

## LORENZO DOW

Some one has said that all Spirit-filled Christians appear peculiar or eccentric to the people of the world, because "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2: 14). This was especially true of Lorenzo Dow, the quaint but famous pioneer Methodist preacher, who, about the beginning of the nineteenth century, traveled about the world on foot and on horseback, preaching the Gospel to tens of thousands, and winning multitudes to Christ

In his character Lorenzo Dow very much resembled John Bunyan, but he seems to have had a quiet vein of humor which was lacking in the latter. Like Bunyan he went astray with wicked boys in his youth, and learned many of their ways. Like Bunyan he was haunted by terrible dreams and visions. And like Bunyan he was plunged into awful agony and despair by imagining that God had reprobated, or predestined, him to be damned.

Lorenzo Dow was born in Connecticut, October 16, 1777. His parents were born in the same town, but were descended from English ancestors. They had a son and four daughters beside Lorenzo, who was next to the youngest. They tried to educate the children well both in religion and common learning. Lorenzo came near dying when two years of age, and he always suffered from a weak constitution. When he was between three and four years of age, he was one day playing with a companion when he fell into so deep a muse concerning God and heaven that he forgot about his play. He asked his companion if he ever said his prayers, morning or night; and when his friend replied "no," Lorenzo said, "Then you are wicked and I will not play with you," and he went into the house.

When Lorenzo was eight years of age, his parents removed to another vicinity, the youth of which were very vile, wicked and corrupt. He soon learned their ways, and his serious thoughts and impressions soon left him. But one day he killed a bird, and the sight of it gasping struck horror to his heart, as it made him think of death, and he was afraid to die.

At ten years of age he promised to serve God if He would restore his sick friend to health. "God granted my desire," says he, "but I soon forgot my promise." Later he promised to serve God if he should get the prize in a certain draw or lottery. "No sooner had I got the prize, which was a shilling, than I brake my promise," says he.

When past the age of thirteen, and about the time Wesley died (1791), he had a vision in which Wesley appeared to him three times in succession and warned him that he had better pray. "Keen conviction seized my heart," says he. "I knew I was unprepared to die. Tears began to run down plentifully, and I again resolved to seek the salvation of my soul." After this he broke off from his old companions and sought earnestly for salvation; but he had no one to pray for him and show him how to be saved. He was also greatly troubled over the doctrine of unconditional election, or predestination, as taught by many in those days. Referring to his dream about Wesley, he says: "Frequently before and after the above, the enemy of souls harassed me much with the forementioned doctrine of reprobation, etc., my view of which excited such enmity and rage against the Supreme Being, as the author of my most wretched helpless fate, that I cursed and swore, and blasphemed His name, throwing sticks and stones toward heaven, defying Him to come down and destroy me. It seemed as if I were unable to refrain from acting often in this manner." Through brooding over the matter, he became so fully persuaded that he was

predestined to be damned that he decided to take his own life. Loading a gun he went out into the woods for the purpose, but when he was about to pull the trigger he decided to wait a little while longer before taking his life. About this time the Methodists came to his town. They were everywhere spoken against, but he concluded that if he was one of God's elect they could do him no harm, and if he was eternally reprobated they could do him no injury, and he went to their meetings. He was somewhat surprised to see that the Methodists looked very much like other people. The preacher, Hope Hull, described his condition so accurately that he had to hold on to his cousin to keep from falling off his seat, so great was his agitation. People were being converted all around him and his conviction became almost unendurable. He went to a prayer meeting, and his conviction of 'n became so overwhelming that he fell down on the road several times on his way home, and he hardly realized what he was doing. Reaching home he prayed for hours until he fell into a slumber from pure exhaustion. He then had a fearful vision of hell. In his suffering he awoke, "and, oh! how glad I was to find that it was only a dream," says he. He began to pray earnestly, and finally said, "Lord! I give up; I submit; I yield; I yield; if there be mercy in heaven for me, let me know it; and if not, let me go down to hell and know the worst of my case. "As these words flowed from my heart" says he, "I saw the Mediator step in, as it were, between the Father's justice and my soul, and these words were applied to my mind with great power: 'Son, thy sins which are many are forgiven thee; thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace'".

