until, to the joy of their souls, they could read for themselves, in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God. Six members (including the leader) out of one class, who could not read when they entered the society, reading on this memorable afternoon whole chapters of the word of God. May such leaders and members be multiplied!

In the extracts made from the papers of our lamented friend, it is believed that the reader will find but few thoughts that could be more appropriately expressed; if, however, anyone should think otherwise, let the subject of this sketch offer his own apology: “I have lived long enough to know that words are but sounds at the best; but I have also learned that there is a vast difference in the force that different words carry with them, as much difference as there is between the sound of a sheep-bell and the great bell of St. Paul's; and I have often been obliged to weaken the force of all my poor scrawls, because I could not spell many words that I thought would have conveyed the power; therefore I was obliged to take words that I could spell, although with much less power to convey my meaning.

“Wm. Reeves, 1851.”



8. LEADERSHIP, CONTINUED

“Let us join ('tis God commands),
Let us join our hearts and hands,
Help to gain our calling's hope;
Build we each the other up:
God His blessings shall dispense:
God shall crown His ordinance;
Meet in His appointed ways:
Nourish us with social grace.
“Let us then as brethren love,
Faithfully His gifts improve,
Carry on the earnest strife,
Walk in holiness of life.”

C. Wesley —

“Be sure you tell all your relations and friends at what time your class meets,” was one of Father Reeves' earliest instructions to new members; and that no one might plead ignorance as an excuse for not conforming to the rules, he not only gave each a copy, but devoted part of one meeting each quarter to read, explain, and enforce them.

On such occasions he had a brief suitable address to deliver: at one time a warning against conformity to the world; at another, an exhortation to the study of the Scriptures; at another, admonitions against lukewarmness, &c. In one of the latter he exposes most forcibly the folly of the excuses which many urge for not attending their class with regularity, finishing with men of business: “Now, concerning the business over which you 'have no control.' To be a Christian and yet to have no control over business, I do not understand. I have been more than twenty-five years a class-leader, and yet, though I have business, I never missed once through business, and never should while I have two such swift helpmates as 'Forethought' and 'Redeeming the Time.’” He recurs to this matter in another address with great earnestness: “Be sure, my dear children, let all your families and all your friends know what day and at what time you meet in your class, that they may not make any engagement with you at that time. Tell them all that hour is the Lord's. Neh. Vi, 2, 3, 4.

“Now, my beloved children, be sure you be as firm against your enemies in building your own house, (Heb. Iii, 6,) as Nehemiah was in building the house of the Lord. Yield not to your enemy or a pretended friend; for what work is so great a work as your own salvation? Heb. Ii, 3; Phil. Ii, 12; and be sure and take good heed to the words of our blessed Redeemer. Matt. X, 36-39.” These exhortations and other addresses on doctrinal subjects did not generally interfere with the ordinary class-meeting, but formed an introduction to the usual monthly prayer-meetings. Father Reeves says in one of them: “Such exhortations would not be needful when there are only from ten to twenty members in a class, when the leader has time every week to press these things on every one; but where there are sixty to eighty members, the leader can only have time to get at their present and personal experience, and to urge a present salvation. He has no time to enlarge, in my humble judgment.”

All would agree that, with so considerable a number, there was “no time to enlarge” at the ordinary weekly meetings; but Brother Reeves' classes found the benefit of his careful preparation for them, in his ability to condense his observations, to convey in the fewest possible words the greatest amount of instruction. “He was never in haste,” “always orderly,” “never dull” is the unimpeachable testimony of intelligent members; and yet, though so brief, he was eminently successful. Some leaders would take longer to meet twenty members, than this leader did sixty to seventy; but if they prepared for their work more carefully, they could afford to be less copious, and would be more effective. And though all leaders may not deem it wise to imitate Brother Reeves' example, and read a brief, pointed, practical ten to fifteen minutes address every monthly prayermeeting, yet preparation for these assemblies would frequently make them more profitable.

Hymns might be selected thoughtfully beforehand; a portion of Scripture might be well studied and read to the assembled members, with perhaps a practical remark or two; and if chosen in reference to some blessing needed, or some duty not over-zealously performed, if it contained encouragement to prayer or stimulants to faith, how would it aid to promote humility before God, or to kindle the devotion of the class, while on their knees they remembered the word of the Lord! Had Brother Reeves a number of penitents in his class? The next prayer-meeting would be specially for them, penitential hymns selected, and an address of encouragement with Scripture references would be delivered. Were penitents set at liberty? — well-chosen verses of praise to God, previously marked, were heartily sung. Had the class received, as into a hospital, some poor backsliders? — the following prayermeeting was for them; for them the hymns, for them the exhortation, for them the

Scripture fact and Scripture promise, and for them the earnest, importunate, prevailing prayer. Over backsliders Father Reeves truly mourned; over their penitent return he as heartily rejoiced. In one paper, containing an account of his classes, he marks "One backslider"; but the term is afterward blotted out, and this line written, "The prodigal returned." Were believers evidencing an earnest longing for a deeper baptism of the Holy Spirit? — a prayer-meeting and an address were dedicated to those who were seeking "perfect love"; and when any attained it, the hymn of adoring gratitude was already at hand.

Nothing was done without thought. When he read the Rules, he had certain suitable hymns invariably selected; nothing was trivial with him that he deemed it his duty to perform.

His addresses were not always in relation to experience, but sometimes to practice. One is headed, "A word to those who do not like to be dealt faithfully with"; another, "On members neglecting to take their quarterly tickets." Others are adapted to their season: "Questions to be proposed at the end of the year"; "For the outpouring of the Spirit on the ministers and society generally at Lambeth"; and on "Family worship."

"He labored most diligently," says one of his members, "to instruct us in doctrine, in Church discipline, and every matter necessary to make us intelligent Christians; his mind was always devising means for our improvement.

"He loved the members of his class to attend regularly, and so winning were his invitations for their presence when the time for the renewal of tickets approached, that it was difficult to be absent.

'The dear ministers,' he would say, 'feel encouraged by a full attendance; do come and cheer them by your presence.' He was so perfectly unselfish, he could never understand how a brother would keep his wife from the house of God to prepare his Sunday dinner; 'he so loved that his dear wife should enjoy with him the feast of love in God's house, that he could well afford to do with a cold dinner.'

"He knew well, and could expose most cleverly the stratagems of Satan, and the deceitfulness of human nature. We do not remember that he ever came to class desponding. Seasons of severe trial he has had, in common with others, and sometimes expressions of the weight and care of the responsibility of his charge would escape him; but the more general tone was that of great delight in the service of God."

Another member writes: "He loved Wesleyan Methodism — indifferentism was dreaded as akin to infidelity; but it was the sterling catholicity of Christian faith, the invariable rectitude of life, and the simplicity of aim that admitted of no misrepresentation, that gave distinctness to his character.

"The Bible preeminently, Baxter's Saints' Rest and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress furnished his mind with abundant material for acceptably discharging the duties of a class-leader, or visitor of the sick and poor. He never ventured to dogmatize without an appeal to Scripture — telling and rich quotations from 'Moses and the Prophets' would often awaken a thrilling interest usually pertaining to the subject forming 'the meditation in order for the day.' "In directing the penitent to a gracious Saviour, the deep emotions of a heart travailing in birth for souls would lay every energy of his mind under contribution — speech would grow rapid and loud, and his memory seldom failed to supply the most appropriate and soothing passages of Scripture. Then, baptized with love, earnest and absorbed in exhibiting the divine compassion and present willingness to pardon the returning sinner — amid gushing tears and thickened utterance, he would pray with a fervor and enlargement truly remarkable."



9. NO DUTY NEGLECTED

“Help us to help each other Lord!
Each other's cross to bear
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel his brother's care.”

