

THE
Faithfull Shepherdess:

BEING

A BRIEF MEMOIR OF

Mrs. Ibbetson,

OF GREAT AYTON VICARAGE

Mrs Elizabeth Ibbetson was the wife of the Reverend Joseph Ibbetson, who was the vicar of Great Ayton from 1827 to 1878. The publication "The Faithfull Shepherdess" was sold by the Christian Book Society, 22 King William Street, Strand, London, 1870, price sixpence.

These extracts are taken from the second edition, which is described as "considerably enlarged", and which is a fifty-page eulogy to Mrs Ibbetson. The title page declares "She being dead, yet speaketh" and describes her as a woman "who laboured for many years in the parish as a faithful shepherdess and an exemplary handmaiden of the Lord."

The first paragraph of the preface to the second edition explains how this reprinting came about:

'When this memoir was first written, it was "printed only for private circulation amongst those relatives and friends of Mrs. Ibbetson, who loved her character, and valued her instructions." But it was read with such deep interest, not only by those for whom it was first intended, but by many who had not personally known her, that several felt it was calculated for more extensive usefulness, and ought to be given more publicly to the Church of Christ. By some who are eminent for their piety and love of scriptural truth, it was regarded as a delightful manifestation of what the grace of God can produce in the human heart. A lady who knew her well many years past, after reading the memoir, writes, "I think the book so likely to benefit earnest young Christians, in this superficial age, that I much wish it could have a more general circulation, and that I might be allowed to purchase some copies. The preparations made for the teachings of her class themselves convey an important lesson, as also the subjects for prayer, so systematically and regularly sustained; in short, the whole life is one that could only be infused and maintained by God the Holy Spirit." Others have thought it might be useful as a reward book to be given away; also to be read in Bible Classes, and Dorcas parties.'

The text is short on facts about her life, yet full of praise for her qualities and

Mrs Ibbetson was born at Nunthorpe on 7th July 1810. Her parents were Thomas and Ann Simpson, of Nunthorpe Hall. We get suggestions as to her character from parts of the text:

'Even in her school-days she acted as a gentle shepherdess to those younger than herself; an old friend and school-fellow states, "When I was a young child, only eight years of age, one of the youngest in the school and she was one of the oldest, she acted so unlike the older girls; she would draw me to her and walk with me, that she might give me kind counsel and advice, which I remember and value to this day."

'Sometimes the family worship would be interfered with and delayed by the many calls and claims on her father's time, engaged as he was in active business avocations. Without care, there was a danger that family worship might sometimes be omitted; but, with a meek and winning gentleness, she would remind her parents, "We have not had our reading and prayer;" and this effectually secured it.'

'An old servant looks back more than forty years, and remembers with affection how she, a girl in her teens, used to give Christian advice to him, when nearly double her own age: he says that during this time he learnt much scriptural truth from her.'

She married in 1834 and became the wife of a clergyman.

'In her own conduct and that of her servants, she was most tenderly solicitous that everything should be done to strengthen her husband's influence in his work, and to avoid everything that might weaken it. She took a lively interest in every part of the pastoral work. Her most active thoughts were employed in devising, and her industry and skill in expressing, plans for the temporal and spiritual good of the flock; and though she was so retired and retiring, it was remarked by one intimately acquainted with her plans and labours, "She was the mainstay in every department of pastoral work".'

Her servants had to attend church services with her, not only on Sunday but also during the week. This would not be so onerous then, as the Nunthorpe church was next to Nunthorpe Hall, where the present chapel stands. She particularly worked in the Sunday School. Each Sunday she gave each child ten or twelve references, on which they had to answer questions and supply Scripture proofs the following Sunday.

'Both teachers and scholars will remember with what a beaming animated countenance she led the singing in the school; and with what delight she cheered and encouraged even the youngest to sing the little hymns.'

She learned Greek so she might read the New Testament in the original language.

She supported the Church Missionary Society, the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, the Society for promoting the due observance of the Sabbath, the Church pastoral Aid Society, the Bible Society, and the Religious Tract Society.

'She contributed freely herself, and collected from others, that the blessed gospel might be preached to the Jew, and also to the Heathen, whether at home or abroad.'

She left religious tracts in railway carriages and enclosed them in her letters.

'The fragments in her kitchen and pantry were carefully collected, and skilfully used, to supply her poor neighbours with many a refreshing meal.'

'She did not regard her servants as mere instruments of toil, but felt their moral and spiritual welfare was entrusted to her for the time to her; she therefore watched over them with a parental affection and care; and this commonly produced a return of filial respect and love and obedience.'

Servants had to remember a verse from the Bible every night and repeat them to her the next day. She played the piano and read, but not 'light and frothy publications'. She seems to have not been too healthy:

'The constitution, in early life, had been weakened by repeated inflammations and a severe internal pain often oppressed her. But she endured it all with meek submission to the will of God'.

For several years she suffered from difficulty in breathing, but eighteen months before her death she met with an accidental fright, which shook her delicate frame, and tended to greatly aggravate the evil.'

On Sunday 29th November 1868 she attended church for the last time, she prayed throughout Christmas Eve and gave instructions for her funeral on Wednesday 30th December. She received the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on New Year's Day and died about four in the afternoon of 2nd January. The funeral was on the thirty-fifth anniversary of her marriage. An old inhabitant remarked that:

'He had never witnessed a funeral so strikingly solemn and impressive and the feeling so tender and hallowed.'

And

'Persons of every denomination followed her to the grave: before the hour appointed, they were seen assembling from every direction, clothed in mourning; and, as an expression of respect, most of the shops were closed.'

The inscription on her tomb, in the All Saints' Churchyard in Great Ayton, reads:

<p style="text-align: center;">ELIZABETH IBBETSON, BORN JULY 7, 1810; DIED JANUARY 2, 1869. "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" - 1 COR. i. 7.</p>
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There are a few additional pages at the end of the text in the second edition. Apparently questions had been asked as to whether there were really no frailties or imperfections in her character such as surely no poor sinful human could be without. This only leads to further effusive praise.