

WESLEYAN HERITAGE Library

Biography

**LIFE SKETCH OF
DR. ADAM CLARKE**

By

Mrs. Clara McLeister

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

Wesleyan Heritage Publications
© 1998

LIFE SKETCH OF DR. ADAM CLARKE

From:

MEN AND WOMEN OF DEEP PIETY

By

Mrs. Clara McLeister

Edited and Published By

Rev. E. E. Shelhamer

GOD'S BIBLE SCHOOL, AND REVIVALIST

Ringgold, Young and Channing Streets

Cincinnati, Ohio

ADAM CLARKE

Adam Clarke is known mostly by his great set of Commentaries on the Bible, the writing of which occupied twenty-seven years of close, hard work [more correctly, 40 years -- DVM]. But few know the fact that he was one of the early flaming Methodist preachers of Wesley's day, and had a prominent part in that great revival.

He was not a precocious child. At school he was very dull, and proverbially at the foot of his class, until past eight years of age. Some scornful expression about his dumbness stung his pride into effort, his mind awakened, he applied himself to study, and the result was amazing. He mastered twenty languages. and made research in almost every branch of learning. He became proficient in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Samaritan, Chaldee and Syriac versions of the Scripture, and learned in all the oriental languages and most of the languages of Europe.

His curiosity led him to attend Methodist meetings, and, like many others, he remained to pray. Agony of conviction was followed by sky-blue conversion. Soon he was exhorting others, and seeing them become lowly Christians. One day Wesley said to him, "Do you wish to devote yourself entirely to the work of God?" "Sir, I wish to be and to do whatever God pleases." "I think you had better go out into the work at large," said Wesley. Then laying his fatherly hands upon the young man, he prayed a benediction upon him, and sent him to Bradford circuit. He had twenty-three appointments and did most of his traveling on foot, carrying most of his belongings on his back.

In eleven months he preached 450 times.

Like Abraham of old, he heard the voice of God bidding him to get out from his native land, Ireland, and follow whither the Lord should lead him. This he did, though stoutly opposed by his Presbyterian mother and Episcopalian father [at first -- DVM]. He resolved, "I am determined by the grace of God to conquer or die!" Over his mantel he placed the motto: "Stand thou as the beaten anvil to the stroke." Indomitable energy carried his decisions through. He carefully husbanded his time. While others slept or trifled, he studied, prayed and worked. This was the great secret of his Herculean accomplishments. To a youth he wrote, "The grand secret is to save time. Spend none needlessly. Keep from all unnecessary company. Never be without a praying heart, and have as often as possible a book in your hand."

The great, the wise, the good, sought his company. But he loved the society of humble people, and sought not the praise of men. Said he, "Learning I love; learned men I prize; with the company of the great and good I am delighted. But infinitely above all these, and all other enjoyments, I glory in Christ in me, living and reigning and fitting me for His heaven."

He was always a clear teacher of holiness. As to his own experience of entire sanctification, he said: "I regarded nothing, not even life itself, in comparison with having my heart cleansed from all sin; and began to seek it with full purpose of heart. Soon after this, while earnestly wrestling with the Lord in prayer, and endeavoring self-desperately to believe, I found a change wrought in my soul,

which I have endeavored through grace to maintain amid the grievous temptations and accusations of the subtle foe."

His powerful treatise of "Purity of Heart" shows Christians their call and privilege of being filled with the Spirit. "It would be indeed dishonorable to that grace, and the infinite merit of Him who procured it, to suppose, much less to assert, that sin had made wounds which grace would not heal. Of such a triumph Satan shall ever be deprived."

"As there is no end to the merits of Christ incarnate and crucified; no bounds to the mercy and love of God; no let or hindrance to the almighty energy and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit; no limits to the improvability of the human soul, so there can be no bounds to the saving influence which God will dispense to the heart of every true believer. We may ask and receive, and our joy shall be full! Well may we bless and praise God, who has called us into such a state of salvation."

He was so youthful when he went to preach his first sermon that a man, eyeing him from head to foot, asked. "Are you the preacher?" "Yes, I am sent by Mr. Bredin." "You are a young one to unravel the Word." But to their astonishment the young one did unravel the Word with blessed success. Ere long crowds gathered to see him, and many inquired what they must do to be saved.

He and another went as missionaries for a period to the Norman Isles, where they suffered some sharp persecution at first, but later saw good success.

He married Miss Cook, well qualified to be the wife of such a man. Few marriages are so felicitous.

His godly father, before he died, wrote on a sheet of paper his last benediction: "May the blessing of God, and a dying father's blessing, ever be upon all my children. I die full of hope, and happy. John Clarke." Whenever Adam Clarke passed the cemetery where his father lay buried, he uncovered his head, as a mark of respect to his worthy father's memory, while he rode or walked by.

His pen was always busy, and his writings scholarly, spiritual and always useful. He began his greatest work, the Commentaries, May 1, 1798, and finished it March 28, 1825, on his knees. It was a moment of great joy to him, and he fittingly returned thanks to his Heavenly Father for enabling him to finish the task.

He was a truly good man. In private life he was a devoted husband and an affectionate father. He had twelve children. He was greatly beloved by his brethren in the ministry, and after Mr. Wesley's death they elected him president three times. So reluctant was he to accept the responsibility that the first time his brethren had to carry him bodily and place him in the chair: but once there, he performed his duties with grace and success.

Seven weeks before his death he closed a short journal of his last visit to Ireland thus:

"I feel a simple heart: the prayers of my childhood are yet precious to me, and the simple hymns I sang when a child, I sing now with unction and delight. Phil. 1:21. May I live to Thee, die in Thee, and be with Thee to all eternity. Amen. -- Adam Clarke."

In the year 1832 the cholera was prevalent in England, and carried off many by sudden death. The disease, attacked Mr. Clarke while away from home. His wife and friends reached him in time to see the end of the good man's useful career. The great scholar, the eloquent preacher and the learned commentator went to his reward at about the age of seventy years [or seventy-two years -- DVM].

[Transcriber Note: This sketch seems to lack some in accuracy, but does present some interesting facts and observations about Adam Clarke. For a more complete Life Sketch of Clarke, see that of P. Douglass Gorrie in "The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers." For the greatest detailed accounts of Clarke's life, see J. W. Etheridge's biography of Adam Clarke and Clarke's own autobiography. -- DVM]