DAYS OF REVIVAL

Vol 3

(1823-1859)
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The History

of

Methodism in Ireland

Vol 3

(1823-1859)

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Stoke-on-Trent

2005
HISTORY OF METHODISM
First Published in 1885
in 3 volumes.

Retypeset and
published in 6 volumes.

This edition, based on the 6 volume set
but reset in 3 volumes, 2005.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 (1824)

CHAPTER 2 (1825)

CHAPTER 3 (1826)

CHAPTER 4 (1827)

CHAPTER 5 (1828)

CHAPTER 6 (1829)

CHAPTER 7 (1830)

CHAPTER 8 (1831)

CHAPTER 9 (1832)

CHAPTER 10 (1833)

CHAPTER 11 (1834)

CHAPTER 12 (1835)

CHAPTER 13 (1836)

CHAPTER 14 (1837)
CHAPTER 15 (1838)

CHAPTER 16 (1839)

CHAPTER 17 (1840)

CHAPTER 18 (1841)

CHAPTER 19 (1842)
CHAPTER 20 (1843)

CHAPTER 21 (1844)

CHAPTER 22 (1845)

CHAPTER 23 (1846)

CHAPTER 24 (1847)

CHAPTER 25 (1848)
CHAPTER 26 (1849)

CHAPTER 27 (1850)

CHAPTER 28 (1851)

CHAPTER 29 (1852)

CHAPTER 30 (1853)

CHAPTER 31 (1854)
CHAPTER 32 (1855)

CHAPTER 33 (1856)

CHAPTER 34 (1857)

CHAPTER 35 (1858)

CHAPTER 36 (1859)
Days of Revival

- Lurgan - Portadown - Armagh - Moy - Aughnacloy - Clones - Cootehill - Ballyjamesduff
- Cavan - Maguiresbridge - Enniskillen - Pettigo - Ballyshannon - Fintona - Omagh - Donegal. The Irish Evangelist. The work done by Irish Methodism - the progress made
- the fruit in other lands - the future. .................................................................396-416

INDEX to Persons and Places ................................................................. 417-472
CHAPTER 1

1824

EARLY in the year 1824 death made sad havoc in the ranks of the Wesleyan preachers, no less than three being called hence within about as many months. The first of these was the fearless and faithful Samuel Steele, who in Dublin, on January 10th, in the meridian of his strength and influence, died in the full triumph of faith. His remains were interred, amid the tears and lamentations of thousands, in the Cabbage Garden; and a funeral sermon was preached for him, by the Rev. Samuel Wood, in Whitefriar street chapel, to a vast congregation, including ministers, stewards, leaders, members of the Strangers’ Friend Society, and children of the Orphan School. The second death was that of a humble and devoted man, William Gilcriest, who, owing to serious illness, had been obliged to retire from the active work two years previously, but having somewhat recovered, went to fill a vacancy on the Manorhamilton circuit, where he got cold from hardship, and on February 25th, at Swanlinbar, died in peace. The third of those removed to their eternal reward was Charles Graham, an aged veteran, who having travelled as a missionary for nearly thirty-four years, died at Athlone on April 23rd, in holy triumph. “His powerful appeals to street congregations were pathetic, and sometimes overwhelming; the multitudes heard, trembled, and fell before him.”

Some cheering glimpses are given of the labours and successes of those engaged in the work of the itinerancy. The Rev. Fossey Tackaberry writes, “Although I cannot say with Bramwell, ‘I see some saved every night,’ thank God, I can say I see some saved every round.” Again, “The Mountrath meeting was a blessed one indeed. Many declared that they never had seen such a meeting previously. Our house, ground floor and gallery, was very full during the love-feast, and all felt that God was there. We had a few testimonies to entire sanctification, and several hungering after it, and we had a cloud of witnesses clearly testifying that Christ hath power on earth to forgive sins. Two received a conscious pardon during the meeting. Mr. Downing says he saw nothing like it since he came, nor does he think the circuit was in so good a state these ten years.” While at Abbeyleix, such was the prosperity of the cause that the erection of a new chapel was rendered
necessary, for which a suitable site, on easy terms, was obtained from Lord De Vesci, and the project carried out.(1)

The Rev. John Armstrong writes, “February 8th. This day we had the Sacrament in Monaghan for the first time. At preaching the house was filled, and between forty and fifty came forward to the Lord’s table. It was a time of refreshing.” And again, “In Monaghan we are rising in every sense. We have got a tract society formed, with Samuel Richardson as president, and Thomas Hetherington, who has lately joined us, as secretary.” While at Castleblayney, in the neat chapel recently erected, there was a large congregation.(2)

Even at this early period an earnest effort was made to arrest the progress of intemperance, profanity, and Sabbath desecration. At Bandon a number of leading Methodists, including John Wheeler Sullivan and George Harris, consented to act as overseers, and see that the laws with regard to profane swearing, the observance of the Lord’s day, and the hours for the sale of intoxicating drinks were enforced. Many delinquents were summoned before the magistrates and fined, which resulted in a considerable and marked improvement in the morality of the town. These faithful maintainers of law and order continued their labours until they were rendered unnecessary by the appointment of paid police. Meanwhile, however, a considerable sum of money was obtained from fines, and this was applied to the establishment of a loan fund, which has proved a means of still further benefit.

The Committee appointed in 1822 for the liquidation of the debt of the Wesleyan Connexion issued its report this spring, signed by Henry Heney, secretary. From this document it appears that it had been hoped that a sum of £1,000 would have been raised annually by special subscriptions, which in eight years would have relieved the Society of its liabilities; but this expectation was not realized. However, during the year 1822-23 nearly five hundred pounds was collected, and applied to the object contemplated. It was then proposed to borrow money from such friends as might be disposed to lend, free of interest, to invest it, and repay it at the end of ten years; but this expedient failed. The first plan was therefore again adopted, and an earnest appeal made for practical assistance. The Committee had also entered into a correspondence with the creditors, in order, if possible, to reduce the rate of interest from six to five per cent., and met with an encouraging reception.

(1) Life and Labours of Rev. F. Tackaberry, pp. 82-5.
(2) Unpublished Diary of Rev. J. Armstrong.