

Rev. James Travis

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Henry Davenport

THE passing of James Travis last December snapped another link with a generation of stalwarts, the value of whose contribution to the making of our Church it would be difficult to over-estimate. He has been called "The Greatheart of Primitive Methodism," and his title to the description will not be questioned. He was a giant even among the giants, in the judgment of many, the greatest all-round man our ministry has ever contained. Though for a decade and more he had lived in comparative retirement, his death has left the Church with a poignant sense of loss. He had, however, reached the ripe age of nearly fourscore years, all of which had been packed with strenuous and fruitful toil. Moreover, while intellectually as strong and alert as ever, physically he had begun to fail. No one therefore will begrudge him his well-earned rest and promotion.



To the Kingdom of God beyond his own denominational boundaries James Travis was a valuable asset. The National Free Church Council owed much to him for many years, and during one of the most critical periods in its history he served as its President with great distinction and success. To his own Church his services were many and varied. He was an ardent advocate of higher ministerial education at a time when a cultured ministry was not the popular ideal it is to-day. As an ecclesiastical statesman, he has left a deep and an abiding mark on our laws and constitution. An expert business man, some of his best work was done on committees and administrative bodies when difficult and delicate problems had to be handled. Few have a better record as chapel builders, some of the finest properties we have in the Manchester and Liverpool districts owing their existence to his sagacious initiative and abounding energy. No man ever excelled him as a circuit minister; wherever he laboured there was solid progress and abiding prosperity.

No one required to be told that Mr Travis was a Lancashire man, for in him all the best and most typical characteristics of that virile county were conspicuously evident. To Summit, in the Littleborough Circuit, belongs the proud distinction of having given him birth. In spite of meagre educational advantages, his qualifications for public service were early manifest, for before he was nineteen, the local preacher stage was passed and he had entered the ranks of the regular ministry. Almost at once he acquired commanding position and influence. From the beginning he was predestined to the front rank. He had no need to seek official position, it sought him. Every office he held was filled with distinction and left with added lustre; for James Travis was a multiple-talent man, great not by reason of one outstanding quality, but by the combination of many. In his intellectual make-up there seemed to be no weak place. He had a breadth and grasp of mind, a practical shrewdness and sagacity, a swiftness and clarity of judgment, that enabled him 'to see as by a

lightning-flash the real inwardness of a difficult problem and the best way of dealing with it. As a reader of character and a judge of men he has probably had no superior.

Everywhere our departed friend and leader was, in the best sense, popular. It could never be said with truth that he sought popularity, but he could not escape it. Wherever he was known he was admired and loved. It may be doubted whether in the course of his long and strenuous life he made a single enemy. With all sorts and conditions of men "his name was as ointment poured forth." And those who knew him best loved him most. James Travis was one of those rare spirits who can sustain the severe test of long and intimate acquaintance. By none was he held in higher esteem than by those who through long years had enjoyed the privilege of his personal friendship. To those who, like the writer, had the joy of colleague-ship with him, he was more than an ideal circuit minister—he was a hero.

The explanation of this universal esteem is found in the quality of the man. He stood for a robust and virile Christian manhood, and embodied in his own life the ideal of "holiness without cant." To truth and the sense of duty he was unswervingly loyal. In him meanness found no place, indeed, he was generous almost to a fault, whether in the matter of money or of affection and judgment. It gave him far more pleasure to hear a colleague well spoken of than to receive a compliment to himself. A bigger and more tender heart than his never beat in human bosom. On the other hand, of sham and pretence he was hotly intolerant, especially when garbed by a religious profession. Transparently sincere himself, what he demanded in others was truth unadulterated, character without veneer. By all who knew him he was: absolutely trusted. To great numbers of people James Travis was a kind of final argument for the truth of Christianity.

As a preacher he had really great qualities. Perhaps his style of delivery left something to be desired, particularly when his spirit had caught fire; but notwithstanding this, his services for every kind of special occasion were deservedly in great demand to the last. There was no playing to the gallery, for he was in the pulpit not to win a compliment, but to implant a conviction. Plain, pointed and practical expositions of evangelical truth, his sermons were often white-hot with Spiritual passion. He believed in his message and proclaimed it as one the reception of which was fraught with issues of eternal moment. It was the same when on the platform he advocated great moral causes, or pleaded for the rights of the common people. It was the eloquence of intense conviction and moral passion, and it was immensely effective. Under its spell his audiences were at times swept by great waves of emotion and roused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. In truth he was "a master of assemblies," and his power was always directed to the saving and uplifting of men.

For the Church on earth the long life, so grandly lived, has terminated. Nothing could have exceeded the comfort and peace of his closing years in the home of his devoted daughter and her husband. And when the call came he was mercifully not suffered to linger. Attended by every ministry of human love, he quickly passed through the shadowed valley into the light of the eternal morning, and was "at home with the Lord."

Soldier of Christ, well done!
Praise be thy new employ;
And while eternal ages run,
Rest in thy Saviour's joy.

Fittingly, before the interment, a service was held in the George Street Church, Chester. The Rev. Samuel Palmer conducted, and addresses were delivered by the Rev. A.T. Guttery, D.D., and the writer. The Rev. Arthur Baldwin, who represented the Missionary Committee, offered prayer. While there was sorrow in the loss of so distinguished a leader, there was joy in the remembrance of his life. In thousands of hearts James Travis will be remembered to the end of life.

References

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