" The burden of sin and guilt and the fear of hell vanished from my mind, as perceptibly as a hundred pounds weight falling from a man's shoulder; my soul flowed out in love to God, to His ways and to His people; yea, and to all mankind".

Having found the Saviour, he immediately wanted to tell others. "My soul was so happy," says he, "that I could scarcely settle to work; and I spent the greatest part of the day in going from house to house through the neighborhood, to tell the people what God had done for me."

He soon felt a powerful call to preach the gospel; but felt that he was only an illiterate child, and resisted the call as a temptation from the devil. The more he resisted the call, the greater was his misery. He tried in every way to get rid of the impression that he must preach, but the hand of God was heavy upon him. Like Jonah, he was afflicted in soul and body until he was literally compelled to preach. After he began to preach, he met with so many discouragements that he tried again and again to stop preaching, but the hand of affliction was so heavy upon him that he was forced to begin again. He said that God showed him plainly that he could not live unless he preached the gospel, and that if he stopped preaching he would die. Like the Apostle Paul, he could say, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9:16, 17).

Lorenzo sometimes resolved that saved or damned he would not preach but intense physical suffering compelled him to change his mind, and then his health would improve. He once had a vision of Justice ready to cut him down if he did not preach the gospel. He seems to have been taught many things in dreams and visions, of which he had more than almost any other person with whose history the writer is acquainted.

He was licensed to preach by the Methodists, and in 1796, at the age of 19, he became an itinerant preacher. His presiding elder and others criticised his ignorance, his behaviour, his conceit, his manner of preaching, and so on, until his heart was almost ready to break with discouragement, and he longed to stop preaching. Sometimes the conference took away his credentials, and he sought to hold this up to

God as an excuse for not preaching, but the hand of the Lord was heavy upon him until he resumed his preaching.

Dow's manner of preaching was bold, full of zeal, and so uncompromising as to arouse the anger of many; but God blessed his labors in many places, though in others he could scarcely obtain a hearing. Often in his early ministry his clothes were worn out, and he had no money to buy new ones, but in some way or other the Lord always supplied his need.

In 1796, while still in his nineteenth year, Dow was deeply convinced of his need of a deeper spiritual experience. During that year he wrote: " I never felt the plague of a hard heart as I do of late, nor so much faith as I now have that inbred corruption will be done away, and I filled with perfect peace, and enabled to rejoice evermore." Referring to this period, he also says : " Sometimes I was so happy, and the times so powerful, I would hope ' the winter was past and gone'. But soon it would return again."

From his Journal, of Sunday, May 23, 1802, we copy the following account of how he obtained the deeper spiritual experience for which his soul was craving:

"When I was on the Orange (Connecticut) Circuit," says he, "I felt something within that needed to be done away. I spake to one and another concerning the pain I felt in my happiest moments, which caused a burden but not guilt; some said one thing and some another; but none spoke to my case, but seemed to be like physicians that did not understand the nature of my disorder; thus the burden continued, and sometimes felt greater than the burden of guilt for justification, until I fell in with T. Dewey, on Cambridge Circuit. He told me about Calvin Wooster, in Upper Canada, that he enjoyed the blessing of sanctification, and had a miracle wrought in his body, in some sense; the course of nature turned in consequence, and he was much owned and blessed of God in his ministerial labors. I felt a great desire arise in my heart to see the man, if it might be consistent with the Divine will; and not long after I heard he was passing through the circuit and going home to die. I immediately rode five miles to the house; but found he was gone another five miles further. I went into the room where he was asleep; he appeared to be more like one from the eternal world, than like one of my fellow mortals. I told him, when he awoke, who I was and what I had come for. Said he: 'God has convicted you for the blessing of sanctification, and that blessing is to be obtained by the single act of faith, the same as the blessing of justification. I persuaded him to tarry in the neighborhood a few days; and a couple of evenings after the above, after I had done speaking one evening, he spake, or rather whispered out an exhortation, as his voice was so broken, in consequence of praying, in the stir of the Upper Canada, as from twenty to thirty were frequently blessed at a meeting. He told me that if he could get a sinner under conviction, crying for mercy, they would kneel down a dozen of them, and not rise until he found peace; for, said he, we did believe that God would bless him, and it was according to our faith. "At this time he was in a consumption, and a few weeks after expired; and his last words were, as I am informed, ' Ye must be sanctified or be damned,' and casting a look upwards, went out like the snuff of a candle, without terror; and while whispering out the above exhortation, the power which attended the same, reached the hearts of the people; and some who were standing or sitting, fell like men shot in the field of battle ; and I felt a tremor to run through my soul and every vein, so that it took away my limb power, so that I fell to the floor, and by faith, saw a greater blessing than I had hitherto experienced, or in other words, felt a Divine conviction of the need of a deeper work of grace in my soul ; feeling some of the remains of the evil nature, the effect of Adam's fall, still remaining, and it my privilege to have it eradicated or done away; my soul was in an agony — I could but groan out my desire to God — He came to me, and said, 'believe the blessing is now'; no sooner had the words dropped from his lips, than I strove to believe the blessing mine now, with all the powers of my soul, then the burden dropped or fell from my heart, and a solid joy, and a gentle running peace filled my soul. " From that time to this I have not had the ecstasy of

