

Richard Jukes

Transcription of Obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by James Pritchard

How admonitory is the mortality of our relatives and friends! The father, the mother, the elder brother and sister, press on in the solemn procession of successive life and then descend into the grave, to rest from human sight until the morning of the resurrection. By and by in the family gradation there will not be one left between us and the house appointed for all living. In a few days or years we must lie down in dust for our children to pass over us for a short time and then they must take their rest in the same humiliating dwelling place and there in "silence rot." As it is in the social line of march to the "land of deepest shade," so it is in the official order, or among the standard bearers of the ensign of the Cross of Christ, under which fought the great battle on which depends an everlasting kingdom to him that conquers. The flag continues to float high in the breeze and the living hosts exult, although one bearer after another while firmly grasping the pole falls in the conflict, another is close on his rear to lift the ensign and to bear it up and on as best he can until called to his reward.

On the 10th day of August, 1867, in his residence, in the midst of his family, at West Bromwich, a standard bearer a preacher, a poet, a prince, and a great man, fell in our Israel, in the sixty-third year of his age, and forty-second of his holy service, the REV. RICHARD JUKES, the only son of Richard and Martha Jukes, of Goathill, in the parish of Clungunford, in the county of Salop, where he was born on the 9th of October, 1804.

Being the only son, young Richard became the pet of his mother, and no doubt inherited many indulgences, and was allowed a large share of playtime with other boys of his own age. From early childhood he evinced a kind disposition, much wit and good humour, playful satire, and a proneness to turn things and circumstances into rhyme, which rendered him a pleasing companion to those about him. These characteristics, combined with his somewhat princely form, won upon the minds of his compeers, so as to induce them to elevate him to the rank of captain of their company, and then to that of king in their little dominion.

The education of this young man was very limited, as is very evident from his early writings. This it is likely would be owing in part to the very defective method of teaching in village schools in those days. His religious training we are inclined - to think was more defective even than his secular education. We have no account of the decided piety of either of his parents, any more than that they attended the parish church occasionally, and it is not unlikely that their only son would attend with them when able, but he remained an entire stranger to vital godliness until he reached the age of twenty-one. For some time previous to his conversion to God, he received a very deep religious impression through a sudden and emphatic speech made by his fellow workman while on a high building. "Richard," said this man, "The peace of God passeth understanding." The man who uttered these words had once possessed that peace, but had fallen from his steadfastness, and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Richard did not allow the serious impression to spoil all his sport nor to remove all playful mischief from his mind. When he grew up to man's estate he attended the preaching services of the Primitive Methodists, some short distance from home, but with a design to create a little fun for himself and his companions, in pinning the peoples clothes together as they sat quietly to hear the Word of Life. The common pins to some extent failed to hold the garments thus joined which occasioned some degree of mortification of mind to this company of young men. However, Richard Jukes was resolved that he would not be beaten by the weakness of pins. Before the next preaching service that he purposed to attend, he went to the blacksmith's shop and procured some horse-nails, and these he filed thin and to a fine point hoping, to have rare fun by seeing these good people tearing each other's garments when they would rise to sing or kneel to pray or to leave the house. Richard pocketed his well prepared and new fashioned pins, and away he went to the preaching house for no other object than the one just named. While he thus purposed in his heart, God had his purpose too, and prepared an arrow keener than the sharpened nails, and a man to shoot it, and by it the young man was so wounded at heart, that it killed the mischief maker within him. His labour in filing the nails was in vain, for he could not use them for

the purpose intended. What became of them we cannot tell, this is the end of their history so far as we know.

The first Primitive Methodist preacher Mr. Jukes ever heard was the late Samuel Lloyd who departed to the spirit world on the 28rd of last March. In March 1825, Mr. Jukes obtained mercy through believing, and became experimentally acquainted with him whom to know is eternal life. He immediately united in Church fellowship with the people, who under God, had been the means of leading him to Christ for salvation, and with these people he lived and laboured with unswerving consistency for upwards of forty-two years. In the absence of any other written document concerning the starting place of our pilgrim to mount Zion, the following few verses of his own composing may not be unacceptable here:—

“ ’Twas in a cottage near the wood
I was convinced of sin,
And there my race for endless life,
Through mercy did begin.

