

Moxley Family History

Some fifty years ago I visited a number of churches in the Wye Valley, and found our name inscribed frequently in the old registers, and on many a tombstone, now mossy and ichen-covered. The earliest entry I found was the record of the death of William Moxley, which took place in the year 1772. He could scarcely have been the returned exile from Hoiland, but he might well have been his son. His wife, whom he married in the year 1734, was named Margaret, — I was not able to discover her maiden name. By her, he had three children, Henry (born 1735), John, who died in infancy, and Mary, who in 1775 married one, Jeremiah Lewis. The eldest son, Henry, married Mary Purcell, of Winterbourne, the village which, a century or more earlier, was the birthplace of Henry Purcell, the composer, whose song, "O who will o'er the downs so free", is believed to have reference to Winterbourne Down.

Henry and Mary had four children, the eldest of whom, George (born 1761), alone survived; James, John and Mary all dying in infancy. George was a small farmer, first at Chapel Hill, Tintern, and later at Porthcasseg, St. Arvans. In 1790 he married Elizabeth Parry (who had kept a school at Chapel Hill), Ezra Powell being the officiating minister; (it will be noted how frequently the typical Welsh names occur). George and Elizabeth had a long family, of whom only three seem to have survived to adult life. These were Charlotte (born 1799), James (born 1801), and Jeremiah. The grave in St. Arvans where the children were buried, and where also their parents rest, bears this quaint and pious verse:

"Those children sweet we hope to meet
In heayen before God's throne;
All glory be to His Majesty
Who took them for His own",

A laudable sentiment, doubtless; but it is the survivors who claim our interest, Charlotte, James and Jeremiah; and these become rather more than names to us, because some who remembered them have been able to tell us something about them, making them real people for our knowing. My father himself rarely made reference to the past in my hearing, but the little he said fitted in with the more vivid pictures that his sisters, Charlotte and Eliza, loved to paint for my delectation.

Porthcasseg Farm lies on the Monmouthshire side of the River Wye and runs down to the famous Wynd Cliff. The two sons and their daughter helped their father and mother both on the land and in the homestead. George Moxley was a church-goer, and warden of St. Arvans, but there was not enough life in the services of their parish church to satisfy the soul of Charlotte, and when the Methodists came to their neighbourhood she and her two brothers found something they had been waiting for.

In course of time, Porthcasseg became a frequent meeting-place for the faithful, and the Love Feast, the Methodist equivalent of the Agape of the early church, was often celebrated in the old farmstead. In fact Methodism so claimed the whole family that farming became rather a secondary consideration, for James offered himself for the ministry in the Bible Christian Connexion, Charlotte soon after married a minister of the same persuasion, and Jeremiah left Porthcasseg to become steward of Piercefield.

This Jeremiah married in succession two widows "with jointures", whom he charmed with his fine singing voice (so my Torrington aunt assured me), the first of these, in 1832, being Ellen Jane Woodroffe, and the second, in 1845, was Louisa Elizabeth Powell. I have seen great-uncle Jeremiah's photograph, taken in old age, and he certainly was a man of fine presence and handsome face, clean-shaven but with a fringe of whisker, according to the fashion of the time.

Charlotte Moxley, the evangelist, was married in St. Arvan's Church to the Rev. Charles Blake, and thereafter until her death in 1836 she followed the fortunes of an itinerant minister, which meant straitened means and incessant toil. Some account of her life, together with a selection of her letters, was published in a slender volume, a copy of which was in the possession of my eldest

brother at Old Stone, Westward Ho, and some extracts from it may be considered worth preserving.

It is entitled "Memoir of Charlotte Blake", by her husband, Charles Blake, Minister of the Gospel (sold by J. Thorne, Shebbear, Devon, and the preachers in the Bible Christian Connexion, 1840); 112 pages. (My brother's copy was inscribed "Charlotte Elizabeth Moxley, October 2nd, 1843, the gift of her grandmother Moxley; i.e. Mrs. George Moxley of Porthcasseg.)

Here is Charlotte's Introduction: -

"I am about to take notice of a few particular occurrences that have befallen me from my infancy, and I must acknowledge that God's mercy hath followed me all the days of my life. Were I to attempt to enumerate all the calls and invitations I have had from the Lord, and state the numerous instances in which I have disregarded them, it would swell this into a larger volume than at present I intend it shall make".

