

Leonard Ravenhill:

IN 1762 John Wesley made his second invasion of the City of Galway in Ireland. Unknown to him, snug in his cradle in a corner of the same country lay a baby boy who when Wesley had ceased his labors would be beginning a ministry scarcely less effective and endued with the same baptism of fire. Gideon Ousely, for that was the name of this God-endued soul winner, was born in Dunmore, Ireland, on Feb. 24, 1762.

His mother was careful to safeguard Gideon from his father's ideas on Deism. She had the boy read to her at nights from Tilotson's Sermons or Young's Night Thoughts and his Last Day. Time did not erase these thoughts from the mind of the reader.

Gideon was first awakened to his lost estate by a man who was a soldier fighting in two armies at the same time - the Fourth Royal Irish Dragoon Guards and the army of the Lord.

He was also deeply affected by the preaching of John Hurley and under his anointed exhortation he came into grace. In his twenty-ninth year in the middle of May, 1791, Gideon beheld "the Lamb of God slain for him" and felt that God had taken the load and darkness away and had bestowed the long-sought peace.

At the "Classmeeting" John Hurley asked him, "Do you believe that the Lord has pardoned you?"

"Yes," he replied, "my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour."

Later, over the Irish countryside, as dumb beasts would look over the fences they heard the singing soul of the horse-borne preacher, eloquent and loud in his praises to the One who as Wesley put it, "Saved poor souls out of the fire and quenched their brands in Jesus blood."

The Irish preacher of whom I write had but one eye. Yet no man with two eyes ever saw more clearly from the divine record that men are lost now and lost forever except they repent, than did this man. Men to him were not men, but spirits wrapped in flesh - souls for whom Christ died. He saw them as potential jewels for the diadem of Christ or fuel for the flames of hell.

Sparks flew from the hoofs of his flying horse with its foam-trimmed mouth and sweating flanks as he sped with pitiful urgency on those rough Irish roads. One would think that this preacher had had a preview of hell or a secret note delivered by Gabriel himself that the end of the age would come within the next twenty-four hours. Such was his quenchless zeal for souls. There can be no doubt about it that this blessed man could say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

Neither Paul Revere of America or John Gilpin of England ever rode with more zeal than this "Irish Wesley" as some have called him. It might be nearer the mark to class him with England's Whitefield or America's Gilbert Tennent. He was their kinsman in spirit. He belonged to the fellowship which leaps ecclesiastical labels - the fellowship of the burning heart.

In London St. Paul's Cathedral has a pulpit in impressive marble. In his City Road Chapel Wesley had a nice polished mahogany pulpit. Jesus used the rim of a well for a pulpit. Our hero had for his pulpit often times a pair of stirrups or a backless saddle.

Consider the scope of one of Ousely's prayer-baptized missionary journeys among the unlettered Irish folk of the then wild countryside. See these things happen. A priest stands waiting for the wedding party to enter the church. When the carriage bringing the happy couple arrives, our hero preacher walks to them. He gently warns them of eternity and in a few minutes the happy couple are startled to find themselves involuntarily kneeling on the ground while the flaming evangelist prays for them. He then rushes on. Over the cemetery wall he espies weeping souls, wailing and affrighted because their loved one has gone - whither? He lifts his great voice in prayer above their flesh-freezing cries.

Next see Ousely in the market place. This is the scene of a last public execution. Thousands are gathered. I believe it was our preacher who climbed the scaffold and ministered to the shaking criminal. After he had led the man to Christ, the Preacher with the scaffold for a Pulpit, bombarded the crowd with the facts of eternal solemnity. As he spoke, the body of the dead was swinging from the Scaffold. Within sight of death he preached to the careless sinners of eternal life. As he pictured for them the eternal woes of those who die without God and without hope, he turned their dancing into Mourning.

One who heard Ousely testify said later, "I wish I could reproduce his testimony as I heard it. The solemnity and loving earnestness of his manner, the melting tone of his voice, the beaming look, the grateful joy, the flowing tears, the impassioned character of his appeals, cannot be reproduced on paper."

Gideon took more than one preaching tour of England. There, as in Ireland, he saw the manifest power of the Lord, evidenced not only in striking conversions, but also in phenomena. Folk would fall into a swoon while he preached. Some would appear to be dead and respond neither to gentle attention nor to shouting and shaking. Later they "awoke" and entered into the peace of salvation.

The flaming soul was driven from market place and derided from pulpit. Priests and Protestant alike sought to put road blocks in the way of this advancing crusader. On he pushed.

His spirit was willing, though at times his flesh was weak. But he drove it on. Rough riding, rough eating, rough sleeping, and rough crowds in the markets all made draining demands upon him. Yet in his 75th year he was still street preaching and holding the attention of the crowds as he urged them sometimes in English and at other times in eloquent Irish, but always with impassioned earnestness to "flee from the wrath to come."

In his 76th year (note this well, preacher) he says, "I preached six and thirty times in sixteen days." He later records that "from Sunday morning, August 27, to Thursday morning, September 21, I was enabled by my Lord to preach fifty-four times in and out of doors - not far off from my seventy-seventh year!"

A year short of his eightieth birthday, Gideon Ousely died - full of wisdom, full of years, full of grace. Devout men carried him to his resting place, a grave on Mount Jerome, and "there returned to mother earth all that was now earthly of one of the best sons of Erin that the green sod ever covered."

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