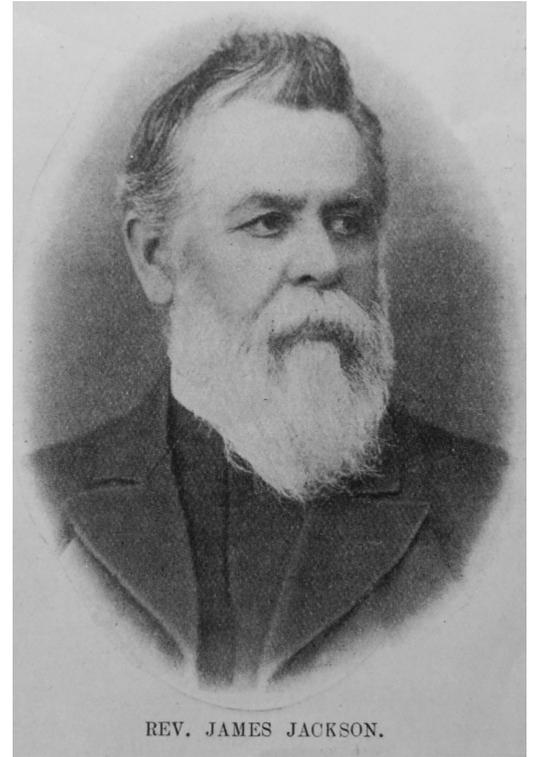


Rev. James Jackson

Transcription of Obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Robert Hind

ON the last day of the year 1907 the soul of the Rev. James Jackson passed into the eternal. The change, which had been expected some time, came peacefully, albeit it was the end of an earthly career that had had in it a large element of tragedy. Mr. Jackson was born at Lymm, a little town within the Cheshire border, and only a few miles from Manchester. His parents, who were members of the Anglican Church, gave two sons to the Primitive Methodist ministry, and to the fact that they were if not in affluent, at all events, comfortable circumstances is to be attributed what for the times was the superior education of their sons. The elder of the two, the Rev. Charles Jackson, spent his ministerial career in the Manchester District. He was a man of striking personality, great force of character, pleasing temperament and bearing, and considerable culture. His remarkably successful ministry came to an end at the early age of forty-two, and the solid character of his work is abundantly evident from the fact that after the lapse of all these years it is spoken of in terms of the highest appreciation at the present day. James Jackson was converted at a prayer meeting in Rosamond Street Chapel. He held a position at the time in a Manchester business house, and it may be inferred, first from the fact that princely fortunes have been built up in that line of business, and second, Mr. Jackson's own qualities - his probity, his farsightedness, and his general business capabilities, that had he continued in this calling, he would in all probability have reached a position in the commercial world of great eminence and influence.



But at the age of eighteen he accepted a call to the ministry, and went to the Middleham circuit, in the North Riding of Yorkshire. This was in the year 1853. It was a great change from the life he had hitherto known, though if the salary was small, the hospitable people of the Yorkshire dales took care that the preachers fared well at their homes. But the work was trying. The Middleham circuit at that time measured sixty miles from end to end. Within its area is some of the finest scenery in England. But to the immature constitution of the youthful preacher the snows and rains and fierce blasts of the winter in that hill country must have been a sore trial. Even that experience, however, like most of the events that happen to mortals, had its compensations, and the greatest of these was that in that sphere of his early ministry he found his life-partner, the gracious, noble-minded lady that shared all his future conflicts and trials, and who survives to mourn his loss.

The twenty-two years from 1853 to 1875 were spent in circuits in the North of England, and they may be fairly styled a long series of successes and triumphs as a Primitive Methodist minister. He was one of a group of men, who taking them all in all were probably the most remarkable that the denomination has ever produced. Sometimes a man gains position and influence although he has only average ability by reason of the mediocrity, or less than mediocrity of his associates. Mr. Jackson, however, was not placed amidst such circumstances. There were giants in those days in the old Sunderland District, but he held his own in the front rank. To this day the sermons he preached when he was stationed at Newcastle-on-Tyne are spoken of, although it cannot be much if any less than two score years since the events happened.