This Introduction seems to have been written later than the rest of the entries, possibly when Charlotte formed the deliberate intention of publishing in the hope that "the Lord will spiritualize the hearts of my readers, and bring them to heaven, for this is the prayer of one who desires that when she is dead she may in this way speak to them".

So Charlotte continues :

"It is with great simplicity I intend to set down the distinguishing mercies of God toward me from an early period of my life. He was pleased to call me to know something of myself when I was about twelve or fourteen years of age. I was born at Porthcasseg in the parish of St. Arvans, in the County of Monmouth, of honest industrious parents on the 16th of September 1799. I was brought up to attend the Established Church, and was a regular attendant until I was twenty-two years of age, during which time I was frequently convinced that there was something more required of me than the mere outward performance of public worship. There was at that time a minister in our church that would sometimes read heart-searching sermons, under which I was often led to weep.

"My father kept a farm, and had ten children living at home at one time, seven sons and three daughters, and when we all seemed to be in a prosperous way, the Lord was pleased to send a fever among us which made havoc in the family. Two sisters were removed from time into eternity, the one elder, the other younger than myself, within five days of each other and my life was despaired of for some time".

II

"I have always had an ear for music and delighted much in singing. My two brothers and myself conducted the singing in the church, and were very much applauded by the gentry in our village, which raised us higher in our own esteem than ever.

"I became a teacher in the Sunday School. The minister's wife, who was the superintendent of the school, would generally take me with her to dinner, and others of the neighbouring gentry would also desire my company with them to tea. I had the name of being the most amiable young woman in the neighbourhood, which caused me to have exalted views of myself, and tended to feed my pride and vanity. But all this time there was something wanting within, which neither praise nor pride could supply".

"In the year 1820 the Lord was pleased to call me by the removal of an intimate friend into another world. . . . This occurrence left a powerful impression upon my mind, and I began to pray with all my heart for that humility I so much admired in my old companion. . . . I betook myself to prayer and continued till the following Tuesday, when I felt a degree of the peace of God which passeth all understanding, but could not fully believe until the 18th of May 1823. That was the most blessed day I ever enjoyed. It was Whit-Sunday, and while passing through the fields on my way

to church, meditating on the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and praying that He might descend on me, I opened to the hymn commencing with:

‘Let worldly minds the world pursue,
What are its charms to me;
Once I admired its trifles too,
But grace hath set me free,’

And whilst repeating these words my soul was set at liberty; I was exceedingly happy, and all below appeared as dung and dross. I proceeded to church and received the Holy Sacrament. For some time previous I had been in the habit of going to the Lord’s Table in an indifferent manner, but now, for the first time, I received the sacred elements as the tokens of the Saviour’s dying love, and my soul was greatly strengthened. In the evening I attended the Wesleyan Chapel about two miles from my father’s house. It was a great favour to obtain the consent of my parents who told me that as we had a good minister in the Established Church they saw no need of making so much ado as to go elsewhere; but my mind was led to hear the Dissenters, and when I first came among them I found the Lord was with them”.

“I began first to make known my feelings to my two brothers, to whom the Lord gave the hearing ear, and from this time they began to seek for the pearl of great price which I had found. My parents were not so teachable”.

“The people called Bible Christians came into our neighbourhood and I heard Elizabeth Dart and Francis Metherall, and believed that they belonged to Jesus, and that He had sent them among us. My father and my two brothers also attended their meetings, and became the subjects of a work of grace, and father was soon made happy in the love of God, and felt it his duty as well as his privilege to cast in his lot among his people. On October 21st 1823 father, brother Jeremiah and myself gave in our names and were admitted into the society, for which I have to be thankful”.

“November 18th 1823. My dear brother, James, gave in his name among us to be a follower of Christ.

“December 21st. I was appointed Class Leader. We were fifteen who met in Society, and I felt myself inadequate for such an important undertaking, but who hath despised the day of small and feeble things! I soon felt it was not displeasing to the Lord; for He blessed me in my office, as well as those committed to my charge. The good work is going forward, and my class is increasing”.