C. Wesley —

It has been shown how Father Reeves gathered men into the Church, and how he taught them when there; but there are a few other points in the character of a successful leader, and these were conspicuous in the leader before us. He was invariably present at the weekly meeting of the stewards and leaders; and as he always collected the money from his members weekly, he as regularly paid the amount to the stewards. The writer cannot imagine the attraction which would have prevented our friend from the discharge of this duty; whoever else was absent, Father Reeves was in the Lambeth chapel vestry on Thursday evening; there he sat, always on one spot, on the left of the minister, his class-books ready, the addition of the last column checked by some younger brother, and the money in the hand waiting for the steward to enter it.

And his books are models. No blanks, or extremely few, against the members' names, but either the money or a sufficient reason for absence.

“He was very skillful,” says the female friend who has previously so well sketched his proceedings, “in keeping the weekly payments straight. 'Don't let Satan tempt you to remain away because you have got behind, and cannot pay up the score; come and begin afresh.' But lest this should leave room for laxity and indifference, in what he considered a very important duty, he would describe, in most glowing terms, the immense pleasure some of the 'dear people' felt in making sacrifice and using self-denial, as he would say, 'for the gospel'; illustrating his remarks by appropriate anecdotes, and always giving us credit for such excellences as he desired we should possess. He would never allow the false idea that religion was expensive. 'Let them compare the trifle given for the support of the gospel with those expenses into which sin had led them, and then judge.'”

In one of the addresses referred to, Father Reeves, after enjoining obedience to the rules, “that we may not bring any disgrace on the Church of Christ,” and urging punctuality “in private devotion,” adds: “The Lord hath heard and answered our prayer, and hath sent us faithful and able ministers to preach to us the blessed gospel, and they must be supported. Not by thousands a year, for then only the great and the rich could have the honor and privilege of paying; but our ministers have a smaller sum, and, blessed be the Lord, he hath given us that are poor this great luxury — to help pay the Lord's servants by a penny a week. Let us say with David, I will not offer 'unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.’” 2 Samuel xxiv, 24.

Father Reeves did not content himself with giving “a penny a week,” he gave as the Lord enabled him: but he had many in his classes who could spare no more. He loved those who ministered to the Lord's people in holy things, and evidenced his attachment to them at all times.

Among such large numbers under his care, he had a long list of the sick, the poor, and the aged.

He looked well to them; his list was always ready on “poor's night”; the name and the particulars of the case briefly stated, and the sum he desired asked for. When this was

increased by any suggestion from a brother, the emphatic "Thank you, sir," and the quickly altered figures told how much he delighted to be the Church's almoner to the Saviour's poor members. Occasionally he was entrusted by others with gifts for the poor, privately; and all these accounts of receipts and distribution were regularly kept in his books.

One of his former members says of him: "While cultivating the charity that thinketh no evil, he carefully discriminated character, and dealt with parties accordingly. Such as sought through him certain supposed advantages from membership, while higher and worthier motives were believed to be absent, were not long in discovering the expediency of a retreat from their position. To the sincere, his heart was ever expansive; cordial invitation and affectionate welcome always awaited them, and beamed expressively through his peculiar contour of features; but to the worldly views of others, as much severity could be manifested as comported with the Christian character." The same friend says: "Little children, brought by their parents, were always affectionately and appropriately regarded: this attention has often proved an additional link in the chain which united him and his members." One of his papers, apparently written to be lent, is an address "to a mother with an infant." He loved the social and family characteristics of Methodism; but, as this friend remarks, "he would check, and even silence observations indiscreetly alluding to domestic and family affairs; yet it was felt, that if counsel upon perplexing questions were needed, there was an open ear, a careful judgment, and a sincere sympathizing heart, ready to attend, ponder, and assist.

Confidence was never shaken nor propriety shocked by disclosure." In one other particular of excellence as a class-leader should Father Reeves be viewed — his visitation of the sick and absent members at their own homes. Many modern leaders think they do their duty by meeting (with something approaching to regularity) those members who may come to them on the class-night; they, perhaps, send a message by a member to "the sick, the lame, and the lazy"; or they content themselves by scolding the delinquents in their absence, thus troubling the members present with the condemnation of faults which they at least have avoided. Not so this admirable leader. To estimate aright the following statement, let it be borne in mind, that until Father Reeves was seventy years of age, he had to work dally for his living; that on Sundays, for many years, he was, except during very brief intervals, in the chapel from seven in the morning until eight o'clock at night, and after that at a neighboring prayer-meeting; that every evening in the week, but one, was spent in the chapel, schoolroom, or vestry, in some religious service; and yet he undertook and accomplished an amount of house-to-house visitation of his members, such as made his person well known through the neighborhood, to saint and sinner, and kept up the numbers and spirit of his classes to an unparalleled degree.

His visits, during the early years of his leadership, were few, or were not fully recorded; but, taking his class-books from 1825 to 1852, nearly thirteen thousand visits may be traced — an average of four hundred and fifty a year; and, during the last five years, they averaged six hundred and fifty a year. These are exclusively to his classes — to those detained by sickness, business, or temptation, and entirely apart from his visits on account of the Strangers' Friend Society, or his visits to members who had unavoidably left his classes. Were these added, it is probable that his domiciliary visitations would amount to one thousand a year for the last three years. "These visits," says an old member, "were seasons of considerable interest; solicitude for your temporal welfare was not omitted, but his absorbing anxieties were directed to spiritual concerns; no member of the household was forgotten. My wife has remarked, 'Your old leader is always about his Master's business.' Few men within the sphere of my observation won more respect than did he from those who had been educated in accordance with other Church systems." A poor woman, who with her husband met in Father Reeves' Sunday class, writes: "If we have been absent from class, through illness, he has been sure to call the next morning before nine o'clock. Many a time

he has helped us out of his own pocket, for fear we should not have bread.” Another friend, who met with Father Reeves for the last twelve years, says: “His visits to my house, which occurred about once in a quarter, were always anticipated with pleasure by every member of my family, and proved seasons of delightful communion to us, his heavenly conversation raising our minds and hearts to things above — each visit being followed by an influence which convinced us that a man of God had been our guest. For the true happiness of our children he evinced an almost parental solicitude; many and importunate were his prayers, accompanied by many tears, to the throne of grace, that they might be made partakers of the blessings of salvation; and sincerely did he rejoice with us, as he saw, from time to time, one after another of them translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. One of his letters to us, dated December, 1851, we received a day or two after a Sabbath evening, when he had noticed our six children, side by side, commemorating the death of our dear Redeemer, at the table of the Lord, in Lambeth chapel. He tells us that his joy was inexpressible; it filled his heart.”

This was a sight likely to interest angels, to move all good people, and would be sure to melt the tender heart of our departed friend. This was another point in which he was exemplary — he regularly received the sacrament of the Lord's supper himself, and uniformly urged the duty on his members.

“The command and invitation,” says one who met with him, “Of the Lord Jesus, rendered it,’ he would urge, ‘a binding duty on the followers of Christ, if gratitude and love for the wondrous acts commemorated had not impelled, to the communion of saints.’ At our meetings prior to Sacrament Sunday he was sure to make the announcement, together with the ‘hope of meeting all my dear members at the table of the Lord.’”

And he looked after them too. For many a long year the good old man took his stand just under the corner of the pulpit stairs, gently aiding to form the line of waiting communicants, and narrowly scanning each line for the members of his own flock.

He loved the “Society meetings,” and regretted they were not more frequently held.

This good old-fashioned custom of meeting the society and examining the tickets, is one of the family characteristics of Methodism which should not be lost.

The love-feast, too, especially delighted Father Reeves; he was always ready here to tell how “the poor unlettered shepherd boy” found peace with God, always ready to counsel private prayer and preparation for the Sabbath.

Orderly in everything, he has sometimes told us, “even my clothes are all laid out ready to put on in the morning; I can put my hand on all I want in the dark.” Self-denial he constantly urged. Early rising he insisted on as all but necessary to a growth in grace. “Does not your Lord,” he sometimes asked “find you in your bed, when He looked for you on your knees?”

Though greatly afflicted and frequently unable to get rest at night, he would not be induced to lie down during the day. He considered any disposition to this indulgence a temptation from Satan; and few things grieved him more than to find a mere excuse offered for absence from class.

