
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Everett, James

(1784–1872)

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Everett, James (1784–1872), Methodist minister and religious writer, was born on 16 May 1784 at Alnwick, Northumberland. He was the second son of John Everett and his wife, Margaret Bowmaker. Everett's father died while he was young, and the boy soon learned to help his mother. After a short time at a private school in Alnwick he was apprenticed to a grocer and general dealer, where he was given to practical jokes. In 1803 he was converted and joined the Wesleyan Methodist Society. He began to preach in Sunderland in 1804 but refused an offer made in the same year to send him to Hoxton Academy to prepare for the Independent ministry. He showed such preaching power that in 1807 he was accepted for the itinerant ministry among the Wesleyans. His first circuits were Sunderland, Shields, and Belper in Derbyshire. In August 1810 he married Elizabeth Hutchinson of Sunderland. From an early period he took careful notes of the celebrated characters whom he met, and thus preserved recollections of Robert Southey, the poet laureate, James Montgomery, the hymn writer, William Dawson, the preacher, and many others. From 1810 to 1821 he served in a variety of Yorkshire towns, and also spent two years in Manchester (1815–17) under Adam Clarke, who became a close friend. He was enrolled as a member of the Literary and Philosophic Society there.

On account of a serious throat complaint in 1821, Everett gave up the regular ministry and became a bookseller and writer, first in Sheffield and afterwards in Manchester. He had been collecting materials for the history of Methodism in those towns, part of which he published in 1823 and 1827. Everett preached occasional and special sermons while in business, and extended his popularity. In 1834 he resumed full ministerial work at Newcastle upon Tyne, and from there moved to York in 1839. Through failure of health he was again made a supernumerary minister in 1842, but remained in York, writing more actively than ever. His main contributions were in the areas of biography and church history, and he displayed a talent for poetry through his friendship with James Montgomery, editor of the *Sheffield Iris*. His accounts of the lives of Adam Clarke (1843, 1849), William Dawson (1844), Samuel Hick, the village blacksmith (1848),

and William Crister, the Wallsend miner (1851), were very popular and went into many editions. His verses on the death of Joseph Benson (1823) and the *Sacred Grave* (1831) were widely read.

The most important event in Everett's life was his expulsion from the Wesleyan conference in August 1849. For many years he had been opposed to the policy and working of conference, and had published critical comments in works such as *The Disputants* (1835), in which he argued against the scheme for starting a theological college for the training of ministers. He defended Adam Clarke and Richard Watson in the dispute concerning the doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ against Bunting and his party, to whose perceived autocracy he became deeply opposed. He was an encourager of the religious revival that the American James Caughey brought to York and other places, in opposition to the more orthodox and static preaching style of Robert Newton and Wesleyan conservatives. He was the author of the chief part of *Centenary Sketches of Ministerial Character* (1841), a work in two volumes containing disparaging sketches of the preachers with a humorous but satirical tone. In 1845 and following years certain clandestine pamphlets, called Fly Sheets, were circulated widely, bearing neither printer's nor publisher's names. They contained serious charges against the leading men of the conference, reflecting both on their public actions and on their personal character. A general suspicion attributed the authorship of these pamphlets to Everett. He was brought before the conference and questioned respecting them, but declined to give any answer. After further inquiry and discussion he was formally expelled. Everett then took the lead in an agitation against the conference which shook the entire Wesleyan connexion, and resulted in the loss of more than 100,000 members and adherents. Some of the seceders joined others who had previously left the 'old body', and formed a new denomination which they styled the United Methodist Free Churches. Everett was elected the first president of their assembly, which met at Rochdale in July 1857. To the end of his life Everett remained a minister of this denomination, filling its pulpits as health and opportunity permitted.

Everett lived for some years in Newcastle, and finally in Sunderland. He wrote many articles for magazines and printed a few poems. In July 1865 his wife died, leaving no children. Everett, as a connoisseur of books and manuscripts, had formed a large collection of Methodist literature and artefacts, revealing a fascination for curious and unusual items. Much of the collection he disposed of to Luke Tyerman, the biographer of Wesley. Everett died at Tavistock Place, Sunderland, on Friday 10 May 1872, and his library was bought for Ranmoor College, the theological institution of the United Methodist Free Churches.

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