’Twas there I heard those cheering words
’Thy sins are all forgiven!’
And there I joined the little band,
Whose names are wrote in heaven.

* * * * *

always shall revere that place,
That cottage near a wood,
For there I lost my load of sin,
And there received my good.

And when I reach ‘the Better Land,’
And stand on Zion’s hill,
The humble cottage near the wood
Will be remember’d still.”

At the September Quarterly Meeting of the same day, Mr. Jukes was put on the preachers’ plan as an exhorter, and then in proper time was raised to a local preacher on trial. As such he laboured very zealously and successfully until the December quarter day in the year following, when it was decided that he should be called into the regular ministry in his native circuit, which was at that time the Hopton Bank Circuit; comprehending what are now Ludlow, part of Bishop’s Castle, Presteign, and Leintwardine Circuits, and Primrose Bank, Church Stretton, and Knighton Branches. Had what he calls the “Recruiting Hymn” then been composed, our imagination would very naturally have pictured, or drawn him, at full length, with a low-crowned and broad-brimmed hat, minus a shirt collar in sight, a straight-cut coat, a pair of strong shoes, with an umbrella in one hand and a small parcel in the other, marching off towards Radnorshire, singing—

“I’m a recruiting officer,
Commissioned from on high;
I’m one of the great army
Which does in Zion lie.
I’m come enlisting soldiers,
To fight the daring foe;
Then come, enlist, and with me sing,
I’m bound for to go.” &c., &c,

This soldier of Jesus Christ did “go” and “faced the daring foe”. He entered the field, and commenced the noble conflict on the 7th day of January 1827, right amongst the Radnorshire Hills, where he fought well with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, being panoplied at the same time with the Christian’s whole armour, for the space of one year and six months. On that thinly populated and rough field, he won many glorious victories and took many of Apollyon’s captive to make them free men under the reign of King Immanuel. It was hard fighting for a while, and in the depth of winter too, but through the help of the Lord he succeeded in carrying off much

spoil, which was greatly improved in the transit as extracts from his journal will show, and may be seen at considerable length in "The Poet of the Million;" or, "Memorials of the Life and Labours of the late Rev. R. Jukes." One or two specimens we give here, in an abridged form for the sake of brevity. He says "On Sunday, February 4th, I preached at Corn Hill and Glassbury, to two large congregations. The Lord was with us, and there was a mighty shaking among the dry bones. The next day, I preached to a very large congregation, at a place called Killtork. We had a glorious time. I joined nineteen members to society, and led them for the first time."—

"Sunday, May 6th—He had a great meeting at Painscastle. Soon after the meeting was opened in the evening, the power of God descended in a marvellous manner, and there was a shout of a king amongst us. A number of persons were struck to the ground by the Divine influence. Among those struck were five persons out of one respectable family, all down together in great distress of soul, crying to God for salvation, and the servant man and woman praying for them. The members of this family are resolved on serving the Lord, Joshua like, whether others do so or not."

These two extracts are not the most remarkable that are recorded in his journal of the wonderful displays of the power of God in the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways. There are many full of interest which if transcribed would render this memoir too long for our excellent monthly.

The following is Mr. Jukes' own account of the stations in which he laboured, and the time in each he travelled. He writes, —

"I travelled in the Hopton Bank Circuit from December 1826 up to June 1828, I then removed to Brinkworth, where I remained until December 1829 and then removed to Motcombe, where I laboured till June, 1830. Pillawell one year Salisbury one year, Birmingham one year, Nottingham one year, and Ramsor four years, midsummer of 1838. Having through some mishap in exchanging circuits lost the book in which I kept my accounts for a number of years, I am thus prevented from giving an account of the number of members in each station. This I know, that we had an increase in all the circuits."

