

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
ELDER ABRAHAM PERKINS
AND
IN MEMORIAM

**The Church At
Enfield New Hampshire
"Chosen Vale"**

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**TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY
OF
ELDER ABRAHAM PERKINS**

July 20, 1900

Brave soul! How nobly you have fought
Life's battles in this vale below!

How grandly kept the upward march
To Heaven's heights, through weal or woe!

Today, with you the goal is won,
Your watchword ever — "No defeat";

Thus, bright with brilliants all your own,
Your crown of beauty is replete.

A God-like man! Our patron saint,
The impress of whose lifelong theme

Leaves on our memories no taint
For purity has reigned supreme!

Boast not of miracles of art,
Of Nature's marvels great or grand,

The Miracles of the "pure in heart"
Through grace Divine, all these transcend.

Nine decades of eventful years
In earnest quest for human good

Find record in the higher spheres
Kept by a gracious Fatherhood.

Take home, dear Father, Brother, Friend,
A sincere tribute of our love,

Entwined therewith our vows to spend
Remaining years this love to prove.

ELDER ABRAHAM PERKINS

"The memory of the just is blessed." Abraham Perkins, for more than half a century identified with the business, social, educational, and religious work of the Shaker Community in Enfield, passed to his reward last Sunday morning, August 12, 1900, at the advanced age of 92 years, 9 months, and 29 days.

His erect form, quick, nervous step, and his face radiant with the innate goodness that marked his life, were all this long time familiar to the people of Lebanon, New Hampshire, and all neighboring towns.

Abraham Perkins was born in Sanbornton, New Hampshire, October 13, 1807. His parents were Jonathan and Hannah (Taylor) Perkins. He was the youngest of a numerous family, prominent in its day, most of them living to a great age. His mother was a sister of Nathan Taylor, at one time member of the governor's council.

Asked to give his views of Shakerism, Nathan said that the vital principles of the order were being generally accepted. The Shakers are no longer persecuted. The great objection was celibacy and the community of interests. It seemed to him that the Shakers live a little nearer the life that Jesus taught and lived than the popular churches. Every man who lives to his convictions and does not interfere with others, is accepted of God. His exact words were: "I want to get as near to the life and doctrine of Jesus as I can. There is good in the churches. Wherever it is we bless it."

Such was the simple faith of Abraham Perkins, and he lived it day by day, and year in and year out. It shone in his very countenance. That life was a benediction. Everyone who came under its shadow was strengthened in good thinking and doing. It was as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Elder Perkins visited Enfield a few times after his retirement from official life, expecting each visit to be his last. These visits were occasions of tender interest to the community. All that love could do to make his declining years pleasant, at Canterbury and Enfield, was kindly done.

In speaking of his decease it was remarked that "he grew feebler from day to day until the peaceful end came. The beautiful sheaves of his noble Christian manhood, ripened to full maturity and bending from very richness, have fallen without a blight into the heavenly granaries of our God."

Elder Abraham lived largely in the realm of inspiration. It was the favorite atmosphere in which he moved. One characteristic hymn among the many written by him is the following:

"God is infinitely able
To sustain the weak and feeble,
And to meet the demands of the needy and poor;
Though they wade in deep waters,
Yet by fasting, prayer, and watching
He will safely, safely lead them to the unbroken shore.

Oh, Canaan! Fair Canaan!
Golden days bespeak thy future;
I behold the thousand hills whereon graze thy flocks and herds,
All Israel lies before me
Clad in vestments of bright glory,
And I hear their songs of victory and feel power from their words."

The memorial service was held in the Shaker church at East Canterbury, on Monday the 13th at 2 p.m. There was a full attendance of the community at that place and a delegation of four persons came from his old home at Enfield. The services were simple, as is the custom with this Church, but they were very impressive. Many loving tributes were paid to the memory of beloved Elder Abraham by Brethren and Sisters, young and old, all bringing, as it were, offerings of gratitude and appreciation to their dear father and friend, who had gone away from our earthly home.

The reading by the presiding Elder, Arthur Bruce, of the 23rd Psalm, seemed very appropriate to the occasion, and was a gentle closing to the services.

PSALM 23

As said the Psalmist: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want", thus have I found the declaration true for nearly seventy years.

He hath provided me green pastures where I could lie down, where I could repose; He hath led me beside still waters; He hath greatly restored my soul and led me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake and for my salvation.

Though I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, in this life I have feared no evil, for He hath been with me, my rod, my staff, the comfort of my soul. Even in the presence of my enemies hath He prepared a table before me, He hath Anointed my head and many, many times hath He caused my cup to run over.

Yea, all the days of my life, goodness and mercy have followed me. Truly have I dwelt in the house of the Lord, which I am sure will be my abiding place forever and forever.

ABRAHAM PERKINS

East Canterbury, New Hampshire November 24, 1895.

As human and as faulty as may have been my life, and as I am, the foregoing are my convictions, have been my blessings and are my dying words.