Large congregations composed of people belonging to all the churches and to no church assembled to hear the thoughtful, eloquent, silver-tongued ambassador of Jesus Christ. Mr. Jackson was a rhetorician whose diction was a well of English undefiled. But his words, whilst pleasant to hear, were also charged with truth that stirred men's souls, appealed to their conscience and made them long to live in a nobler way. The writer recalls hearing him preach on the Beatitudes. He has heard many sermons preached on that matchless theme; he has read much that has been written on it by divines of world-wide repute, but he has neither heard nor read an exposition of it at all comparable with that delivered by Mr. Jackson. One hesitates to write about his gift of prayer, it is a matter so sacred, but he had a way all his own of leading a congregation into the Holy of Holies which those who have had one experience of can never forget.

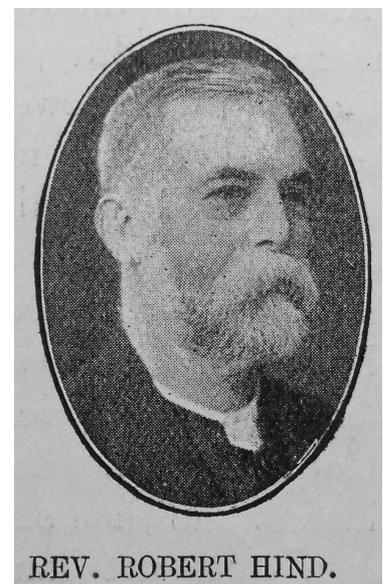
Mr. Jackson was hardly less distinguished in other respects. As a debater he had few equals. It was almost an education to hear him dealing with an opponent whether in a church court or in a good humoured discussion at his own fireside. He was equally at home amidst the profundities of theology and philosophy, and the critical matters appertaining to administration and the making of ecclesiastical laws. Possessed of a keen intellectual perception, a logical mind, and a perfect mastery of choice and varied terminology, he could detect a fallacy at once and had not the slightest difficulty in exposing it. As a chairman he was a master in all the rules of procedure, and whilst kind and courteous, could always maintain his command over the assembly over which he had been called to preside.

He had given full proof of all these gifts and graces by the time he had been a minister twenty years. It is just here that there came the great tragedy of his life. Born to be a master in Israel, gifted far beyond many, and having won his way to a position of influence he was stricken down when he had travelled twenty-two years, that is, in 1875. The instrument so finely constituted to be a messenger of God alike in intellectual gift, in spiritual experience and insight, in moral conviction, and in sweetness and power of vocal expression had one defect. His throat failed him, and for years he could not speak above a whisper. It must have been a bitter ordeal. A man whose soul was charged with weighty and important messages to his generation struck dumb! For eight years he was laid aside, and for the greater part of that time the medical faculty regarded the affection as incurable.

He went among the Westmoreland hills and by their lonely burn banks fought his fight and resigned his life to God. In this is to be found the secret of the smile he wore. Care, anxiety, bitter disappointment failed to quench the laughter that was in his soul. The peace that passeth all understanding was his.

No doubt the best part of the issue of this experience was the personal enrichment it brought to him. But in addition to this it is pleasing to record that even in external things out of the tragedy there came not defeat but achievement. After eight years he rallied, and once again reached the position in our church for which nature and the grace of God had so admirably fitted him. Not everyone is able to reach a front rank position once; to our friend it was given to reach such a position twice. He went back to his native circuit of Lymm as its minister and afterwards travelled in Liverpool, Fleetwood, Clitheroe and Barnard Castle.

The Liverpool Conference made him Journal Secretary, and the Manchester Conference of 1897 bestowed on him the highest honour that our church can give by making him President. In that difficult position he won new laurels. His perfect self-control, his level-headedness, his unerring judgment, his mastery of every detail of procedure, above all, the singularly fine blend of firmness and gentleness contributed in a large degree to the happy and efficient despatch of the business. It was a gratifying



circumstance that his gifted son, the Rev. James Dodd Jackson, the Connexional Vice-Editor, was a delegate of the Conference at which his father was President.

References

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