“Some time about Christmas 1823 I felt it my duty to employ more of my time in the service of God. It was deeply impressed on my mind that I must tell my neighbours what the Lord hath done for my soul; but I feared to do so lest they should think me a proud Pharisee. This temptation kept me back for some time; but at length I was compelled by the love of God; I felt for their precious souls”

Charlotte’s ministry was claimed both near and far, and when the evangelist William O’Bryan (from whom the Bible Christians were sometimes called Bryanites) visited the circuit Charlotte writes that he “would have me go with him to Devonport; but my fond Mother would not consent to let me go so far from her”

In her evangelistic journeys she seems to have been generally well received, though at times she had to face rough handling and opposition. She rode horseback and astride to her more distant appointments, and was sometimes away from Porthcasseg for days together. There are frequent references to Love-Feasts that were held in her father’s house, and to her own class-meeting, or “band”, so grown in numbers that it had to be divided into two. Her health gave way under the strain of her work, and in a period of convalescence she found new joy in the famous Wynd Cliff

scenery, which she describes: "a delightful prospect at a little distance from my Father's house, . . the lofty rocks standing in such majestic form, the river winding and rolling at their feet; . . I considered the wisdom and the power of God, the Maker of all things".

Though it is probable that Charlotte knew nothing of the "Lines composed above Tintern Abbey", which was only a mile or two upstream from the Wynd Cliff, there is no doubt that she would have found a kindred spirit in him who confessed:

"The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion, the tall rock
The mountain and the deep and gloomy wood
Their colours and their forms were then to me
An appetite....
. . . . And I felt _-
A presence that disturbs me with the joy !
Of elevated thoughts".

Only Charlotte would have spelt "presence" with a capital P!

"1828 August 25th. Since I last recorded the dealings of God with me I have had many inward conflicts and outward trials. I have had heartfelt trial to part with my brother James. He left home on the 14th instant to preach the everlasting Gospel. His first appointment is to the County of Kent. It was a greater trial than I had expected it would have been, but as it is the will of God, I hope to be resigned. May God bless his labour of love. Some think it is ease and worldly gain that induces men to preach the Gospel. I allow it may be the case with some, but not with all; for many lose all hopes of worldly gain, and sacrifice comfortable homes and kind friends to go and preach the word of life, as did my brother and a thousand more".

As James entered upon the work of an itinerant minister after the Conference of 1828, and Charlotte's marriage in the following spring to Charles Blake, another minister of the Bible Christian Connexion, from that time a correspondence between the two was maintained, mostly about the work of evangelism that was so near to the hearts of both of them.

A son was born to Charlotte in February 1830 but only survived a few hours. In September of the same year she paid a visit to her old home, and the conditions of travel at that time are indicated by the entries in her journal.

"The great God of the deep who holds the winds at His command suffered me to put my feet upon the Welsh ground in the course of twenty-eight hours after I left Cornwall. We had a very fair passage, and I was highly pleased with the kindness I received from the captain and passengers. . . . There was one pious man on board. . . . At Newport I called at the Globe Inn, where I was kindly 'entertained by Mrs. Gathen. From thence I came to Creek by a returning chaise, stopped at Mr. P.'s, and from thence to my aunt's at Chepstow, where I tarried Friday night, and on Saturday met my Father and other friends at the market".

Charlotte was again at Porthcasseg in July 1832, this time having travelled by packet from St. Ives to Pill in the Bristol river (just across the Avon from the place where her great-great nephew is living, at the moment of my writing this!). "Not having water up to Hotwells, we had now the choice of two things, either to remain on board until eleven o'clock at night or to go on shore and proceed by land. Most of the passengers preferred the latter, which was five miles from Bristol, but this was rather difficult for me, having to carry my luggage after having been on the water eighteen hours, and without eating or drinking for more than that time. However I got some distance, took tea, and then proceeded on towards the city, and about seven o'clock entered Park Street, where I found Mrs. Gale and was kindly entertained for the night".

In a letter to her "Honoured Parents" under date June 18th 1833 (Trevanson) occurs the following:

“I had the pleasure of spending the last week with brother James. He is quite well, and seems to be in the spirit of his work. He is much beloved by the people, and the Lord hath been blessing his labours. There is a good work in Mevagissey... . The cholera hath been raging and the Lord hath been preaching’.

