

Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones:

A Minister of the Gospel

The Only Authorized and Authentic Work

By his wife
Assisted by
Rev. Walt Holcomb, a
Co-worker of Mr. Jones

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CHAPTER NINETEEN OMAHA AND KANSAS CITY

In November, 1886, Mr. Jones opened his meetings at Omaha, Nebraska. It was the farthest Western point he had ever visited, and he found himself among a new and a strange people.

The Westerners were big-hearted and generous, however, and having heard much of the strenuous preacher, they received him with kindly expectancy. He had hesitated for some time, preferring not to go so far from his Georgia home, but the ministers of Omaha pressed upon him so emphatically their need of his services that he finally consented to make the journey.

Upon his arrival in Omaha he saw at once that the ministers were in hearty sympathy with him, and could be counted on to give their support. This was encouraging, and did much to make the meeting a success.

The committee on arrangements secured the Exposition Building, which seated five thousand, and allowed standing room for many more.

The meetings at Omaha continued for three weeks, and from the preaching there resulted a widespread religious awakening. At every service there was a larger crowd than the building would seat, and the interest of the people was intense.

There was little pronounced opposition in the Nebraska city. The newspapers received him with kindness, and one or two with words of genuine praise. An editorial from the *Republican* follows:

“The primary cause of Sam Jones’s strength as a preacher lies in the fact that he has brains. A mere explosion of slang and provincialism would not create much of an excitement for any length of time. Bald vulgarity would not have lifted him from a Georgia country pulpit to a position of national prominence in the religious world. When results are large and continuous, they must be considered just as they are. Prejudice cannot always trace them back to petty sensationalism.

“This man has preached all over the country. In every city he has visited he has met with opposition on his arrival. The general estimate of those who have not heard him, and who should not, as a consequence, estimate him at all, is unfavorable. But the people he attracts by the curiosity to see and hear him he holds by his force. There is crude, rugged, epigrammatic vigor in what he says that appeals to the popular sensibilities. He carries more rocks in his pockets than frills on his clothes. He has the earnestness of the old-fashioned belief which never minces words, or introduces the name of the Almighty without prefatory apology. In Whitfield’s time, when a sparse population and much solitude in the wilderness made the early pioneer introspective and emotional, Jones would have probably been as great a force as Whitfield. As it is, he has made larger progress in a cynical age, and in a day of veneer and superficial free thought. No ordinary man could have done this.

“It is said that he makes money. We don’t know whether he does or not, but we hope he does. There is no particular reason why vice should monopolize all the profits of the world. It would be a rather poor incentive to do good if poverty and religion are to be synonymous and immorality is to have all the worldly advantages. We fail to see why religion should be discriminated against.

Naturally this is the point at which the ‘**sell all that thou hast**’ should be quoted, but if this is to be taken literally there will have to be a general auction sale of all the effects of all the professing Christians. No man can insist upon the letter of the law for other people when he pays scarcely any attention to even the spirit of it himself.

The truth is that the church is rich enough to pay its workers, and to pay them well. If it would devote less money to brick and more to brains it would be much stronger to-day. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, but the martyrs will have very little blood if they do not get enough to eat. It is a poor sort of creature who will grudge any minister of the gospel the bread necessary for himself and family.

“Quite independent of religion, and purely as a social force, Sam Jones has his value. If, out of all the vast audiences he has addressed, he has given but one man a glimpse of higher morality and taught him his duty to society and his fellows, he has done a work of which he may be proud. But he has convinced thousands instead of one. He deals with faults and vices with an unsparing tongue, and even if the lesson does not sink immediately, it may have an after-value. A rough customer said to Moody once, ‘For forty-eight hours after listening to you I was a good man.’

‘Thank God for that much,’ replied Moody, ‘in those forty-eight hours, under other circumstances, you might have committed murder.’

“Sam Jones has the heartiest sympathy of the *Republican* in his work. Any man who tries to do good is doing good.”

This editorial was considered by Mr. Jones to be one of the best that had ever been written about him and his work. It gave a great deal of help while he was in Omaha.

He always mentioned the meeting at Omaha with a great pride, and with thankfulness to God, for there he gained a great victory in a strange country. Omaha was one of the most prosperous and growing cities of the central West. Everything there was wide open. At the beginning, the idea of his accomplishing much good in so godless a place seemed almost ludicrous to a great many of the people, but before his labors were finished their doubts were dispelled. The churches in Omaha were wonderfully strengthened by the work, and the moral and religious life of the city was greatly improved. He made hundreds of friends in Omaha, who were true to him until his death.

It was some time after the Omaha meeting before he went to Kansas City. Just before his engagement at the latter place he had passed through one of the most trying ordeals of his life. My severe illness had been a great strain upon him, and when he reached Kansas City, January 1, 1887, he was practically worn out. However, he was so grateful to God that death's cruel hand had been stayed, that he felt he could best show his gratitude by taking up immediately the work of winning souls.