“O,” said he, “if the members of society did but know how it pierces the heart of a leader, when he visits them to know why they were not at class, to hear this answer, ‘I was poorly, so I lay down till it was too late.’ “He expresses a deep and serious fear lest such may be found “laid down at ease” when “the Bridegroom cometh,” and that they will not recover their earnestness till it is “too late,” and “the door is shut.”

That his attendance on the public means of grace, and his diligent visitation of his absent members, did not interfere with those private religious duties by which the soul of the

Christian is chiefly sustained, may be gathered from the following rather singular paper, which relates to one of his most prosperous years in business.

“December, 1831. This years has been a year of many mercies (as well as all the years of my life) • mercies temporal and spiritual. In the midst of much distress and want of trade in our land, glory be to my heavenly Father, he hath given me enough and to spare. I have earned this year the sum of £84 14s. 11/2d. O, when I consider I am but a steward of all I possess, how shall I stand to give an account at the morning of the resurrection? O that the ever-blessed Lord may increase my wisdom to manage all to His glory! I have heard this year one hundred and eighty-six sermons; and have been at one hundred and thirty public prayer-meetings, and one hundred and fifty-eight class-meetings; and have paid two hundred and fifty visits to members at their own houses; one thousand and ninety-five times I have prayed with my family; one thousand and ninety-five times in private, with my ever-blessed Jesus at the throne of grace. O how 'I loathe myself when God I see, And into nothing fall!' O that the Lord may help me to redeem the time!”



10. FATHER REEVES AND HIS MEMBERS

“All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.”

Herbert —

In 1839 the members of the three classes at that time met by our departed friend subscribed to present to him a Bible, prayer-book, and hymn-book; and they caused a list of their names to be printed. This token of love deeply affected the leader: he read them a touching and most Scriptural address.

But he turned the printed list to good purpose; he wrote against the names an account of what became of them as far as he could trace them — no slight work, for out of one hundred and fifty-one members in 1839, only seventy-seven remained in the classes four years afterwards.

In 1843, he records, “Four have been made leaders; seven have died happy in the Lord, ten have become backsliders, seventy-seven remain with me, twenty have removed,” and the rest appear to have been taken away to assist in forming new classes. In 1847 the Wednesday class was transferred to another leader; only ten remained of the forty-one counted in 1839. In 1851 the numbers in the other two classes, found in the printed list, are thus counted up:

Removals, and to form new classes . . .	58
Deaths . . .	18
Backsliders . . .	15
Remaining with me . . .	19
Total . . .	110

In 1851 Father Reeves remarks: “Two classes have been divided from the Sunday class since 1839; two from the Friday.”

The above numbers will show in what a very fluctuating population the parish of Lambeth has hitherto abounded, the Sunday School and the congregation bear the same evidence; looking at this fact, the service of such a leader as Father Reeves, who was ever ready for the roughest as well as the most polished material, cannot be over-estimated.

“On Sunday, May 18, 1851, we gave an account of all these members,” (the printed list,) “and we all spoke our present experience by a text of Scripture. This is my general experience, I Cor. Vi, 11; this is my present experience, Gal. Ii, 20; and for my dear children, 3 John 4; Isa. Liv, 13.” In some years our lamented friend was favored with unusual accessions to the number of his members; this was especially the case in the first visitation of that awful scourge, the cholera, when one of our resident ministers, the Rev. John Storey, was removed by it. This event, with others, made a deep impression on the people, and in March, 1833, Father Reeves records: “The number in my three classes is one hundred and fifty-eight, being an increase, since last March, of sixty-nine; and there are on trial this quarter, twelve. Glory be to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for calling so many sinners out of the world, and receiving them into the Church and fitting them for glory!” Some of the prayer-meetings in his classes at this time were distinguished by much of the divine presence; at one penitent prayer-meeting twelve souls were set at liberty. Again, in 1838, Father Reeves writes, according to his wont, in his class-book, which, as it now contained the record of four classes, barely lasted six months:

“Glory be to His holy name, He has been fulfilling that great and glorious promise which He so clearly and fully gave me one Sunday morning, about the year 1830, when on my knees praying for my classes: 'The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children; ye are blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth.' O, my ever-blessed Father, keep me humble at the feet of Jesus while Thou savest poor sinners. O, what have mine eyes seen! The Lord has added in this class-book—

To my Sunday afternoon class . . . 9
 Sunday evening . . . 8
 Wednesday . . . 12
 Friday . . . 8
 Total . . . 37

and the blessed Lord has set twenty souls at happy liberty.” Every quarter he carefully took out an estimate of his classes; usually adding the statistics for the circuit. The following is a specimen:

STATE OF MY CLASSES, DECEMBER, 1842

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Removals . . . 3
 Backsliders . . . 1
 Number of members . . . 80
 On trial . . . 6
 Found peace . . . 6
 Last quarter . . . 74
 Increase . . . 6
 WEDNESDAY
 Removals . . . 5
 Number . . . 66
 On trial . . . 4
 Found peace . . . 4
 Last quarter . . . 60
 Increase . . . 6
 FRIDAY
 Removals . . . 5
 Numbers . . . 44
 On trial . . . 1
 Found peace . . . 1

Last quarter . . . 44
 Total number of members . . . 190
 On trial . . . 11
 Found peace . . . 11
 Number of members at Lambeth . . . 665
 Total in the circuit . . . 1561
 Number on trial . . . 61
 Increase this quarter . . . 12

The last address of Father Reeves to his Sunday class is preserved. It was for the prayer-meeting in October, 1852; in it he greets his "very dear and beloved children in the Lord Jesus," calls upon them "with all their souls to join him in praising the Triune God." He says: "For the last six months you have given me, your unworthy leader, far greater joy and gladness of heart than in all the thirty-four years before; and not to me only, for this would have been no joy to me, had it not been for the glory of our heavenly Father. Again we will sing, Hallelujah to God and the Lamb, who hath given us grace to fulfill all righteousness! For many of you by self-denial, by taking up the cross weekly, have given full proof that in accordance with our Lord's commands you have loved Him more than father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, or any pretended friend, or gold, or silver, or any of the comforts of life."

He then proceeds to state the sins of the Churches of Asia, pointing out each, and making valuable practical remarks.

Only one paper more on the subject of leadership, though he has left materials for a volume. It is the laudable practice at the Lambeth leaders' meeting, when a new leader is to be proposed for reception, to ask him whether he believes, and how he would teach, the Scriptural doctrines which are generally taught among Methodists. Of course, the quality of the answers is varied; but Father Reeves was anxious that those made leaders from his classes should pass their examination well.

There is reason to believe the following paper was prepared for the benefit of one of these friends: "My Dear Brother, — You will be asked in the first place, whether you believe that all mankind are fallen, and are become sinners? The answer is, Gen. Vi, 5; Isaiah I, 4-6; Mark vii, 21-23. You will be asked whether it is needful that a sinner should repent, and what repentance is? Luke xiii, 5; xxiv, 47; Acts v, 31; xvii, 30. Also, What would you say to a poor sinner who should cry out, 'What must I do to be saved?' The answer is, John I, 29; Acts xvi, 31. You will be asked, whether Christ died for all men? The answer is, Heb. Ii, 9; I Tim. Ii, 4-6; Acts x, 34, 35. You will be asked, How is a sinner justified, and what text of Scripture you would give to prove it? You may find an answer, Rom. V, 1; iii, 28-31. You will be asked, What is sanctification? You may give a Scriptural answer, Matt.

Xxii, 37. And by what means a believer is sanctified? Take Acts xv, 9; I John I, 9. The promise of sanctification is found in Ezekiel xxxvi, 25, 26. You will be asked, whether it is possible to lose it and finally fall? The answer is, I Tim. I, 19; Heb. X, 26, 27, 38; 2 Peter ii, 2022; Heb. Vi, 4-6. You will be asked, whether you believe in the general resurrection, and the day of judgment? The answer is, John v, 29; Acts xxiv, 15. And whether you believe in eternal punishment? Matt. Xxv, 46; Mark ix, 43; Rev. xiv, 11. you will be asked, whether you believe that the Holy Ghost is God? The answer is, Acts v, 3, 4."