This we know, that there was a great and glorious work of soul saving going on in Ramsor circuit most of the time he superintended that station. While there his popularity as a preacher and manager greatly increased, and as a further proof from that time he superintended most of the important stations in the Tunstall District with considerable success as the following account will show,

"I travelled in Darlaston four years, increase of members 130, Tunstall three years, decrease thirty; Congleton one year, increase ninety-four; Dudley three years, increase 485; Darlaston, again, two years, increase 424; Brierley Hill two years, decrease 194; Coventry two, increase twenty; Westbromwich four years, increase fifty-two.

This brings us down to the year 1859, the time when he was necessitated to apply to conference for superannuation, on account of growing infirmities, in the fifty-fifth year of his age, having travelled thirty-two years and six months.

The following is his account of the causes of the decrease he had in two of his stations. "The cause of the decrease in Tunstall circuit was owing to the very painful circumstances which quickly succeeded each other, and exerted a very damaging influence on the congregations and societies, but prudence forbids me recording particulars. The cause of decrease in Brierley Hill circuit was owing to a very strong reaction that set in when the cholera subsided. There are reasons to fear that many persons became professedly religions and joined the society through fear of death and hell. When the cause ceased their religion died,"

The early years of Mr. Jukes's itinerancy were attended with hard work, weariness, hunger, and persecution. Most of the circuits were very wide, friends and homes few and far between. Indeed, instead of houses and chapels to preach in, the road side, the village green, or the market cross were the only places of worship that the preachers of these days occupied. Instead of a brother meeting you with a hearty shake of the hand, a smile, and a 'How do you do, brother?' there were the yells of ruthless mobs, brick-bats, rotten-eggs and other missiles freely indulged in. Besides meeting with this brutal treatment his food was often scanty and mean: a raw turnip, the pith of a

cabbage stalk, or a crust. And these were often eaten on the roadside with a stone or the block of a tree for a seat. The labours and deprivations endured by many of the Primitive Methodist itinerant and local preachers during the first twenty-five years of the Connexion's history, tested well the force of their love and zeal, and the health and strength of their constitutions. Many failed before they laboured twenty years. Some have endured up to forty, but few have exceeded that number of years who bore the burden and heat of the early days. We give thanks to God that many of the men of those days were just the men for the time and the work.

As a preacher, Mr. Jukes was quite original, imitating no one, and it would have been no easy task for anyone to have imitated him. He had a way of his own, which was generally acceptable to his hearers, whether learned or illiterate. He was plain, often pointed, but always pleasant and persuasive, and sometimes powerful. We may say that he was generally an effective preacher. He was one that had a pleasant voice, and was distinct in his pronunciation; he was successful in bringing sinners to Christ; he was popular; his services were frequently in demand for special occasions, which continued so long as he was able to leave home. Seldom would he have had one Sunday at home during the eight years of his superannuation had he complied with all requests. So numerous were the applications he was receiving that he put his replies into verse, with greetings to all classes of persons at the place to which he was invited. He was a good superintendent, and a very agreeable colleague. In official meetings he had great control over the minds and feelings of men.

We here give one testimony from one of his colleagues out of many we received. The Rev. M. Bennett writes—“In business meetings his was generally the presiding, pervading and ruling spirit. While the fullest liberty of discussion was enjoyed, and the freest expression of thought allowed, he was truly and almost invariably the guiding mind; his cheerful spirit, his happy disposition, his abundant humour, his quaint expressions, his respectable address, his sparkling wit, his amusing anecdotes, his ready rhymes, and his Christian urbanity overcame all opposition, and generally succeeded in winning his opponents to his own side; and whether he said it or not, he might with the utmost propriety have announced, ‘I am monarch of all I survey.’ ”

