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Early Days in Herefordshire

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EARLY DAYS AMONG BRETHREN.

WE insert in this issue an account of “The Lord’s Work amongst early Brethren in Herefordshire,” thinking it may be profitable to our readers as showing the blessedness of that earnestness, simplicity, and power the lack of which things is sadly felt among many of the Lord’s people at the present time, and as exposing dangers to us that are to be avoided. We believe that the evils (strife and division, &c.) that are recounted in the narrative, as following so soon upon such real and blessed times, not only show that the power of Satan is especially directed against such true testimony, but manifest also the material in us on which he works and by means of which he is successful, to our shame be it said. But once we get occupied with ourselves in relation to and in comparison with each other, instead of with the Lord, His truth, and His people in relation to Himself, Satan has got an advantage; he has secured a foothold, and he will make havoc of the assembly or assemblies.

The narrative referred to was written in 1893, but the wisdom of publishing it being questioned by some, it has {71} been kept back. But the fact that the account of God’s ways with His people, and His mighty power and grace among them, as well as that of their failure, is often given in the scripture for the benefit of, and even to bring home the sin of, a succeeding generation, and that in some instances they are expressly told to tell to their children the works of God among themselves, influences us to publish it now, especially as it is in character with the object of this Magazine.

The whole of Psalm lxxviii. is written with the object of “showing to the generations to come the praises of the Lord and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born: who should arise and declare them to their children.” The object of this is two-fold: first, their own faith and obedience – “That they might set their hope in God and not forget the words of God, but keep His commandments.” Secondly, that they might see where their fathers sinned and avoid the same; “and might not be, as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”

How we long for more real love, freshness, simplicity, powers, and holy unction! Don’t let us think as we read or speak about such blessed times that they belong only to the past; no, we have the same mighty and gracious God, the same loving Saviour, the same Holy Spirit, and the same revelation in our hands. Let us seek to emulate the simplicity and devotedness of the early brethren to whom God revealed so much that is matter of common knowledge to us. Let us also seek to avoid the evils which so soon marred the testimony to the truth thus revealed, and judge the cause of it in ourselves. To this end we shall be glad {72} to receive any true and unbiased accounts of the work of God in recovering to His people truth that had been long lost to the Church, yet clearly taught in His Word, and its immediate effect upon those who received it. But prejudiced accounts which have as their object the vindication of one party of brethren as against another, will not be in harmony with our object. Let us rather foster the Daniel-like spirit, and wherever there has been, or is, sin, take it upon ourselves in true humiliation and true confession before our God.

EARLY DAYS IN HEREFORDSHIRE.

SEEING it will be to the profit of many, and an encouragement to labourers in the Lord's service, I have taken in hand to arrange and set in order a narrative of events that occurred very many years ago in the county of Hereford, that at the time created no small stir, rousing the hearts and conscience of not a few, and created much stormy and keen opposition.

Most of those who took an active part in the work are long passed away to their reward. Few only are left who were eye-witnesses and helpers; those few it has been my happy privilege to be thrown amongst, and hear their account of things that happened from the very first.

These accounts I have put into consecutive order, and trust that the perusal of them will encourage labourers and toilers in these present evil days. C. B.

MR. GIPPS, vicar of St. Peter's, Hereford, was an earnest, devoted evangelical preacher of the Gospel, who gathered around him many godly lovers of the truth. Through his preaching very many were brought to the Lord; he was 40 years vicar, and died in 1832. To the last he never saw the Lord's second coming, and thought those who did were in great error.

For three years after his death there was a break in the ministry; the flock got scattered and disheartened. In 1835 Mr. Venen (= Venn) was appointed vicar of St. Peter's; he was a wonderfully gracious man, children took to him, and all loved him. Besides being a great philanthropist and a diligent worker, he was a faithful preacher, but in one respect his preaching dissatisfied very many of his hearers; his Arminianism offended the inner circle of the Church, and caused them to pray for a better ministry; amongst them were Mr. and Mrs. Yapp, Dr. and Mrs. Griffith, Mr. {85} Humphreys, with many others, the most intelligent and influential amongst the congregation.