Father Reeves might have added other questions, but these show how alive he was to the reputation of any who had been his members.



11. HIS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

“To join the spirits of the just
Your leader hath departed;
Be comforted, be comforted,
Ye bruised and broken-hearted.”

M. Howitt —

The usefulness of our beloved and lamented friend was founded on his experimental acquaintance with the truths he wished others to embrace.

“It seems rational to hope,” says Dr. Johnson, “that they who are most able to teach others the way to happiness should with the most certainty follow it themselves”; but the moralist intimates that this expectation is frequently disappointed.

Now Father Reeves could well teach others the way, for he was constantly walking in it: he knew and loved “the path of the commandments”; he was familiar with all the guideposts “Of promise”; he drank repeatedly of “the wells of salvation”; and, from the commencement of his Christian course, he followed “the path of life” with the certainty that appertains to the deepest conviction of truth, and manifests itself in unwavering consistency of character.

He had been four years a class-leader before he committed to writing that covenant with God which he had repeatedly made before. In the same book from which his autobiography is taken, the following is found:

“Here, for the first time, for want of courage, to my shame, I commit my covenant in writing; but this morning, feeling that the Lord accepts me for His own, I here, with my hand and all my heart, give myself to Him.

“O Lord, I am Thine, save me! If Thou sparest me this year, help me to glorify Thy name; and if Thou takest me, take me to Thyself. I am Thy unworthy servant, “William Reeves

“January 7, 1822.”

Underneath this is written at a later time, “You will see I am a bad speller but a worse sinner”; though this remark probably refers to the narrative of his life which followed.

Occasional entries in the blank leaves of his class-books, testify, from time to time, the trials and the triumphs of our friend's faith, and of his growth in grace. Of late years these entries became more copious, and some extracts may be made from them. In March, 1840, is the following: “I believe the ever-blessed Lord is carrying on His own work of grace in my poor soul, because I never felt the corruption and awful depravity of my own heart and life as I do now. Yes, indeed! It is one thing to read of it in the word of God where it is so clearly pointed out — one thing to hear of it from the pulpit and to talk about it to others — but O, how different it is when we see and feel it within by the light of the Spirit of God! Well might my beloved Saviour say, 'If I wash you not, ye have no part with me.' I bless the Lord that I ever felt His blood applied to my poor polluted heart, and still feel that I have need of its efficacious power every moment.” In another book, the same year, is written: “Glory be to Thy holy name that Thou continuest to make Thy house my sweetest home on earth; but praise the Lord, O my soul, that I know my name is written in the Lamb's book of life; and if the 'earthly house of this tabernacle' were dissolved, 'I have a building of God, eternal in the heavens.’”

His experience continued to deepen. In 1843 he wrote: “Confinement by sickness is a seasonable opportunity for improvement in patience and resignation; the love of God is a sweet support in pain.

Glory be to Thy holy name, I feel it has opened a paradise on earth! I now feel I am 'dead indeed unto sin,' and 'my life is hid with Christ in God.' O my soul, art thou indeed lodged in

such a heavenly place? The thought is overwhelming.”

Father Reeves was no stranger to affliction. He blesses God for having given him power to endure, but says, in 1843: “My nights have been full of tossing to and from until the dawning of the day; often have I been obliged, through severe pain, to get out of bed from ten to twenty times in the night and walk my chamber; and yet the blessed Lord hath given me strength to labor hard all the day for the bread that perisheth, and to meet my classes, and to enjoy the visitation of the poor and sick of the Lord's people. His grace has ever been sufficient for me.” On some of these nights of painful watching, his soul was so blessed, while relying “by faith on the precious atoning blood,” that he says, “I almost fear sinking into the arms of sleep, lest I should fail to retain the bliss I now enjoy. Give Thine angels charge over me!” In 1844 an entry runs thus: “For several weeks past my soul has been longing for a clearer testimony from the Spirit of my entire sanctification. I pleaded hard with the Lord for it, through the precious blood of Jesus; and, glory be to my heavenly Father, He very soon granted me the desire of my heart, though so unworthy, and filled my soul with 'perfect love.' Blessed be the name of the Triune God for His unspeakable love to me.”

This blessing Father Reeves appears to have enjoyed at an earlier date, but his evidence of it was now, as he remarks, given to him “afresh” and “far brighter.” In 1845, while reading the Scriptures in family worship, and “meditating, by the help of the Holy Spirit, on the exceeding great and precious promises, my soul,” says our friend, “was in very deed, in a large and overwhelming sense, made a partaker of the divine nature; O how was I humbled at the Saviour's feet, and my soul filled with glory and praise to the almighty God of love!” Take extracts from another entry — “My body being tossed with great pain so that I could not sleep all night, while I was meditating on the mercy of God and the love of Jesus at midnight, divine light rushed into my soul; and though it was all darkness without, glory be to God, it was all heavenly light within.” He went on meditating about heaven, the glorious city, the New Jerusalem, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne, when, he says — “This blessed part of the word of God was, by His Spirit, spoken to my heart in a voice loud but sweet: 'I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' In a moment my soul was so filled with that light and life, my peace and joy became so exceeding great, the blood of atonement so sweet and precious, that it must have been a portion of heavenly joy and glory poured into my soul. I could only find vent for my happiness by crying, 'Glory, glory, glory to God and the Lamb forever and forever!' O, this was a happy night of pain! I would not have been without it for all the sleep in the world; if ever I could say in truth, it is now 'With Thee conversing, we forget

All time, and toil, and care;
Labor is rest, and pain is sweet,
If Thou, my God, art here.”

From this time his experience is of the richest and deepest tone; and, but that religious biography has for years past presented Christian enjoyment to the readers, till, it is feared, some of the effect of the recital is lost, a whole volume might be filled with passages nearly as rich as the above.

Father Reeves was eminently a practical man; and yet, had he indulged it, he might have exhibited much power of imagination. One of his class speaks of the aptness of his illustrations of Scripture doctrine and experience drawn from the scenes of his boyhood; and so true to nature, as at once to awaken interest and rivet attention. The following extract shows the imaginative faculty busy in sleep, and almost realizes an answer to the prayer of Charles Wesley: “Loose me from the chains of sense,

Set me from the body free;
Draw with stronger influence

My unfetter'd soul to Thee;
In me, Lord, Thyself reveal;
Fill me with a sweet surprise;
Let me Thee, when waking, feel;
Let me in Thy image rise."

"July 18, 1846. — This night I was in much pain of body, and walked my bedroom for some hours; then I returned to bed very happy in my soul, and as I lay down, I said: 'O my ever-blessed Jesus, may I dare to ask Thee to suffer such a poor sinful unworthy worm as I to lean my head on my Redeemer's breast? — and, glory be to God, it appeared as if I was in the arms of my blessed Saviour, and I fell asleep in this happy frame of mind. Shortly I dreamed I was in the country again, where I was brought up, striving to drive a horse into a stable where I had driven many when I was young: but this horse I thought was like the animal Balaam rode. I strove hard to get it in, but could not. After a few minutes, a tall thin figure like a man came rushing out, but I did not see his face. I said, 'I know whom you seek, it is I,' and I felt as if it had been real. But I felt no fear; my mind was sweetly tranquil, and, believing it was Death, I said, 'Come quickly, and do your office'; and he turned round with a dart in his hand and thrust it into my side; and, as soon as the fatal blow was struck, I expected instant heaven, and I began to sing a part of the hymn beginning, 'Vital spark,' and I sang

'O death, where is thy sting?

O death, where is thy sting?' &c., &c.,

and, in the act of singing, I awoke. My heart was deeply affected, and I began to praise God for keeping me from fear in the immediate prospect of death. This vision of the night has been of great benefit to my soul; it has led me more closely to examine myself, and to pray more fervently to my heavenly Father that I may in very deed be found of Him at last in so sweet and tranquil a mind, without fear, trusting alone in the precious blood of Jesus.