Mr. Jukes, as a poet, was very natural, easy, and original; he professed not to be learned, nor to be familiar with the classics of other lands and times; neither was he a poet of the highest order, but he was sometimes really sublime, powerful, and thrilling to the very centre of the soul. He was in this capacity extensively useful, and this was his principal aim. He entered so much into the feelings of the sighing and sorrowing, the sad and the glad, the living and the dying; he seemed to possess something like a magical power of turning the blossom of a thistle into a fragrant rose, and a nettle into a pink, and nearly all kinds of circumstances to the use of the sanctuary. Hence his “Thief in the Candle,” his “Satirical Poem,” “The Newspaper,” “The Railway Navigator Spiritualized.” He was emphatically “the bard of the poor,” and formed in that chain what may be termed the missing link, His hymns have been extensively useful in promoting and keeping alive a revival of vital piety in England, Ireland, Scotland, and America. Scores of souls—yes, we may say hundreds—have been convinced and converted while his hymns have been sung. They are at this time sung in China with life and power; also at Jerusalem, the far-famed city, the type of our eternal home. Many a humble pilgrim has been cheered while pursuing his daily toil, when singing “Heaven's my home,” “It is better farther on”; or when ready to despair these words have warmed in his heart, and risen almost involuntarily to his lips, “Never give up; try, try again!” Many a humble cottage, and the children's playground, have been made vocal by singing Jukes's hymns. At one time they nearly supplanted all the carnal songs in what is called “the Black Country. His hymn called “The dying Christian” has been a great favourite for a long time throughout the land. There is something almost irresistible in these lines:—

“What is this that steals upon my frame?
Is it death?
Which soon will quench the vital flame
Is it death?
If this be death, I soon shall be
From every pain and sorrow free,
I shall the King of glory see, —
All is well.” &c., &c.

We have heard of one of England's scientific men listening to our people while singing this hymn in the stillness of the evening nearly a mile from where he stood, but such was their earnestness and harmony that, though borne on the sound of so many voices to such a distance, that gentleman heard the words distinctly, and was deeply moved to tenderness. Many a large congregation of people both in chapels and in the open air, have been touched in almost every fibre of their frames, as if they had all held in their hand an electric chain, while that hymn has been sung in the power of the Divine Spirit. But the cross of Christ was our poet's charming and oft-recurring theme. In looking over the variety of his hymns—which is great, and their number *very many*—it is surprising what a many there are about the death of Christ. He kept the resolution he expressed in the following hymn, one verse of which we will here transcribe:—

“Where'er I go I'll tell the story
Of the Cross;
In nothing else my soul shall glory
Save the Cross.
Yes, this my constant theme shall be
Through time, and in eternity,
That Jesus tasted death for me,
On the Cross.” &c., &c.

Mr. Jukes had a large family, for whose welfare he ever manifested great solicitude. The light of his life shone here so as to be well calculated to lead his household to glorify his Father who is in heaven. He was a kind and faithful husband, and a most affectionate father, almost to a fault. He was like a healthy and wide-spread olive tree in this garden—at one time attempering the scorching rays of the sun; at another, shielding from the winter's blast; his very leaves were healing, and his words were as oil for softening and soothing. He read most of his hymns and poems to his family before he published them to the world.

After a successful career as a preacher and poet for forty-two years, this portly looking man was smitten with a paralytic stroke, from which he never recovered. This took place in June, 1866. In the November following he had a second attack, which laid him prostrate, and in a short time deprived him of the use of every member of his body - even his speech was taken from him. In the midst of this universal wreck of the external framework his mind remained clear and sound, his hope of heaven bright, and his faith in Christ strong and active. For nine months he was confined to his bed, with no power to turn himself or move; yet, through all, he was never known to murmur or to grow impatient. He waited with resignation the Lord's time, and was ready when the Lord Jesus came to receive him to himself. His remains were attended by a large concourse of people to their resting place in Westbromwich Cemetery on the 14th of August.

Mr. Jukes was greatly respected by the people of his own Connexion wherever known, and by many of other communities of Christians who formed his acquaintance. Funeral sermons were preached for him in all the principal chapels in this part of South Staffordshire.