1834 October 5th. Charlotte became the joyful mother of a fine boy (Alfred).

1836. A fourth child, a boy, was born on September 28th, at Porthcassey, and Charlotte died on October 5th following, aged 37.

The story of Charlotte’s brother’s work may best be told in the words of his son Edwin’s “Memoir of Mr. James Moxley”, which appeared in the Bible Christian Magazine, May 1870.

“My father was born in October 1801 at Porthcasseg Farm at the summit of the Wynd Cliff and in close proximity to the ruins of Tintern. Often I have heard him speak with pleasure, and something of pride, of the beauties of his native place”. (Here follows a description of the influences already recorded that led the family to throw in their lot with the Bible Christians.)

“On August 14th 1828 James set out as a missionary of the Bible Christian Connexion to labour in the Chatham circuit. Mr. H. Major and Mr. James Way were his colleagues’. (The latter was the father of the future Chief Justice of South Australia, the Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Way, Bart., with whom my Father maintained a life-long friendship.)

James kept a diary from which it is evident that he was much beloved of the people among whom he laboured, but this esteem was obtained without compromise of duty. “I plainly see (he wrote) that those who would be accounted righteous before God, must not court the smiles nor fear the frowns of any man, but must labour on at God’s command, and offer all their works to Him.” The early itinerant preachers did not stay long in each circuit and a year in Chatham was followed by a year in Hastings, and a third at Faversham, after which he was received into full Connexion at the Conference of 1831 held at Hicks’ Mill, Cornwall. Then followed work at Truro, Mevagissey, Breage, Helston, Kilkhampton and the Isle of Wight. On the death of his father at Porthcasseg, he was appointed to the Monmouth circuit that he might be able to manage business affairs for his mother. It was at this time that he married Elizabeth Roberts of Mevagissey, another of the women evangelists of the Connexion. Never long in one centre, James and his wife “travelled” in Tenterden, Farnham, the Isle of Wight (West), Gwennap, Newport, Dean Forest, Chepstow, and Ringsash, at which latter place ill-health led to his being placed on the supernumerary list, with the hope that a year’s rest would restore him to former vigour. He settled at Bristol and looked forward to the Conference of 1869 which was to be held there. It was during that Conference that his strength finally gave way, and medical opinion found him suffering from an internal cancer. He died on November 14th and according to his own request was buried in the same grave as his friend and fellow-labourer, Robert Kent.

III

It was said of him that he was “gentle and genial in manner, pleasing in voice, kind and considerate in all his actions”, and “there was in his nature a rich fund of humour, a keen sympathy with the smiles and tears, the foibles and oddities of humanity. As a preacher he aspired to nothing more than to talk of Christ”.

When he came back to Porthcasseg after his father’s death it was remembered that the large farmhouse kitchen became again the centre of Methodist gatherings. There was prayer at the family altar three times a day and preaching services and class-meetings were held there. A Mr. Knight was associated with him in the work of the Monmouth circuit and to hear those two men of God pray was to me (said one) really astonishing. I hope to bless God to all eternity for James ‘Moxley’.

James Moxley’s widow survived him for eighteen years, dying on the last day of the year 1887, at the home in Torrington of their daughter Eliza Mary Webber; the grave-stone in the cemetery

appropriately enough records the passing of husband and wife, although the former had been buried in Bristol, years before.

She, too, like her sister-in-law, Charlotte, had been drawn into the evangelistic work of the Bible Christians in her youth. She was born at Mevagissey, her father being "a respectable tradesman in that place". The dark Cornish strain which some of her descendants still favour seems to have been derived from her. Her portrait shows her to have been a woman of commanding appearance, with her large brown eyes, her black hair and dark complexion.

When the Bible Christian "cause" reached the little West Country fishing township, her home was the first to give welcome to the preachers. Her mother (also an Elizabeth) listened to the street preacher and invited him home, and thus began a generous hospitality that ended only with the death of Mrs. Roberts. She herself and her second son, William, at once joined the society, the latter being especially active in opening up preaching stations in West Cornwall; his son, Edward, in course of time becoming a minister in Canada and President of the Conference.

Little is known concerning Elizabeth's admission to the society, for she was exceedingly reticent in matters pertaining to herself. Her decision seems to have been reached under the ministry of William Read. She early adopted Quaker dress and before she was twenty years of age she became a preacher. It was a common thing for her to walk ten or even twenty miles to keep her appointments. In 1842 her marriage took place, and she proved a worthy helpmeet to her husband, continuing for years her pulpit ministrations, and leading a society class.