In 1837 Mrs. Griffith went on a visit to friends in Plymouth, and there attended some meetings where Capt. Hall spoke; so pleased was she with what she heard, that she invited him to her house in Hereford for a visit, saying "that there were many Christians there who would be glad to hear him."

Capt. Hall came, a few meetings were held in Mr. Yapp's house in Bridge Street, and other meetings were held in schoolrooms and chapels. The ministry of the Word was generally acceptable; they felt this was the Lord's answer to their prayers. Mr. Venn had given them elementary truths, but here was strong meat, and an opening up of dispensational truth such as they never had before.

The result was, Capt. Hall was invited to come and settle in Hereford. A house was taken at Brainton (= Breinton), three miles out of Hereford, and thoroughly furnished for him, to which he and his family removed in 1837; a horse and phaeton were also provided.

Regular meetings were at once begun in a large room at the back of Mr. Yapp's house; the attendance rapidly increased, breaking of bread was instituted every Lord's-day morning; the room soon becoming too small, was enlarged to seat between 300 and 400, brethren and sisters selling their silver-plate and surplus furniture to defray the cost of the alterations.

Most of those who connected themselves with this movement were from the Church of England; some of them professional men of the highest standing in the city, many first-

class tradesmen, and able business men. They were men who had gifts for public service, which their Church position had hitherto suppressed; but now, being brought into liberty, were able to exercise them, either as pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.

One now living says: "I shall never forget the over- {86} powering sight it was the first morning I went; there was a table from one end to the other down the middle of the room, covered with a white cloth with the bread and wine on it; seated on each side were about 300 brethren, sisters, and children. Those *were* days of power and blessing."

It was indeed a marvellous display of grace, love, and power; the patience, endurance, forbearance, self-sacrifice was beautiful. It was the nearest in modern days to what Acts ii. 44–47 must have been.

Many from the world were thoroughly converted. The saints felt their responsibility to the world around them, and spread themselves over the whole county of Hereford, preaching the Word. Well-sustained Gospel testimony was carried on in the villages directly round the city and in the towns beyond, extending even to the neighbouring counties. Ross, Ledbury, Worcester, Malvern, Leominster, Ludlow were reached by horses and traps that were kept for the longer distances. At one time Mr. Yapp kept five horses for this purpose in his own stables.

This new way was vehemently spoken of and preached against. Mr. Venn published a sermon against them, Dec. 9th, 1838. Much personal and private opposition was manifested. A father threatened to shoot his three daughters if they went to the meetings; he was known to have gone out with his gun for that purpose. Some lost property, customers, good situations in consequence, but many were added to the Church.

One result of the village preaching was, many came in from the country to the breaking of bread; twelve from one hamlet walked seven miles each way, others even greater distances every Lord's day. One sister had to walk ten miles to the meeting. Once a continuous heavy rain had flooded the county and covered the road; she took off her shoes and stockings and waded through the water. Dr. Griffith hearing of it at night ordered his carriage out and drove her home.

{87} Two sisters coming some distance from the country, only able to get one horse, rode it in turns to the meeting.

To provide for the needs of those coming in from the country Dr. Griffith and Mr. Yapp used to furnish a cold dinner and tea at their own houses for those who wished to remain for the afternoon and evening meetings.

Week-night meetings for reading the Word were often held, at which tea was provided. Class distinctions were almost entirely done away with; poorer brethren and labourers were as equally welcomed as the rich – they were all members of one family.

One who was but a common labourer was much esteemed by his wordly {sic} employer, who was in a large way of business; he said that he could go from home very comfortably, if he knew this brother was on the premises. He would also advise anyone who was anxious about his soul to send for him, and would even get this working man to come to his house, to expound Scripture to his own family and visitors.

