

## **Rev John Blackburn**

### **Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Richard Tanfield**

JOHN BLACKBURN was born at Ingham, near Lincoln, July 13, 1813. His early life - like that of too many youths - was spent in folly and vice. In the very brief record left by him, he tells us, that up to the age of seventeen years he was "as wicked as the devil could make him." At the age of fourteen years he was apprenticed to the trade of joiner and wheelwright. His master, though a professed Christian, does not appear to have had much moral influence over him. The only check to his downward course was found in the prayers and counsels of a pious mother. He tells us he was a "great Sabbath-breaker," and in his love of pleasure, and his habitual Sabbath desecration, the influence of even his mother appeared to be lost upon him.

His conversion is thus described by himself: "While sitting under the ministry of the Primitive Methodists, I was awakened to see my state and danger. As brother Robert Atkinson was preaching from these words, 'Take the unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness,' the word was accompanied by the Holy Ghost to my soul. I continued for some time before I felt the burden of my sins to be removed. But one night, while pleading with the Lord with groans and tears, I was enabled to believe with my heart unto righteousness, and obtained the pardon of my sins."

This took place in March, 1830, and through the pressure put on him by his master and father, who were Wesleyans, he was induced to join the Wesleyan Society. He continued a Wesleyan till November, 1831 - about a year and a half - and not finding the associations of that society quite to his mind, he left, and became a member of our society. His own description of the case is very characteristic - "being born in a fire, I found I could live there best, and accordingly I came home to my kindred."

In the following year (1832) his name was put on the preachers' plan. This was a heavy cross; as it was done without consulting with him beforehand as to his convictions of duty on the subject. He afterwards saw cause to be grateful that such a course had been taken with him, as he remarks, "I have reason to be thankful that ever my name appeared there; for many times, while watering others, I have had my own soul watered." A severer trial was soon to befall him; for in 1834 he was called to take the position of a travelling preacher in his native circuit, Lincoln. His soul had previously been much exercised on the subject, as he had an impression that deepened day by day, and caused him many restless nights that he must give himself wholly to the work of the ministry. But it was no very attractive thing in those days to become a Primitive Methodist preacher. And to render the case still less attractive, his father was strongly opposed to his son John entering such a profession, where neither wealth, honour, or comfort was likely to be realised by him, and threatened John with expulsion from his home, and exclusion from the benefit of his will, if he persisted in going out to travel. "But," he remarks, "I had no rest till I went out, and the Lord supported me, and by His help I continue to this day."

He was encouraged in his new sphere of toil by witnessing the conversion of sinners, and the general edification of the societies, and rejoiced, on leaving the circuit, to report an increase of 49 members. Having witnessed his commencement as an itinerant preacher, we must follow him rapidly through his successive spheres of labour. From Lincoln he went to Wakefield circuit, Barnard castle branch of Hull circuit, Whitehaven, and York, remaining about a year in each station.

it was his lot to be associated in the Barnard Castle station with that blessed man of God, JOSEPH SMITH, whose marvellous labours, holy character, prevailing prayers, and glorious success are still remembered in the station with gratitude and admiration. The fruits of that revival are to be met

with still in various parts of Teesdale and Weardale. Our departed brother records several instances of the conversion of large numbers - especially at Middleton. He says, "Middleton, April 23, eight souls found redemption through the blood of Christ, Praise the Lord;" "April 30, Middleton, 30 souls professed to obtain the pearl of great price. This was a pentecostal time from the presence of the Lord: Glory be to God."

On the 19th June, 1839, our brother was united in marriage to her, who, after thirty-five years of devoted service as his helper, counsellor, and companion in tribulation, is left behind for a little while longer in the wilderness. Several children were the fruit of this union. Two of them, Thomas Albert and Alfred, laboured a short time as travelling preachers with us, but were compelled to retire by failing health, and both of them have departed in triumph to the skies.