"I do not put any confidence in dreams; no, for I have been so many years afflicted that I have been like Job, 'scared with dreams, and terrified with visions of the night,' and I should not have noticed this but that the power, mercy, goodness, and love of God should not be forgotten. Mr.

Wesley says: 'A dream is a fragment of life broken off at both ends, not connected either with the part that is gone before or with that which follows after.

'O that I may never forget'

My life is a dream; my time, as a stream,

Glides swiftly away;

And the fugitive moment refuses to stay."

Under date Sunday, August 16, 1846, we have the following burst of holy confidence; with such faith, no wonder Father Reeves was a successful leader: "This morning I read at family worship the third chapter of John, and when I came to the exceeding precious lines, the 16th and 17th verses, the Lord in a most extraordinary manner broke in on my soul by the light of His Holy Spirit.

He filled my whole soul with pure light, fullness of joy, and holy love: all language fails to express what I felt — all the powers of my soul had such a mighty grasp of faith. I saw and felt, as I never saw before, that the almighty Father did not love me in word only, but in deed and in truth, in bestowing that unspeakable gift of His well-beloved and only-begotten Son: and I saw so clearly the precious love of His dear Son so sweetly blending with the Father's, that they became together one mighty ocean of unfathomable love. The ever-blessed Spirit revealed this love to my soul and opened my understanding, so that I feel now if I had a thousand souls — yes! I feel if I had ten thousand worlds of souls, and they were all sunk as black and deep in sin as Sodom, or the Jews, or any Gentiles — yet I can so fully

believe in the precious blood of atonement, that if they will repent, and go by faith to that precious fountain of blood, I firmly believe it will wash them all as white as snow, and make them all meet for glory!

“O, the real enjoyment even in anticipating everlasting life! — no angel tongue can tell it, but feeling it fills my soul. I am led to exclaim, 'O the depth of the wisdom and love of God!'

Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which, at the mercy-seat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e'en for my soul was shed.
'Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.'”

Our next extract will be, Jan. 2, 1848 — “This afternoon I found a most solemn and heart — affecting time at 'the renewal of the covenant'; and yet to my soul it was the most refreshing I ever felt. I was, in very deed, enabled by grace divine, through faith, to touch the precious covenant blood, and thereby I felt assured that I received the seal that moment, stamped by love divine with all its sanctifying power. O, I shall never forget how unspeakably precious was Christ to me that moment! I was able to give up my body and soul with all I am and have, to give up my dear wife, and my classes — which are my dear children; and this I solemnly did, as though it were the last covenant I should ever make with God.

“And now, thou Triune God, Searcher of hearts, Thou knowest that I make this covenant with Thee this day without any known guile or reservation, beseeching Thee, if Thou espiest any flaw or falsehood therein, Thou wouldst discover it to me and help me to do aright. And now, glory be to God the Father, to God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, I am Thine, and Thou art my Father. Amen and Amen.

'Now, O God, Thine own I am,
Now I give Thee back Thine own
Freedom, friends, and health, and fame,
Consecrate to Thee alone;
Thine I live, thrice happy,
Happier still if Thine I die.'

Father Reeves frequently records his joy in visiting the sick members of his classes, and this year especially: “My soul,” he says, “has been drinking with them of the fountain of life freely; and in looking through the week's list, I find by the mercy of God I have been enabled to visit twenty-three families in the distance from Smithfield to Clapham. O, what love doth my Father show me, to grant this great luxury, and strength of body to travel so far at almost seventy years of age!” The close of the year 1848 was a time of great prosperity in the classes of our dear friend. A young man who had met with him, and enjoyed religion, but had changed his residence, and lost his hope, came to Father Reeves again. The class prayed for the wanderer; and the leader says: “Glory be to Jesus, he had not been in the class long before the Lord took the lamb out of the lion's mouth. We rejoiced over him as those who had taken a great spoil.” At another meeting he says: “One of our dear sisters, whom Satan had bound, Lo! More than twelve years, received pardon, and shouted aloud for joy. The class were all much quickened.” The work spread, and the following entry is made:

“Went to my happy class this afternoon; it was our monthly prayer-meeting, and truly it was a time never to be forgotten. It was a time of breaking down and building up. Penitents began to cry for mercy, and those who had lately found pardoning grace began to praise Him aloud; while all those who had long enjoyed peace through believing, were now led in

a most extraordinary and earnest manner to cry for perfect love; and although there were so many, yet there was but one heart, one soul, one voice. 'Love, love, perfect love,' was the cry of all; and, glory be to God, we did not cry in vain; the Spirit of love was so poured out upon us that we scarcely could part. This Sabbath has been a foretaste of the Sabbath above. But there are some cold-hearted professors, because they do not possess this love, are asking, 'Doth old Methodism live among us now in Lambeth?' I can answer with joy and say, 'Come and see.'

"Sinners are awakened, and are crying for mercy. Come and see.

"Penitents are justified by faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Come and see.

"Believers are by faith plunged into that Fountain that is opened for sin and uncleanness, and are washed and sanctified, and made white through the blood of the Lamb. It is so now. Come and see." An entry, January, 1849, shows something of the character of the members he had to visit: "Glory be to God, in visiting the sick and dying today among my dear children, I have found such a degree of happiness, peace, and joy, that I seldom, if ever, felt before. Verily my cup has run over while hearing the sure evidence and transporting joy of several of God's dying saints.

"Esther N____, aged 82; near death; but she is as a little child, lying at the feet of Jesus, full of faith and joy unspeakable. Truly her life is hid with Christ in God.

"Caroline E____, aged 82; has been a member of Christ's Church forty years, and is still fixed on the Rock.

"Anne P____, aged 80; a member fifty years, and has been confined to her room for more than four years, but she is firmly fixed in the cleft of the Rock.

"Francis R____, aged 84; a member fifty years; in much pain, but resigned and happy.

"Mary R____; very ill, and with some doubts.

"Fanny K____; very ill, but unspeakably happy.

"Ann N____; very feeble; she cannot tell her age. Mr. Wesley gave her her first ticket. She has been a backslider, but has been restored for ten years, and enjoys much peace."



12. RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AND EXPERIENCE

"You see the man; you see his hold of heaven;
Heaven waits not the last moment; owns its friends
On this side death, and points them out to men. Young —

Numerous entries in his diary show the humility of Father Reeves. Respected and loved by all, he was encouraged in the leaders' meeting freely to offer his opinion; but he was not always satisfied that he had delivered himself in the best manner. "I have," said he, "a continual fear of offending in word; this I have often done, not willingly, but by speaking too much, as I did this evening on the outward affairs of the Church. I thank my heavenly Father that I have not to condemn myself for speaking anything positively evil; but I am much to blame that, after so much teaching from God and man, I have not more wisdom and knowledge to guide me to speak aright at all times. Lord, help me! I want to be humble, that my heart may always glow with the love of God and man.

“O might my lot be cast with these,
The least of Jesus' witnesses!
O that my Lord would count me meet
To wash His dear disciples' feet!”

Not many months before the death of our friend, a slight difference of opinion on some point of practice had occurred in the leaders' meeting. He heard that one or two were somewhat grieved at what he was supposed to have said. He came down the next week, and, with a heart full of love, and a voice trembling with emotion, offered “to go on his knees to seek forgiveness from any brother he had offended.”