PREFATORY

To satisfy the feelings of many dear friends who have solicited me to leave some notes of the experiences of my life, I comply with feelings of reluctance to give a brief outline of the most important events that have marked my pathway, hoping thereby to awaken a little interest and thus serve as an encouragement to others in right living, for whose welfare are my deepest sympathies, realizing as I do, that the Gospel of Truth and Salvation will depend upon true faith in God and in obedience to His requirements.

ABRAHAM PERKINS

Enfield, New Hampshire March, 1880.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in the town of Sanbornton, county of Belknap and state of New Hampshire, October 13, 1807. My parents were rigidly moral and much respected. I was the youngest of six children, four sons and two daughters.

Early I was placed in the school-room and attentively disciplined. At seventeen years of age I passed an examination for admission to the study of law and was received as a student in the law office of my brother, where with some degree of diligence I applied myself to the reading of Blackstone and other celebrities with, I must confess, but little taste for the study.

In August, 1826, my brother died and I was at liberty to manage for myself. I then resolved to open a school in Andover, New Hampshire. My remuneration was limited, but I also engaged to teach the winter term. I was now providentially led to form an acquaintance with the Shakers at Enfield, New Hampshire. This young man, Hendrick Robinson, had been a pupil in my school and subsequently had accepted the faith of a Christian life. He was amply able to defend the faith he had received, either by reason or scripture testimony.

There was something in the testimony of the Shaker principles that I disliked, honestly feeling that the convictions which imposed such a faith were unfortunate and must deprive its votary to such a religion of much happiness, its life seeming to me incarceration.

As I was naturally of a mirthful disposition, I had a fondness for festive society, although my reverence and respect held me to the religious element. At times my feelings were so tender that privately I would seek Divine aid in prayer, through fear that the punishment which I believed was reserved for those who died in their sins, might rest on me. Under these conditions I have arisen and on my bended knees repeated the Lord's Prayer, committing myself to His mercy with a fearful solicitude lest I should be launched into Eternity, unprepared for the dawn of another day. Many a time an idle course would be checked and a reserve felt for the rebuke, while through the action of the Holy Spirit I made my peace with God.

To become a Christian, I supposed it necessary to form a connection and fellowship with some Church, and resolved in such an event that I would seek a religious order. I soon learned that faith and conviction were involuntary

conditions, and could not be controlled by the power of the will. The evidence must be God given in order to direct man's course of action.

Slowly my mind unfolded to the Light, and I became in some degree acquainted with the principles of the Believers. I began to feel an assurance, although but partially enlightened as to their inner life, that by my fellowship I could make the sacrifice necessary to give me enjoyment in religious service.

My visit to the community at Enfield renewed my life hope, and I felt assured that the Spirit of God was my guide and my staff. My view of the Shakers at that time was that they appeared to be a God-fearing, truth-seeking, cross-bearing Christian people. Holiness was written on all their possessions. Their habitations were signally marked by their simplicity and neatness. The atmosphere of the place seemed like an element of love, and the Village like Holy ground.

The first religious service that I attended, the scene was one of inspiration, and, with the permission of my parents, I resolved to cast my lot with this people. I had resolved to consecrate all, and devote my time to the service of God, that this people should be my people, and their God my God.

Having closed my school and terminated my visit with the Shakers, I returned to my parents and at once informed my mother that I had secured a position where the prospects were encouraging and the situation agreeable. I then informed her that I had been on a visit to the Shakers of Enfield, New Hampshire, and at once asked her consent. As she gave no direct reply, I waited the arrival of my father, who gave his ready and unequivocal consent, little realizing that I was in earnest. However, he did not retract his approbation when he learned I was serious in my request. He now remembered the vow he had made at the time of my nativity. He had promised before God that he would never oppose the religious convictions of his son Abraham.

Others of my relatives and neighbors and friends manifested their interest in my prosperity. By some I was advised to attend a theological school and prepare myself for the pulpit. I was, however, inflexible to every opposing influence. In fact, the more there was said to dissuade me from my purpose, the more I felt determined to persevere in my settled plan, as no other course so perfectly met my understanding of right.

I finally closed my visits and terminated my relations among my friends by attending a gay party of young friends, when I informed them that this would be the last entertainment in which I should take part.

I accordingly arranged for a departure from the ancestral roof, my mother helping me to put my wardrobe, with which she had amply supplied me, in proper condition. I then took the stage for Enfield, and entered the Shaker Village March 27, 1827.

I was made welcome to the Novitiate Order of the Society, and after further investigation was introduced to Elder John Lyon and his associate, Joseph Dyer. These two persons were the Spiritual Directors of the family, and Ministers or Mediators, before whom I commenced my spiritual work. I soon found that I had made but a small beginning in my Gospel travel. To my vision was now opened one phase of the work. With my knowledge and insight into the spiritual necessities of the work, I soon found that the good name and memorable reputation I had borne so securely would not bear the scrutiny of a greater light.