From York, brother Blackburn removed to Malton, which included Pickering circuit, and thence to Horncastle, Epworth, Louth, Bradford, Leeds 2nd, Bradford (2nd time), Middleham, Belfast, Wrexham, Lancaster, Buckden, and Eynesbury.

From the brief statistical record already referred to, we learn that our brother was in every station successful in witnessing the conversion of sinners. It is very refreshing to follow him in his records of success, and to witness the exultation of his soul while tabulating the fruits of his labours. And labours they certainly were of no ordinary character, if we are merely to regard the miles travelled, the earnest and frequent preaching services held, and the very scanty remuneration received. Take a sample of his labours - "July 18, 1841, preached *three* times, led *two* classes, and walked about twenty miles." It will not therefore be any matter of surprise to be told, that with such arduous labours as these, the system in some part should give way; and we now learn from his papers, that in 1846 he ruptured his body. Still he toiled on with his wonted energy for years - few persons being aware of the weaknesses experienced by him in the discharge of his duties.

In May, 1857, an affection of the throat laid him aside from his duties, and he was not able to resume them until July 7, 1858. In 1860, the Conference, in consideration of his inability to sustain the regular work of the ministry, placed him on the list of supernumeraries, after having travelled twenty-six years. In that retired position he has resided nearly the whole of his subsequent lifetime in Bradford, and according to his ability continued to evince pleasure in serving the cause of Christ. He preached only occasionally, in consequence of the throat affection from which he suffered; but he was very useful as a class leader, in which capacity, by his counsels and pastoral visitations, he was of considerable service. He was a most exemplary and punctual attender of the public means of grace, and his happy face and cheerful responses greatly encouraged many a preacher in the discharge of his duty.

He was an early riser, of very temperate habits, and took a good deal of physical exercise, so that he appeared to enjoy very vigorous health; and it was our opinion that he was likely to live to an advanced age. But there was all the while an insidious disease slowly, invisibly, but surely carrying forward its operations towards a fatal issue. It was disease of the bladder. On the 29th August he was suddenly taken ill, and after suffering acutely for ten days, he finished his labours and his sufferings together.

For some months before his death he appeared to be ripening for the heavenly garner. This was seen in the greater seriousness and earnestness of his character, and in the deeper interest he manifested in the work of God everywhere. One of his favourite serials was the "Revival," which he greedily devoured every week, and about the contents of which he loved to enlarge. The records of conversion in Glasgow, and other places, were very precious to him. So that when the last sickness arrived, there was nothing in its suddenness that appalled him. He had "set his house in order" in all respects, and could calmly wait the last shock. To my enquiries whether he had anything to say to

me, or needed anything, he quietly replied, "nothing." His firm testimony was, "I am trusting in the blood of Jesus." His paroxysms of pain were so frequent and long, that he had but little opportunity to speak, except in brief sentences. To Mrs. Blackburn, he said, "I am all right" - a phrase which meant, with him, everything necessary and safe. The day or two before his departure he was, apparently, favoured in a glorious manner with the vision of heavenly visitors. While his dear wife and another person were standing by him, he called their attention to the sounds of heavenly music - "Don't you hear it? Sweet music! Grand!" he repeated. Then raising his eyes, he appeared to be gazing on heavenly objects and persons. His countenance was lighted with an ineffable splendour, and its expression became the most sweet and angelic - wholly supernatural. He raised his hand once or twice, and said to his dear wife. "See! see!" She said, "Is it angels?" "Yes," he replied. This blessed vision continued some time, and only gave place to the periodic pains that seized him, when his face assumed its natural expression. It is not too much to assume that this was a real foretaste, even in vision, of the scenes of paradise - given to sustain the sufferer in his latest conflicts. On the morning of Saturday, the 8th of August, he gently fell asleep in Jesus, aged 61 years. May the God of the widow be the constant staff of his surviving consort, and may the spirit of the father, in double measure of grace and success, be poured on his only surviving son. Amen!

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1875/299