After he became too infirm for manual labor, he devoted his whole time to the Lord. In 1849 the cholera was again with us, and though feeble and afflicted our friend was always employed. “I spent,” he says, on the 20th August, “some time in reading and prayer, and then went out to visit for the Strangers' Friend Society. I visited ten cases for this society today; eight of these, cholera cases; and I saw two members of my classes ill with the same disease. I felt almost worn out, but, glory be to God, though I am tired in body I am not tired of the glorious work. I could wish, were it my heavenly Father's will, that I had another body to wear out in His service, for His glory, and the salvation of sinners. I used to pray, while I was young, that if I was spared to grow old and past labor, and it were the Lord's will, I might live on a little longer, and be enabled to do a little for Him in visiting the sick. Glory forever be to His holy name, He has given me the desire of my heart. O what wondrous love! If the Lord had not given me this glorious work, peradventure my old body had grown lazy, and my poor soul sunk down with it. How precious is this work daily to my soul!” In March, 1850, is this entry: “I went to my class this afternoon much oppressed through bodily infirmities; my nature seemed to shrink to meet so large a number; but, glory be to God, no sooner had I entered the place where we meet than my soul was filled with love, joy, and peace. I felt, indeed, the Lord was my strength in weakness. This day has been one of great peace and triumph in my class. One found peace, and some, I believe, were sanctified; and of late, every time we have met, one or two have been pardoned, and we are daily increasing our number.” “Whit-Sunday, 1850. — Glory be to God, my classes prosper; although these are troublous times, yet we are adding poor sinners names to our classes every week. And as the penitents increased in number, we set apart this day to pray to almighty God, that He would pour out His Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. And, glory to God, it was a season of triumph. No sooner had we begun to pour out our souls in fervent prayer and faith, than there came down an overwhelming power of the Spirit.

Penitents began to cry aloud for mercy, and, glory be to Jesus, they did not cry in vain. Five poor sinners found peace by faith in the blood of the Lamb: one poor old backslider was so overcome with the joy of pardoning love, that he was some minutes before he could speak to tell us; one poor stranger found mercy from God; and I believe several of the old members were made perfect in love.

The Spirit of love was poured out mightily on all, so that we scarcely could part. It was a Whit-Sunday, a day of Pentecost, never to be forgotten. To the Triune God be all the glory, to whom alone it is due. It so overcame my weak body, that I could not rest day nor night for pain; but I could have wished for another body, to be spent for the Lord and the salvation of poor sinners, in the same work.”

August 7, Father Reeves records the death of one of his members: “He met with me twenty-nine or thirty years; he came a poor broken-hearted sinner; he soon found pardon through the blood of the Lamb, and continued to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus. He never missed his class; he loved his Bible and his closet.” This was a man after Father Reeves' own heart.

No one, acquainted with the operations of divine grace on the heart, expects that, despite

affliction, trials, infirmity, and all the other difficulties which beset a Christian's pathway, he should always, every day and every hour, be enabled to rejoice. No matter what his attainments, until he is released from the cares of the world, the infirmities of the flesh, and the temptation of the devil, he will, though his feet are firm on the Rock Christ Jesus, yet find at times the atmosphere less bright and clear than at more favored seasons. It is not because our departed friend never knew depression, that but few extracts are given from his diary tinged with any somber hue, (though he had far less of religious depression than most of God's saints,) but because other passages abound which show an exalted state of piety and spiritual enjoyment attainable; and it is deemed right to bring forward selections from these, that the souls of the faithful may be stimulated and encouraged to seek the same blessings; to walk, as did Father Reeves,

“High in salvation and the climes of bliss.”

October 6, 1850, was to our friend a time of great enjoyment. In the vestry, according to his wont, before everyone else, he sat reading the Bible and contemplating “the exceeding great and precious promises.” “I felt in a moment,” says Father Reeves, “as though an audible voice spoke this promise to my inmost soul: 'For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' 2 Peter I, 11. I sunk into my own nothingness, as in the dust, and exclaimed, 'What, I, Lord? — such an unworthy worm as I enter into Thy glory?' and the words were applied with such extraordinary power, light, and glory, that my whole soul was filled with inexpressible emotion. I kneeled down, and with gushing tears of love and joy unspeakable, could only exclaim, 'Glory, glory to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, which hath sealed me again His adopted child.' O may I ever be found faithful to His covenant grace and love.

'Faith lends its realizing light;
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The Invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.'”

The diary is now full of beautiful thought and reflection, and it is difficult to know what to leave out. The following is inserted as a contemplation of death: “March 12, 1851. — This five or six days past I have been confined to my home by affliction, and have found it exceedingly profitable. I have been taught some precious lessons in my Father's school.

O how sweet it is to sit there and learn, and say, 'My Father's will be done.' I don't know how near this affliction is bringing me to death, neither doth it trouble me to know; but I still rejoice to live with Christ in my heart and one foot in the grave. Glory be to God, my ever-blessed Saviour is now fulfilling His precious promise to my soul, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' I rejoice to feel and say, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Although I cannot tell how near my affliction may bring me to death, yet, glory be to God, I can, yea I do feel assured that grace, faith, and love, can bring me to glory; for,

'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love.'
'O what are all my sufferings here,
If, Lord, Thou count me meet
With that enraptured host to appear,
And worship at Thy feet.
'Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away;
I come to find them all again,
In that eternal day.'”

Another entry shows how ready his mind had become to see “good in everything”: “I was walking down London Street today, visiting the sick, and saw a newly-invented ladder — a very clever thing, made for the escape of people from their houses in cases of fire. It was very high, but did not reach heaven; but O, with what love and joy my soul was filled while I remembered Jacob's ladder, and know that this is my ladder; that by this alone I escaped the fire of hell. And now, by this ladder, which is Christ, (as Mr. Wesley says,) I can daily, yea, hourly, ascend by faith and hold intercourse with heaven and with the Father of spirits. 'Christ is the way.' O wondrous love! O boundless grace! O that my longing may with far greater ardor, 'Run up with joy the shining way,

To see and praise my Lord.”

“May 18. — A glorious day today; the preached gospel has been made a great blessing and comfort to my soul. The Rev. Mr. McLean preached this morning from 'What do ye more than others?' I was much humbled and ashamed that I had done so little for Jesus, and for the glory of God; but I could rejoice to feel and know that He had by divine grace renewed my heart. In the afternoon we had a blessed class-meeting: each one took a portion of God's most holy word, to express his present and real experience; many souls were filled with perfect love; and one poor old backslider, who had been a backslider for more than sixty years, was again, today, restored to perfect peace. I believe we were all baptized afresh by the Holy Ghost.” “August 31. — My soul hath indeed all this month drank, and is now drinking into the fullness of God's love. O the unspeakable joy of perfect love! My soul is living in the happy land of Beulah it is all summer. I feel that all the means of grace, public and private, at home and abroad, are golden pipes to convey streams of blessing to my soul, bought with the precious blood of Jesus.” “October 31. — A thought came into my mind which was made a great blessing to my soul. I thought I was like a tree planted by a river of water, (Psa. I, 3,) as I have often seen in the country, and by the continual running of the water the earth is all washed away by little and little, till the tree falls, as saith the preacher, Eccles. Xi, 3; and, glory be to God, I now feel I am just on the brink of Jordan. Blessed be the Lord, the earth is indeed almost washed away — there are but a very few small fine roots that have got hold of the earth; a very few floods more will wash it all away, and then I feel I shall float over Jordan into the sweet land of Canaan.” The watch-night of 1851, and the covenant Sunday of 1852, were seasons of the most solemn self-examination, and also of the highest devotional enjoyment, to our departed friend.

Through this year he continued to enjoy most largely the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, though at times he suffered keenly from the assault of temptation. His body was evidently becoming weaker, and the adversary of souls tried in the moment of physical suffering to weaken his faith; but Father Reeves knew his resource — the word of God, the divine promise, and the blood of atonement; and in believing prayer his enemy was conquered! “Satan trembles when he sees

The weakest saint upon his knees.”

Last June, our friend's diary states: “Various have been my conflicts since I last wrote: conflicts within; conflicts in the Church which I so dearly love; conflicts in my family, [6] although we are one heart and soul in Christ; and conflicts in the world, for the salvation of which I daily pray. Well, I thank my ever-blessed God that He doth continue to count me worthy to have a daily cross, and to give me grace in any measure to take it up and follow my Lord whithersoever He would have me go.

But O, the unspeakable mercies, with all the joys and comforts for my body, and above all, for my soul, since I last wrote. O yes! Joys in tribulation; joys within; unspeakable joys with God; joys with my family; joys in the Church below; and a glorious joy by faith and hope that I shall soon have a never-failing joy in glory! Amen.”

