

## In Memoriam - The Late John Day Thompson

### Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. J.C. Mantripp

IN the fullness of his powers, on Monday, April 14th, 1919, John Day Thompson has left us. Another busy life has found its resting-place, and the inn that none can miss. None can grudge him the rest or the welcome. But many will miss his cheerful presence and the challenging quality of his robust faith in life.

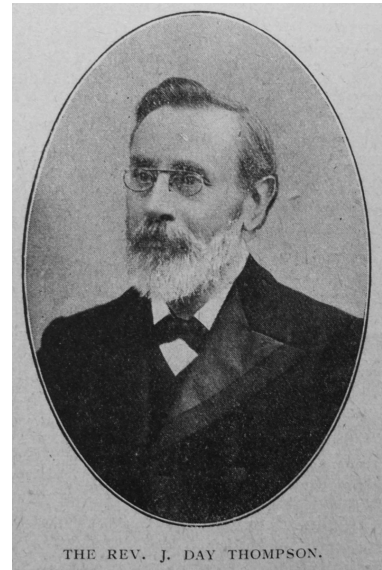
The writer of this sketch cannot claim the privilege of intimate fellowship with Mr. Thompson, extending over many years. This, however, does not detract from the possibility of honest appreciation. Brotherly as he was, probably none knew him thoroughly. With his brilliant gifts, and interests extending to all that life comprehended so far as he could fathom it, he of necessity lived much of his life apart from his fellows. Thus any record of the impression made by his personality can be only partial. The main ideas of his beloved Wordsworth's "Character of the Happy Warrior" best express his own manner of life. His was the generous spirit

"Whose high endeavours are an inward light,  
That [made] the path peers him always bright:  
Who, with a natural instinct to discern  
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn;  
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,  
But makes his moral being his prime care."

He was above all things else a pioneer. That his pioneering was not futile the loneliness at the heart of his radiant personality testifies.

The strange thing is to write of him as among the company of the great ones gone from us. Somehow the thought of death does not find contact with the thought of him. The messenger came in the midst of activities; came probably as he would have wished. That he had earned the right of release by faithfulness in a long and courageous career none will dispute. Yet there were other tasks that needed his wide knowledge and tactful wisdom. Our Church has lost others recently who were eminent in intellectual as well as spiritual gifts. John Day Thompson was by no means the least in comparison with these. In the wide range of his knowledge and the ability to make practical use of it, he had no peer in our Church. His proposals for tutorial reform in our ministerial training college, which fortunately have been published in the *Holborn Review*, reveal his contact with the spirit of the times, as well as with God's age-long purpose. The College Commission will miss his magnetic leadership. And the *Holborn Review*, upon which, during his all-too-brief editorship, he had impressed the stamp of his personality, will not easily find a fitting successor to him. It was in him to lift this periodical to a level yet unreached during its great history.

The personality of John Day Thompson was of that fascinating and magnetic quality around which myths gathered in other days. Those who knew him in his early days speak of the great impressions



made by his preaching. His Australian ministry worthily carried on a brilliant tradition. Already he had penetrated to where few of his generation had ventured, and what he gained for himself he told faithfully and fearlessly. The charge of heterodoxy was bound to come; especially as the reign of the ultra-orthodox was passing. The winds of the Spirit were abroad, and there was one who sought no shelter from their searching quality. And it was found that the heretic bore testimony to truths that gave larger and more spacious expression to the conception of God's Kingdom. The ecclesiastical courts might condemn him; but presently the same courts were glad to recognise both his graces and his gifts. It is not necessary to dwell upon these matters. If the charges gave pain, afterdays gave evidence of trust and generous love that made joy more than pain had been. In preaching he revelled. His messages gripped him. He was master both of ideas, and their appropriate language. There were no notes, no waiting for, the right word. Sometimes, after stating his theme, he would embark upon a flood of illustrations, gathered from many sources, until the idea stood out so conspicuously that none could fail to perceive it. His pulpit work at times was bewilderingly brilliant. And he gave of his best to small companies. It cannot be said that the common people always heard him gladly. Sometimes he wrestled with matters that made tremendous demands upon concentrated and sustained thought — demands that were not always met. Yet during his Presidential year he preached to small week-afternoon congregations sermons that would have appealed to large and cultured audiences—preached with so evident a love of preaching that he won attention and response. He had a habit when in the grip of his theme of rising until he stood on tiptoe. It seemed to those who watched as they listened that he grew in physical stature as he proceeded.

To some it was a surprise that the dedication of such gifts as his to the duties of Church courts should have resulted in so great a success. For as General Committee Secretary, John Day Thompson was a brilliant success. What made for alert and fruitful scholarship made also for ability in dealing with affairs. Plato looked for the day when philosophers should be kings. Events are driving kings into philosophy now. But that is a different matter. The scholar showed himself a wise leader in business. His first Conference as General Secretary was a revelation to many. In the Stationing Committee he was carefully ready for emergencies, yet always willing to receive and ponder suggestions, and to act upon them if persuaded of their wisdom.

But the man was more than his gifts or attainments. He had a genius for friendship. He was a man to be chosen from the multitude for a friend. His younger brethren were attracted to him, and found him willing to entertain their points of view. This generosity made him winsome, magnetic; there was virtue that went out of him. He was humble as well as bold, for he believed in the essential goodness of humanity. He had the poetic temperament, the enthusiasm of lofty ideas and generous purposes. Yet he was no dreamer. In matters of fact he was prepared to produce his authorities if need arose. Still he had sympathy with the dreamers. He did not throw science to the winds, but no mysterious theories could surprise or shock him.

Our Church had a great gift in John Day Thompson. And its enrichment has not ceased with his passing. His pioneering will lure us towards the better times on which our hearts are set.

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1919/480