The ministers had arranged for the meetings to be held in the Temple, a new, large building, with a seating capacity of eight thousand. When Mr. Jones first spoke, he was greeted by at least ten thousand people, as every seat in the building was taken, and hundreds were standing in the aisles. The news of his great sorrow had preceded him to Kansas City, and this seemed to soften the criticism that was directed towards him. The newspapers of Kansas City were especially kind to him and editorially favored his coming. They gave fine reports of his meetings, devoting large space daily to his sermons.

The illness in his home had wonderfully softened his heart, and he preached with deep spirituality and tenderness. He did not, however, spare the evil-doers of the city. He waged a terrific war against the saloons and gambling-houses, and his preaching was effectual in closing a number of the latter. The saloons were regulated also by the Law and Order League that was organized after he left the city as one of the results of his meeting.

The first meeting held for "men only" at Kansas City showed the deep interest that had been aroused. There were more than eight thousand representative men of the city crowded into the Temple.

It was held in the afternoon of a week-day, which made it a most remarkable gathering. It was a magnificent congregation, and every one present listened intently, from the first word to the last. They cheered him lustily, and laughed and wept as his message swayed them between the two emotions. At no place had Mr. Jones ever received more careful consideration. The people wanted to hear him, and his sermons sank into the hearts of his hearers, resulting in the conversion and reformation of hundreds.

The ministers of the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Christian, Lutheran and Congregational churches were in sympathy with the work, and gave him great help by their cooperation in the meetings.

By their help and influence the good work was carried to all parts of the city, and the question of religion was the great topic of discussion by people from all walks of life for many weeks.

Mr. Jones wrote in a letter to the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*:

“We of course have had the usual criticisms in Kansas City, but there is a strong undercurrent of deep conviction upon the city; the ideas of sin and righteousness dominate the whole city. The leading business men of the city tell me that religion is the subject of conversation in the banks and other business places.”

Mr. Jones labored for the entire four weeks while he was there with the greatest earnestness and zeal. At the closing service he was made happy by the reading of a testimonial from the ministers of the city, by Rev. Schley Schaff, pastor of the First Presbyterian church, who prefaced the reading with the following remarks:

“Mr. Jones, you are about to close your labors in Kansas City. For four weeks you have worked incessantly in our midst. Large audiences have hung upon the words that came from your lips. We brethren were in doubt as to what attitude to assume toward you, not having heard you, but the more we have heard your piercing utterances against iniquity, the more we have seen of you personally in the pulpit, the more closely we have unanimously gathered around you, until this afternoon, if it were possible for all the ministers belonging to the different denominations to be here, they would, perhaps, without an exception, express their earnest, cordial regard for you personally, your earnest sympathy to men and the promotion of the cause of righteousness, of good morality and of repentance, and sir, I hold in my hands now a paper which is a testimony on our part of your fidelity in this work, and of our warm personal regard for you. Shall I read it?” [“Yes, yes,” from all over the house].

He read:

“Kansas City, Mo., January 28th.

“To the Rev. Sam Jones, Evangelist.

“Dear Brother: We, brethren in the ministry in Kansas City, desire herewith to express to you our warm fraternal affection and our rejoicing over the good work you and your co-workers have been enabled to do in our midst. For four weeks of unremitting labor, you have preached with earnestness and tenderness the great things out of God’s moral law, and salvation by grace. Your clear exposure of sin, and your keen denunciations of it in every form and as it manifests itself in all stations and avenues of life, have quickened the moral sensibilities of our churches and aroused, as we believe, the dormant consciences of a multitude in this city. The immense attendance upon the services day and night of men of all ranks from the richest to the poorest, from the pure to the debauched, in spite of some of the bitterest weather ever known in the city — an attendance growing larger to the end — this is a sufficient indication of the interest which your preaching, under God, has stirred. The people have heard the preaching. God grant that multitudes may date their eternal salvation from this season of universal thought and widespread earnestness.

“To this expression of warm personal regard and confidence, we add our prayer, commending you to the grace and guidance of God, and supplicating that He may continue to grant you strength, wisdom, and all help to go on in the good work of calling men to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are very truly your friends.”

This was signed by twenty-five of the leading ministers of all denominations, and was greatly appreciated by Mr. Jones, who responded in well-chosen words to this deed of brotherly love.

During his stay there Mr. Jones became very fond of Kansas City, and spoke of it favorably as a residence city. Upon learning of this, the people made an effort to induce him to locate there. He was besieged with requests from the people that he make his home with them, and for many months after he left was importuned by those who loved him to return and locate in their midst.

They urged the convenience of the location upon him, showed him the “advantage of the railway facilities of the city, and attempted to convince him of how much more good he could do from being located at a point accessible to all parts of the country. Many arguments were brought to bear upon him, but Mr. Jones declined with thanks the kind offers they made to give him a handsome home, saying he could not bring himself to the point of leaving his Georgia home.

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