The next extract contains the last solemn covenant with God the departed saint wrote: “The end of another Methodistical year; August, 1852. Today, by the mercy of God, I have been permitted again to present my body and soul a living sacrifice through the precious blood of Jesus, and thereby join myself to God in solemn covenant. I still feel as much need as ever to come through the blood of atonement, a poor, wretched, miserable, blind, naked, polluted, guilty wretch, unworthy of a look from Jesus. Yet, blessed be His name! Sinner as I am, I am enabled by faith, a moment at a time, to look up and call God, Abba, Father! And I have been led to make the most happy contrast between now and forty-four years ago, when for the first time I joined myself in a marriage covenant with the Lord. I believe even then I gave up myself sincerely and fully — body, soul, and spirit: but O, how dark was I, and ignorant! I knew nothing of what the Lord had to do for me, or to make me, before he could receive my soul as His bride — such as to justify me by faith, and to sanctify me by His Holy Spirit. I then had no knowledge that I must come through great tribulation, and my robes be washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, Rev. vii, 14 to end; and I, 5; iii, 4; Ezek. Xxxvi, 25-29; I Cor. Vi, 11; that I must be filled with the fruits of righteousness, Phil. I, 11; and with all the fullness of God, Eph. Iii, 17-19; I, 3, 4; and have the laws of God put in my mind and written on my heart. Heb. Viii, 10. Now all this, and much more, is contained, I now perceive, in the new covenant; and Christ is the mediator of the new and better covenant: and now, O God, I am bold to call Thee my covenant Father!

“Wm. Reeves.”



13. RECENT EXPERIENCE AND DEATH

“The holy dead! O, blest we are,
That we may call them so!”

Hemans —

We hasten to the close — two or three more extracts from the diary of our beloved friend, and we have done. In these pages, the subject of them speaks for himself — he is mainly the painter of his own portrait: a few friendly touches are added, and a plain frame supplied; yet all who look on the picture will see that it is real, life-like, and, it is to be hoped, will deem some of its features worth copying.

Under date September 6, 1852, the diary presents the following: “Tonight, being in much pain of body, and thereby unable to take rest till four o'clock in the morning, I thought how much precious time my heavenly Father hath given me over and above many of my dear brethren, to meditate on the everlasting and glorious rest my Jesus hath gone to prepare for me — even the chief of sinners, me! And if it is sweet to meditate in the daytime, in a noisy, busy world, my heart and soul can say it is much sweeter — sweeter than the honeycomb — to meditate at silent midnight when all are fast asleep around me. Not a voice to be heard, but the voices of the heavenly host speaking to the soul.

They were like the angels at the top of Jacob's ladder, calling me; and every step I rose, I heard a heavenly voice crying to my soul, 'Come up higher' — so truly my soul has been caught up into paradise. O may I ever keep it there by faith and prayer.” Sunday, September 12, Father Reeves received his last ticket of membership in the Methodist Society. “Today, we as a class renewed our Church fellowship — the Rev. Luke Wiseman gave us our tickets. We had between fifty and sixty in number present. It was indeed a soul-reviving time; there were broken-hearted penitents crying aloud for mercy; many others rejoicing in God's

pardoning love; and several, in a full salvation, having their hearts washed in the atoning blood of Jesus. And glory, glory be to my heavenly Father, that I must say I believe I have never felt in my own soul so full an assurance of the sanctifying power of perfect love. I believe it was a time never to be forgotten. To God be all the glory, to whom it all belongs. O that the Lord may ever keep me humble at the foot of the cross! Amen and Amen. Again my soul replies, Amen! At the conclusion, our beloved minister sang —

'Press forward, press forward, the prize is in view;

A crown of bright glory is waiting for you."

"October 10, 1852. — Sunday. I have experienced uncommon nearness to God all this happy day.

The Rev. Mr. Jobson preached in the morning from the first verses of the 23d Psalm; and truly my soul was overwhelmed with a joy unspeakable, and with a love to Jesus my Saviour, that words can never express. I could say with all the powers of my soul, as I never could before in all the fullness of its meaning, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' I only want more of Jesus, so the experience of the first three verses is my own; and I dare believe like David, 'When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me.' I had a joyful meeting with my class in the afternoon."

"October 12. There was a need for my going alone into Lambeth chapel this morning. I went and kneeled down on the happy spot, where the ever-blessed Lord, by His Holy Spirit, gave me to see and feel my lost condition, almost forty-four years ago. Before I could get on my knees, my soul was in a moment filled with divine peace and heavenly joy. Ten thousand thousands of mercies rushed into my mind while I was pouring out my thrice happy soul in rapturous praise to the Triune God.

Then my soul was humbled to the dust, at the remembrance of the misimproved grace and love the Lord had bestowed on me. Forty-four years ago I was young; now I am old. O Lord, help me to redeem the time. It was a Bethel indeed to my soul." October 14, the death of an old disciple is recorded: "One of my beloved classmates, who has met with me in the Church-fellowship thirty-two years. She lived the life of the gospel, and died full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."

The last entry in the diary is on the 25th of October; it is a specimen of many inserted at various times: "I have found much profit and cause for humiliation today, while visiting the sick and poor of Christ's little flock. Mr. _____ gave me some tickets to give to the poor to get them bread to feed their bodies. While I was going from house to house, praising God for the unspeakable honor that He had put on such a poor sinful worm, these precious words of Jesus came to my mind, and my soul was filled with joy and love — 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.'" John vi, 51.

Next to bringing poor sinners to Christ, the greatest enjoyment of our sainted friend was found in his employment as almoner to the poor of the household of faith.

A week after writing the last extract Father Reeves was numbered with the dead on earth, and the glorified in heaven! But had he contemplated sudden death? It would appear probable from the following, which was found on a loose piece of paper in his diary: "For my natural birthday, (December 15,) if spared. Praise the Lord, O my soul, who has permitted a poor sinner to live more than the allotted time for man to live on earth. Therefore, I now consider I cannot have a right to any more time; I consider I now stand between time and eternity, at the Lord's pleasure, to call me any moment when He will." On Wednesday, October 27th, he called on one who had formerly met with him, and who, having been appointed a leader, had taken a part of the Sunday class. This friend communicates the

following: it bears evidence that our departed friend was living in constant preparation.

“He said, 'As I was walking along the streets, I thought of my age, seventy-three years — seventy-three! Why, how is that? Threescore and ten is the promise, and I have had three over this.

Surely this was the Lord's time that He gave me in which to glorify Him; it was not mine at all. I had threescore and ten to prepare for eternity, and now three years to glorify my heavenly Father. O brother, I see then I ought to be living in such a state of readiness, that if I was called this moment ('moment' was said with emphasis,) I ought to be prepared. I feel my soul filled with love when I contemplate the love of God to me; my soul for some time has been continually filled with love.

Indeed, the last two or three weeks have been the happiest of my life.” Thursday found our friend at the weekly meeting of the visitors of the Strangers' Friend Society, to receive cases for visitation; then at the public service in Lambeth chapel; then at the leaders' meeting.

Friday found him at his class, uttering, in his well-known tones, entreaty and encouragement, admonition and counsel.

Saturday found him at the prayer-meeting in the schoolroom, pleading again for himself, his brethren, the Church, and the world.

Sunday found him as usual the first in the vestry, looking out the lessons, marking the collect, noting the psalms for the minister; it found him the devout worshipper in public service; then meeting his beloved Sunday class for the last time, in the afternoon; and in the evening he listened to a discourse based on these words, “Man dieth and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” At a prayer-meeting, held after service, he was one of those who came into the pulpit pew, ready to engage, if required. Thus was spent his last Sabbath on earth.

Monday, November 1, 1852, he visited cases for the Strangers' Friend Society; he saw also an apparently dying man, and leaving him, said, “Brother B____, I shall not be long after you.” In the afternoon, he took his tea as usual; then walked up and down his room, singing the lines Mr.

Wiseman had taught his class—

“Press forward, press forward, the prize is in view;

A crown of bright glory is waiting for you.”