Another labouring man died; brethren carried his remains through the street, his master following as chief and true mourner, at the grave saying what a very valuable servant he had lost.

One thing marked the conduct and character of each; they made a clean cut from the world and the things of the world. It was a definite, wide separation from all evil, on Scriptural grounds. The house and its furniture, the dress and its fashions, amusements, occupation, business engagements and customs were all tested by THE WORD. What is

written? Whatever God had said, they sought to be conformed to, and simply obey. Scripture was the test and guide for everything.

THE LEADERS.

A word must be said about those who stood in the forefront of this movement, and were the leaders and guides.

Capt. Percy F. Hall, who came to reside in Hereford in {88} 1837, was an able teacher and expounder. He had given up his rank and pay in the army, and sought to follow the Lord's leading and guidance in all things. Being a man of ability and power as a speaker, he was able to lead on the saints into a fuller knowledge of the Word, therefore was the chief speaker and teacher for some time.

Then there were three local brethren. Dr. John Griffith, the leading surgeon of the city, who threw open his heart, his house and his purse; he was an energetic man, full of love for the Gospel – would converse with his patients on their soul's greatest need, keeping Capt. Rhind's pictures of the Tabernacle on his consulting room table, explaining and enforcing the different teachings of the various parts. Some of his more wealthy visitors were offended and left, but soon returned because of his professional ability, so that his faithfulness was ultimately to him no loss.

Then there was Mr. William Humfreys, a leading lawyer of much talent and influence in the city, and Mr. William Yapp, a leading chemist in a principal street; he was a man head and shoulders above anyone else in his love and self-sacrifice, ever willing to give up time, comfort, and purse for the welfare of others and their spiritual good.

These were three mighty men, who with one heart and soul sought to make their David King; they laboured earnestly, unitedly, increasingly for this purpose, and thought no toil, trouble, or expense too great where the honour of God and the extension of His kingdom were concerned; they were a splendid picture of what true self-sacrifice was. To show the character and influence of these three brethren in the city when they were in the Church of England, might be cited the fact that they were the means of carrying to the head of the poll their special candidate at a general election. In a bye-election that occurred two years after, when they had given up politics for the Lord, the same candidate lost the election by a considerable number from want of their support.

{89} Capt. Rhind came from working with Lady Powerscourt and the Synge family in Ireland, to Hereford about 1839. He was a splendid preacher, and exercised his gift very much in the open air, both in the streets of Hereford and other places – Leominster, Ledbury, Ross, etc. – at which latter place he settled down in 1843, taking a room in Wilton Road; about ten persons first met together there for the breaking of bread. Now there is a large, commodious hall built in Henry Street, Ross, where many are now in fellowship. He departed this life in 1863, and was buried in the Barton burial ground, Hereford.

Mr. Mansel was another very wonderfully gifted helper in the work.

Then the sisters, Mrs. Griffith, Mrs. Yapp, Mrs. Lanwarn, Mrs. Lingen with their families, and others, were active, energetic, vigilant workers in visiting both saints and sinners, caring for the bodies as well as the souls, instant in season and out of season, constantly watching to do good and distribute. Their self-denial and self-sacrifice were very marked; the sweet savour of their names and their deeds even now is well remembered and much spoken of by many.

Those days were too good to last long unmolested by Satan. He failed as he often does to scatter them by open persecution; now he tried division by the insertion of jealousy and discord, and this he effected.

Capt. Hall was a deep thinker and teacher, not having much fellowship with the direct Gospel testimony to the world, for he was not an evangelist of late years at least.

Dr. Griffith on the contrary was an evangelist, and did not so much care for the deep teaching and wonderful expositions of Capt. Hall. The one was all for teaching the saints, the other was all for testimony to the world. Hence a growing coolness grew up between them, which culminated in an open rupture.