At Breage, their united service found special response. Like so many of their neighbours round them they had to face great hardship, for it was the time of the Crimean War, and bread was very dear. Uncomplainingly, even hunger and penury were accepted by the devoted pair, and they continued to move among the people, bringing to them the bread which does not perish, with this consequence that there arose a revival of religion, far-reaching in its influence for good.

When her husband returned to the Forest of Dean, Elizabeth formed a night-school in her home and aided by her family on three evenings in the week taught the young collier lads of the neighbourhood.

Then came a time when this "Dinah Morris" of real life "felt she was not called to further pulpit labour"; she discarded Quaker dress, and confined her efforts to the supervision of a class for young women.

An account of her life and work appeared in the Bible Christian Magazine for May 1888.

A memory of her, written by a minister who knew her well, John Herridge Batt, is worthy to be added: "She was distinguished by robust sense and a contempt for sentiment. Her religious experience was an embodiment of the epistle of St. James".

With that judgment of his mother's character, my father would have concurred most fully, for I recall, in one of his rare excursions into reminiscence, his vivid description of her unflinching devotion to duty and her plain, practical common sense.

There were five children of the marriage, two died in infancy, both named after their father. The three others were Edwin (born April 10th, 1845), Charlotte Elizabeth (born May 1st, 1847), and Eliza Mary (born February 19th, 1849). Charlotte married Henry William Pinnell of Bristol in 1874 and had two sons, Alfred James and Edwin Moxley Pinnell, who with his two sons (Harold Moxley and Eric) have been prominent in the wool trade in the City of London; Harold also has been much occupied with civic duties and has served as Mayor of the borough of Lewisham.

I remember Aunt Charlotte very well indeed. In her last years she was sadly crippled with arthritis, and when I was within reach of her home, first at Clapton, and later at Forest Hill, I used to visit her and glean family gossip. It was she who gave me the portrait of her grandmother, the first Elizabeth Roberts of Mevagissey, the writing beneath it being by her father, James Moxley, and the frame having been made by her uncle, Richard Roberts. (I happened to have been born on her mother's birthday, which accounts for the inclusion of the Roberts in my own name.)

Eliza Moxley married Sylvanus Webber of Torrington, the son of George Webber of Chulmleigh, in 1877, there being two children of the union, Frederick James and Lilian Maud, who married my eldest brother, and her first cousin, William Edward. Both brother and sister are especially gifted as musicians, Lilian becoming L.R.A.M. and A.R.C.M. at an exceptionally early age.

I remember as a small child staying at their home in Torrington when it was over the business in the High Street, and making many exciting imaginary sea-voyages round the yard, in old boxes for ships, moored there in waiting to be returned as empties to the warehouse. I recall also the splendid portraits of my uncle and aunt, adorned with mayoral robes and chains of office, which impressed me mightily. I remember, too, the queer smell of drapery in the shop, and the marvellous contraption by which the money from the customers was propelled overhead to the cash desk. I remember the farm folk coming into the big dining room behind the shop, on market days, for a dish of tea, and I remember the Sunday mid-day meals with roast chicken and junket and cream to follow, and the jaunts over Castle Hill, and beside the Torridge, where once I lighted on a wonderful clump of fern, which I learnt later to call Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). These memories of mine are of course unimportant, save as they serve to describe the setting of the people of the past. For that alone they shall be allowed to stand.

To come now nearer home I must try to describe the setting of my own childhood and the people in it.

My father must come into the picture first and I must begin with things I've heard tell rather than remembered for myself. His childhood was passed amid the inevitable restrictions of a minister's home in the hungry forties and the years following. Grandmother would wash and iron his linen on Saturday nights after he had gone to bed, so that he might appear in chapel next morning fitly garbed. How it was managed passes comprehension, but he was sent away to school to James Thorne's Prospect Academy, later to be known as the Bible Christian College, Shebbear. Much of the journey had to be covered by coach, for the railways were still new and did not as yet reach far enough. He must have read widely. Indeed I recall a remark of the Rev. J. B. Stedeford's, himself a scholar of no mean attainment, that he re-