joy or that downcast of spirit as formerly; but more of an inward, simple, sweet running peace from day to day, so that prosperity or adversity doth not produce the ups and downs as formerly; but my soul is more like the ocean, whilst the surface is uneven by reason of the boisterous wind, the bottom is still calm; so that a man may be in the midst of outward difficulties, and yet the center of the soul may be stayed on God; the perfections of angels are such, that they cannot fall away; which some think is attainable by mortals here; but I think we cannot be perfect as God, for absolute perfection belongs to Him alone ; neither as perfect as angels, nor even as Adam before he fell, because our bodies are now mortal, and tend to clog the mind, and weigh the spirit down; nevertheless, I do believe, that a man may drink in the Spirit of God, so far as to live without committing willful, or known, or malicious sins against God, but to have love the ruling principle within, and what we say or do to flow from that Divine principle of love and not from a sense of duty, though subject to trials, temptations, and mistakes at the same time."

After receiving the experience described above, Lorenzo Dow met with much greater success in his preaching. During the same year, 1796, his meetings kindled a revival flame that spread to a number of places. In 1797 his whole circuit was stirred into a flame of revival and this made his conference regard him more favorably. God greatly blessed his labors. Crowds flocked to hear him, and multitudes were seized with deep conviction of sin and were led to Christ under his preaching. Wherever he went, whether in America, England, or Ireland, similar results followed his labors. Sometimes the people flocked together in thousands to hear him, and they were converted to Christ by the scores. In one place the people were crying for mercy for eleven hours without interruption. Dow's unique methods of presenting the truth, and the remarkable results attending his labors, made him famous the world over. When he entered a city and began preaching, the effects of his sermons were soon noticeable in the solemn countenances of the people as they walked along the streets. He held many great camp meetings in which from one to ten thousand people heard his preaching. He was so careful to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit in all that he did that one preacher said concerning him, " He is Quakerized."

There were some strange manifestations in the meetings held by Dow, as in the meetings held by Peter Cartwright and in the great revivals at the beginning and near the middle of the nineteenth century. The most remarkable of these were the exercises known as "the jerks," which were so prominent a feature in the great Cumberland Revival. People of all denominations, and many who were not professing Christians, were seized with the jerking exercises. But it was principally the persecutors, scoffers, or half-hearted, among professing Christians who suffered with this strange "visitation from God," as some have called it "Trembling took hold of the hypocrites," says Dow. Writing concerning this jerking exercise, he says: "The wicked are more afraid of it than the smallpox or yellow fever ; these are subject to it ; but the persecutors are more subject to it than any, and they sometimes have cursed, and swore, and damned it whilst jerking. There is no pain attending the jerks, except they resist it, which if they do, it will weary them more in an hour than a day's labor; which shows that it requires the consent of the will to avoid suffering."