Capt. Hall retired with his followers, and met in St. Owen Street, afterwards connecting the meeting with Mr. Darby's. {90} The others retained the room and added many to their fellowship, which was removed to the Barton Rooms, 1859, where the brethren had in 1841 purchased a plot of land for a burial ground; they afterwards built on it their present large meeting-room, at a cost of £650. In that God's acre there is sown some precious dust, waiting the resurrection.

The first interment took place March 30th, 1841, and now four hundred and forty-nine rest there from their labours.

In 1844 there were three hundred and forty-five in fellowship. Nine only of them remain in this life; the record they give of the past is most cheering – their memory loves to recall those precious days.

In 1853 Mr. Yapp removed to London, and was the means of the Welbeck Street Buildings being erected. There he kept open house, but his health giving way, he left London in 1863 and settled in Leominster. Whilst in London Mrs. Yapp departed this life in 1859, and was buried in the Barton ground, Hereford. More than four hundred persons were present at the funeral.

From the year 1839 brethren from Hereford had used to drive over to Leominster and hold meetings in the large rooms of the King's Arms and the Oak Hotels. Later on, about 1850 to 1853, a Gospel work was carried on by Mr. Onions in a room in Church Street; many were converted. This led to the Mission-Room in Etnam Street being erected. There Mr. Mansel was invited to come and speak, the result being brethren were driven out of the Mission Hall by his preaching and formed an assembly in South Street, 1857; after that they removed to Mill Street. Seventeen names were on the register in 1861; three only of them are now left in fellowship.

There was also a meeting in Dishley Street, held over an old cider mill; several left it and joined them later on in Mill Street.

Mr. Yapp's arrival brought fresh courage and energy into the little gathering, which was about twenty-four in fellow- {91} ship. The room in Mill Street being a very small, inconvenient place, it was soon seen to be unsuitable for any work; the large room of the Waterloo House, then untenanted, was rented. Several able brethren took up their residence in the town – Capt. Acton, Col. Colbeck, Col. Dobbie, Dr. Maclean, Capt. Stevenson, Capt. Woodhouse, and others; the result was increased fellowship, full attendance at the meetings, a large Sunday School of about four hundred children, and conversions.

In 1864 the burial ground in the outskirts of the town was presented to the assembly by Mr. James Davies. The first burial took place June 21st, 1864; one hundred and six have been interred there up to now.

The Waterloo in the old coaching days was one of the leading hotels in the town, but on the opening of the railway it had to be closed; being empty, it got out of repair, was put up into the market, and was bought with the financial help of Mr. Yapp in 1873, who thus secured the house as well as the large room for the work of the Lord.

About this time Mr. Yapp was much exercised concerning the divided state of the assemblies in the country, gifted brethren and the various gatherings all seemingly going into ruts of their own without any thought of united harmony; he thought if he could only

get leading brethren together, not to platform meetings, but to sit at the same table, have a few days' social fellowship together with private, prayerful consideration over Scripture and various urgent questions, it might do good.

While this was shaping in his mind, an unexpected legacy left him by Major Molesworth put it into his power to carry out his plans; not only was the building secured, but the dwelling-house part of the Waterloo was completely furnished, and he decided to make the attempt to have a Conference. At that time there had been no such thing as Social Conferences. The public gatherings hitherto held, such as the great Freemasons' Hall meeting, had ended in {92} worse than failure – many predicted a similar result. With much fear and trembling he issued the first invitation, dated April 29th, 1874, for a Conference on May 18th and following days; of the four who signed that circular, three – Henry Groves, William Lincoln, and William Yapp – have gone to be with the Lord. Dr. J. L. Maclean is now the only one left; about thirty responded to the invitation and were present. The result was very good encouragement to continue, and three more meetings were held the same year; but on Nov. 28th, just seven months after the issue of the first invitation, Mr. Yapp was loosed from his earthly tabernacle and taken to be with Christ in his sixty-seventh year. Truly God does move in mysterious ways; His paths are untraceable.