How near that prize — how close upon his brows that crown, none could imagine! “Press forward,” Father Reeves! — a few more steps, thou good old man, and the prize is within your grasp! Reach out thy hand, and take the crown, thou humble, holy, useful servant; for soon thou shalt no longer serve on earth, but reign in glory!

Not knowing his work was so nearly finished, this faithful man had left his home. A few minutes only had elapsed, when a train, rattling over the railway-arch, started a poor infuriated over-driven bullock; the animal struck the defenseless man; one stroke was enough — in a moment he was unconscious; and in an hour, all that was mortal of this servant of God was dead.

To the spirit it was scarcely the passage of death, it was like translation — “He was not, for God took him.” Just before he left his home, Father Reeves had been singing of glory; the strains were yet in all probability lingering in his soul — then there was a moment's pause of life; and the next thing of which the spirit was conscious was the music of the skies.



14. FUNERAL

“Whoever leads such a life, needs be the less anxious Upon how short a warning it (life) is taken from him.

Lord Clarendon, of Lord Falkland —

The news spread far and wide, and formed the principal topic of conversation in Lambeth that evening. “Dead!” said a Lambeth Walk shopkeeper — “who is dead?” “Mr. Reeves.” “What, the little old man with the umbrella, that was always going about visiting the sick?” And thus faithfully was his character sketched by one who was little interested in the religious motives which actuated our friend, but who noticed and admired his life of devotion.

Groups were here and there discussing the event; at the chapel-gates gathered leaders and members, who could talk of nothing else. The missionary prayer-meeting was to be held that evening. Father Reeves was invariably present when able, and would have been there then had he been spared. But what a meeting! — singing was checked by sobs — prayer mingled with tears. Yet it was our loss, the Church's loss, the loss to the neighborhood that was mourned — his departure was his triumph.

The following Monday, November 8, was chosen for the funeral. Agreeably to Father Reeves' wish, expressed in a paper dated in 1829, his body was removed from his house to Lambeth Chapel, and “the corpse was laid across the first pew behind the column under the clock, for that is just the blessed spot where the Lord so deeply convinced me of sin.” Agreeably to his wish, the third chapter of the Revelation was read, and the reader paused “in silence, one minute,” before reading the 20th verse.

It was a solemn thing: the corpse in our midst, and fifteen hundred people obeying the injunction of the spirit that once animated that mortal body, and keeping perfect silence, before those words were read, that were, by God's grace, the means of his conversion.

By Father Reeves' direction, too, we sang the first and second verses of 209th hymn; an exhortation was given by Rev. F. J. Jobson, our superintendent of the circuit, and our late superintendent (the Rev. John Hall) closed this service with prayer. The ministers of the circuit preceded the body; the immediate relatives of the deceased followed; stewards, trustees, local preachers, officers of the Methodist Society of all ranks, came after; the Rev. Messrs. Hall and Pennington, who had formerly been in our circuit, mingled with the mourners; the fifteen hundred from within the chapel were met by nearly one thousand without; and from almost every window in the line of procession were serious lookers-on.

Lambeth old church and Lambeth burial ground have, probably, never had a larger concourse at a funeral before; and never were mourners more assured that the dead they left behind was left in the grave “in sure and certain hope of a resurrection into everlasting life.”

“Grave! The guardian of his dust
Grave! The treasury of the skies
Every atom of thy trust
Rests in hope again to rise!
“Hark! The judgment-trumpet calls
'Soul, rebuild thy house of clay:
Immortality thy wails,
And eternity thy day!” “

MONTGOMERY —

What could have brought such a gathering together? What made the very poor try to get some scrap of mourning? What occasioned the murmured blessings from the crowd, as the corpse passed by? Could wealth have purchased these? It might have purchased the semblance, but not the reality.

Could rank, or human honors — scientific eminence or literary merit? Scarcely could these, with all their attractions, have produced half the interest which surrounded the grave of a poor old man! The reason? — This poor man became religious; the religious man became useful; and the useful man was honored.

A life of plodding, persevering, consistent usefulness, may offer little to attract the world, but God owns it; and when that life is recalled, men feel the world has less of goodness in it than it had before.

The funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. Luke H. Wiseman, on Sunday evening, Nov. 14th, from these words; “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.” The chapel was crowded in every part; two thousand must have been inside. The girls' school was filled by parties who could not get into the chapel; and there, an old friend, the father of the local preachers on the circuit, discoursed on a kindred theme. But, after all, it appeared that hundreds went away.

In 1833 our departed friend wrote the following: “One thing I have to beg of my dear and much-beloved friends at Lambeth chapel: if anything should be said about a poor worm, after I have gone to my own place — mother earth — do not say 'I have done this or that thing'; or, 'I have been this or that'; for the little I have attempted to do for so many years, I have done so badly, I am ashamed of it before my heavenly Father; therefore, I pray, do not read anything of my doing or being, to waste precious time, and weary the people. Not that I would have anything hid that my ever-blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ hath done. NO! For what He hath done for me, O, eternity will be too short to utter all His praise! If you tell the people anything, tell them how good the Lord hath been to my soul, in calling me out of nature's darkness into His marvelous light; in pardoning all my sins, and making me happy in His love; and in keeping me so many years among His beloved people. O, tell this aloud! Let all the people praise him; yea, let all the people praise Him; and praise Him again and again, O my soul!”

Again, we have another injunction at a later date: “I pray you all, let there not be one word said or written, to extol the poor work of a sinner saved by grace alone. To God belongs all the praise!” And to the ever-blessed God, who raised up this instrument of extraordinary usefulness, and who, by His grace and mercy, kept him faithful, would all the friends of the deceased ascribe the glory! Amen!

A paper, dated January, 1843, authorizes this publication. It is addressed to “Mr. James Nash, Mr. John Corderoy, Mr. Edward Corderoy, Mr. Gough, and Mr. Hooker: My very dearest friends, and brothers in the Lord, I should wish you, if you do not think it too much trouble, to look over these fragments of papers; and if you think, to your better judgment, anything can be gathered out and put together, for the benefit of the Church and the world — or of a few poor individuals — please do it; that the world may see, while thousands of pounds are sent to the east, west, north, and south, the Lord's work is not forgotten at home; that a poor shepherd — boy, with the vilest and worst, has been brought to God; and that you can say, with our great Founder, 'The best of all is, the Lord is with us at' Lambeth.”

He entreats that the contents of his box may be well sifted; that “the chaff may be separated from the wheat.”

It is under this authority, and by the wish of his members, and of the Lambeth society generally, that these pages appear. May they be accompanied with the divine blessing, for Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.



POSTSCRIPT —

ONE WORD TO METHODIST CLASS-LEADERS Dear Brethren, — One of your number has fallen — one of the most useful of your highly-honored and useful class — one whose labors God graciously owned in a remarkable degree.

May I be permitted to say, his character, in some particulars, is imitable? He was never (or only once) behind time at class, or public worship.

Never absent but through sickness or distance.

He never let a Sunday pass without inviting one or more sinners to the Saviour.

He never went to class without earnest preparation, a careful selection of hymns, Scripture references, and, apparently, topics for prayer.

He never permitted absence without knowing the cause, or immediate visitation to ascertain it.

He never omitted to collect the moneys in his classes, whenever they met; and he never neglected paying the amount collected to the stewards every week.

He never forgot the poor of his classes; but brought his list of the necessitous every Poor's night.

To him the loss of members was a source of humiliation — a matter of self-abasement in his classes.

The prosperity of Zion was his chief joy.

He lived in the spirit of his covenant engagements with God-being ready for any service, and rejoicing in all; but never neglecting any work he had undertaken.

His Bible as his teacher-prayer his element — his duty — his delight. Consecrating his time, his soul, his energies, unremittingly, unreservedly, to God and His cause, no wonder he was blessed.

Would it not be well if all leaders were like him in these particulars? If all were like him in these things, should we not have a holier, happier, and more useful Church?

Yours, faithfully,

Edward Corderoy