I therefore made this a principle, that whatever phase of my life I discovered to be a violation of the law of God, should be taken cognizance of and have my closest remedial attention. I believed that in obedience to the cross of Christ I should obtain the victory. The gate I found to be straight and narrow, admitting of no turning to the right or the left. The regulations for the government of our Church I viewed as the order and Law of Heaven, and they commanded my respect. The life of a Shaker was to me a school for moral and spiritual training, and the privilege of a Christian home with a godly people, with all of my trials, I have greatly enjoyed. I thank Heaven and all its ministrations that I have always felt able in my spirit to bless and praise God in exhortation and song, having shared largely in Divine protection fully equal to all the sacrifice I ever made.

For the young man who was instrumental in opening the door of Salvation for me I have a blessing. He earnestly embraced the Gospel and was true to his faith. Like David and Jonathan we were pledged to each other, to consecrate together our lives in the Christian warfare.

In my spiritual journey I realized the necessity of guarding against not only evil, but the very appearance of evil, and every influence tending to draw my affections from spiritual care to worldliness. I was desirous of making a radical change, in my dress, my habits, and my manners.

Notwithstanding the invitation of the Spirit that imposed an ordeal of severity and a way as straight as straightness, laying upon my spirit the burden of care, I knew it was needed for my purification. This visitation was often attended with unbounded peace and joy, which enabled me to meet opposition and to triumph over oppression.

Thus I have ever been ministered unto and protected through all trials by the Gospel testimony, and to hold in abeyance the enemies of the cross, so much so that in my heart I have glorified in my calling and daily triumphed in the cross of Christ.

I have been the favored and happy recipient of many beautiful gifts, which I am pleased to acknowledge. Songs innumerable have been engraven in my soul. How I received them, or whence they came, I am unable to explain. The words and music were generally accompanied in their ministration.

For fifty-three years I have been in the enjoyment of Gospel blessings. My life has been that of comfort, love, and peace. It has been sprinkled with some tribulation, but I have received an amount of spiritual wealth which I would not exchange for any treasure that honor or fame could bestow.

I am now in the seventy-third year of my age, and feel greatly satisfied with the reward of my labor, expecting soon to be called to the land of souls, and still to find increase in Christ's Kingdom, of which, we read, there is to be no end. My hope is in the Gospel and in God's love.

The first twelve months of my fellowship with the Shakers I spent in the Novitiate Order. I then moved to the Church Family. For fourteen years I taught the winter school, and had the charge of some thirty boys for the same length of time.

On the 3rd of September, 1845, I was appointed to the Order of Elders as an associate with Elder Orville Dyer. Eldress Abigail Bowdoin and Sister Roselinda Allard were the Sisters in the order at that time.

I was appointed to the Order of Ministry October 19, 1846, as the associate of Elder Joseph Johnson. The sisters were Eldress Harriet Hastings and Sister Hester Ann Adams.

On June 15, 1852, I was appointed to the Senior Order of Ministry, with Henry C. Blinn as assistant.

On June 26, 1863, I moved from the Ministry and was appointed to the Order of Elders at Enfield, New Hampshire, and James S. Kaime moved into the Ministry, and Elder Timothy Randlett, as his assistant.

On the 27th of October, 1867, I again accepted the Order of Ministry, and Benjamin H. Smith was appointed assistant. July 3, 1877, Elder James S. Kaime was appointed to the Order of Ministry, and I was again returned to the Eldership of the Church at Enfield.

The burdens of these official positions I shall not undertake to represent. Whoever has had an experience in these respective offices, and has felt the responsibility of the calling, can understand the weight of the positions. However important these offices and necessary for the union and prosperity of the Society that demand the service, I can assure all that they are not to be coveted for ease or exemption from weighty responsibility.

I realize that my privilege in the Gospel has been to me, personally, of inestimable worth, and if my life service in the House of God has in any degree been instrumental in strengthening and helping other souls, I am thankful, feeling that from my service my call to spiritual labors has not been in vain. I realize the magnitude of the work and the power that resurrects souls, and I feel the responsibility devolving upon those who are called to that field of labor.

I have not been insensible to the fact that, as a leader, my charge has been not solely over those younger and of less experience, but my calling demanded my care for those who had been my Fathers and Mothers in the Gospel, those in advance of me in age and degree of Gospel travel.

Now, in the eighty-sixth year of my age, and in accordance with Nature's common law, the extension of the days of my earthly pilgrimage cannot long be expected. During my long life I have been blessed with the best of experienced leaders in the school of Christ. The process which gives to the soul its elevation and increase is like unto the process in perfecting the condition of all bodies, systems, and creations; no growth is ever found without labor or cultivation of some kind, and no ransom without a sacrifice of some nature.

I have found the Gospel of Christ the power of God unto Salvation, the pearl of great price. Few are willing to pay the price, consequently few are able to find it. Preserving a broken heart, a humble spirit, a dependence on the gift of God, in prosperity or adversity, and patient under the weight of cares, is found this baptism; and to be governed by its principles has been the object of my life, my element, and my blessing.

ABRAHAM PERKINS