The work thus begun by him had to be carried on by others. His widow, Mrs. Yapp, at once accepted the duty, and assumed the responsibility, carrying them on until the present time, when the seventy-fifth was held Oct., 1892; they have more than fulfilled the desire and longings of their originator. The Waterloo and its Conferences were to him "the Lord's," and by Him they have been in every way sustained. Ever have they been happy seasons of brotherly love, godly counsel, spiritual communion, and true fellowship, that have invigorated all who have from time to time attended them.

In the early days of these gatherings, when Conferences were fewer, there were as many as four or five in one year, the attendance causing a strain upon the accommodation, as many as one hundred and twenty being at one meeting; but now that similar gatherings are held in various parts of the country, there is not the special need for them so often as they used to be held; and also the consequent difficulty of securing the attendance of ministering brethren whose time is so fully occupied, there have therefore of late years been only three held annually.

These gatherings have brought many diverse minds into {93} closer union and contact with each other, with a marked beneficial result, which has had its effect upon the various local gatherings all through the land, and tended much to soften down feelings that have been felt on various points. The Waterloo has thus been a house of oil upon the spirit of brethren and the assemblies.

Of late years special attention has been directed at these meetings to missionary efforts; the work in the regions beyond has had a very prominent place. Brethren and sisters going abroad, or at home for change, have ever been specially welcomed, and bid God-speed in their work and service.

As each succeeding Conference has closed and farewell has been given, many have said, "Could there be anything better than this on this side of heaven, all has been so full of power; are the meetings always like this?" Yes, through grace they are; one might be more full of the Spirit than another, but they have invariably been characterised by much confession, much prayer, much of the heavenly benediction and unction. Were they to cease now, they would have abundantly served their day and generation. If it is the Lord's will that they should go on, they will. They were His from the commencement, and

they will be His to the end; they are in His hands; He will guide, direct, control, provide for, and bless, as seemeth Him good.

We have now told our story, but how little have we been able to tell of the many interesting things we have heard – the true record is on high. All the prime movers have passed away; a few aged ones alone are left, they dwell with pleasure on those by-gone days of power, and their fading memories recall the many pungent sentences and burning words that those spiritual giants spoke and taught.

There were sorrows that made hearts ache and tears flow; those are left with the Lord, who will weigh them in a just balance. One has said, “It is needful that offences come” in some way or other; these very sorrows had their place in {94} manifesting men, perfecting the saints, and training them into patience.

One special point most clearly has shown itself; it is very noticeable how very markedly God helped every one of those who in any form or shape endured suffering for His sake, and sacrificed self, property, ease, and comfort for the service of the Lord and His honour. Several individual cases could be named that prove this. Not often can we connect the moral links in God’s chain of retribution, either of good or evil in this life; but most strikingly have there come before us the effect of actions and works done thirty or forty years ago, rebounding for or against the individual actor or doer – failure to stand the test of the world’s scorn or earthly loss, resulting in moral and temporal disaster after many years; whilst bread cast upon the waters, amidst suffering and want, has been found after many days a full and sufficient supply. Truly there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

We would conclude this sketch with a condensation of some of the lessons that force themselves upon us, viz.: –

The diversity of gift in the Church need not result in perversity of action one towards the other.

Teaching and Gospel testimony are twin sisters; they should go lovingly hand-in-hand together.

Where envy and jealousy are, there must be the manifestation of every evil work.

An even balance should ever exist between the teacher and the evangelist, each in their place doing their own work in full fellowship with each other.

The great necessity for a clear, definite, and clean cut from the world and all its ways, and a decided coming out of from everything that is not of God.

The power that a few devoted, earnest, consistent, godly men and women have over others.

A consistent preacher or teacher enforces and illustrates his own words.

{95} The power of love in the Spirit to web together and energise an assembly.

The necessity of being more and more fervent in spirit serving the Lord, and our need for a backward movement unto first principles, and simple gathering around the Word of our loving God.