Describing one of his great meetings, held in 1804, Dow says: "I observed about thirty to have the jerks, though they strove to keep still as they could; these emotions were involuntary and irresistible, as any unprejudiced eye might discern." Describing another of his meetings in which there were some remarkable physical manifestations, he says: "Soon nine were sprawling on the ground, and some were apparently lifeless. The doctors supposed they had fainted, and desired water and fans to be used. I replied, ' Hush !'. Then to show the folly of my ideas, they attempted to determine it with their skill, but to their surprise, their pulse was regular. Some said, ' It is fictitious, they make it.' I answered, "The weather is warm, and we are in a perspiration, whilst they are as cold as corpses, which cannot be done by human art." "Here some supposing they were dying, whilst others suggested, ' It is the work of the

devil'. I observed, "If it be the devil's work, they will use the dialect of hell when they come to.' Some watched my words, in great solemnity, and the first and the second were soon brought through, happy, and all in the course of the night."

So remarkable was the power manifested in Dow's meetings, and so numerous were his dreams and visions which came true, many looked upon him as having supernatural powers. They thought he could detect criminals, cure the sick, and so on. Several amusing incidents are related concerning the manner in which he detected thieves when people insisted that he should do so. While traveling one Sunday to a place where he had an appointment to preach, Dow overheard a man swearing bitterly. He went up to him and asked him the cause. The man answered that he had an axe stolen the night before. "Come along with me to the meeting," said Dow, "and I will find your axe." The man consented, and when they arrived near the church, Dow stopped and picked up a large stone, which he carried with him into the church, and laid upon the front of the pulpit. The subject of his sermon was very well fitted to this particular object, and when in the midst of it, he stopped short, took the stone in his hand, and, raising it, with a threatening attitude, said: "A man in this neighborhood had an axe stolen last night, and if the person who stole it does not dodge, I will hit him on the forehead with this stone," at the same time making a violent gesture as if he were about to throw the stone, as he swung round in the pulpit. A person present was observed to dodge his head violently, and he proved to be the guilty person. In another place a person who had been robbed entreated Dow to discover the thief. Dow told him to gather all the suspected persons into a certain room, and to get a black pot and a rooster. He did so, and Dow put the rooster under the pot, and then had the room darkened. He then explained that he wanted everyone present to go up to the pot in the dark, and to touch it with his fingers, and assured them that when the guilty person touched the pot the rooster would crow. After all had gone up to the pot the room was lighted, and it was discovered that one person present had no soot on his fingers. He had been afraid to touch the pot, and afterwards proved to be the guilty person.

The above incidents are fair samples of the many novel and eccentric doings of Lorenzo Dow. In 1799 he went to Ireland, and while riding on a canal boat there he observed that there was much gambling on the boat. He tried to purchase the cards from the captain, but he refused to sell them. He finally gave the deck of cards to Dow, who surprised him by throwing them overboard. The gamblers were afterward convicted of sin. At Hacklestown, Ireland, two young ladies in a home where Dow remained over night were deeply absorbed in fixing some fashionable superfluities on their clothes. Dow said to them: "Every time you wear them, remember another suit you'll have, the muffler and winding sheet". This made such an impression upon their minds that they were both brought to Christ as a result.

Unique as Dow's methods were, they were often owned of God. Sometimes he told the people that he would ask God to send some sickness on them if they did not repent. One time he hired a servant to pray for a whole day. She said that she did not have time to pray, and he gave her a dollar for her day's time, with the understanding that she was to spend the time in prayer. At another place Dow urged a young lady to decide whom she would serve, God or the Devil. She chose the latter, but was converted to Christ soon afterward. At one place where Dow was preaching, the young men would leave the meeting when the preaching became too powerful for them. Here Dow preached with his back against the door to keep them from going out, and about two-thirds of them were brought under deep conviction of sin.

In 1834, at the age of 57, Lorenzo Dow laid down his cross and took up his crown. He endured much suffering for the sake of his Master, but he won many souls to Christ and will shine as the stars forever and ever.

In personal appearance Dow was about 5 feet, 10 inches in height, was rather light complexioned, and much marked with the small-pox. He had small, light eyes, dark-brown hair and eye-brows, small features and short visage. The originality of his methods is shown even in the title of his diary, or journal, which is, "The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil; as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow."