

In Memoriam: Councillor Tom Fletcher, J.P.

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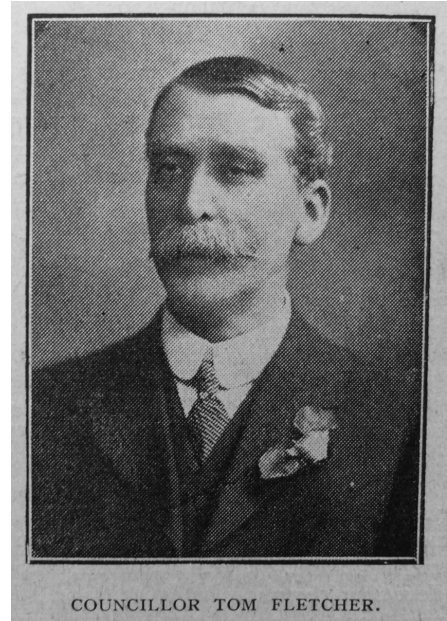
ADMIRED abroad, dearly beloved at home, beautiful in character, and abounding in his Master's service, his passing into the Homeland has created a great void in our Silsden Circuit, and an inestimable loss to Primitive "Methodism. Wherever he moved in church, Sunday school, social circle, or Chamber of Commerce, his magnetic personality arrested attention, and the crest of his Lord was upon all he did. Tall, stately, refined, dignified, with speaking eyes, mobile features, tranquil temperament, tender heart, upright conduct, shrewd wisdom, sane judgment — a Christian, gentleman, courteous, urbane, and kind to rich and poor alike he came to be universally trusted, admired, and beloved.

It was amazing what unbounded confidence people had in him; how they privately sought him, confided to him their secrets, trusted his judgments, solicited his counsel; and he patiently listened and unstintingly gave of his time and service. He was a counsellor and friend to thousands. To the poor and needy he was a generous benefactor, but his left hand did not know what his right hand gave, and the benedictions of the widow and fatherless and friendless fell copiously upon him.

He wielded great power in assemblies. He had the genius which solved knotty problems and straightened out intricate tangles. In critical business meetings an aptly humorous sentence scattered clouds, created smiles, and restored good feeling. In uproarious political gatherings when he stood up the storm immediately subsided and the audience listened with respect. In companies of young people his own exemplary conduct created, as if by magic, quiet and order. When conducting divine worship he created an atmosphere in which souls thrilled and reverently hung upon his words. This man was a born leader of men. His personality was magnetic.

But the crowning charm was his sanctified common sense and deep spirituality. He was a great Christian. Like Jeremiah the preparation for his life-work began ere he was born. He had a great heritage. He was steeped in the traditions of Primitive Methodism. Opening his eyes in a Christian home, blessed with godly parents (his father and grand-father were great stalwarts in our Church), nurtured in a religious atmosphere, led in childhood to the House of God, taken by his father to the class meeting before he reached his teens, educated at Elmfield, which he dearly loved, and finding Christ in his boyhood, he grew up in an environment conducive to the making of great Christians.

He loved God's House and people, was a reverent worshipper and inspired the preacher. After evening service he invariably remained and was a tower of strength in the prayer meeting. He was a great worker and there is scarcely an office in church and school but he has worthily filled. For over fifty years he preached the Gospel with much acceptance and power, and for the same long period served as teacher and superintendent in the Sunday school. In hundreds, of homes in Silsden fathers



and mothers call him blessed. He adorned and enriched district committees, synods, and conferences, and rendered immense service to the Centenary Fund. His name—like that of his brother Richard’s—became an honoured and household word in Primitive Methodism, and at Bradford the Conference honoured him with the vice-presidency. In that exalted office none have excelled him in the grace and gifts and service he brought to that chair. It, is something for Silsden Church to be proud of that two brothers belonging to it have become vice-presidents of the Primitive Methodist Conference.

But what surprised many people most was that this prosperous man—whose business enterprises stretched out like huge fibres throughout the West Riding of Yorkshire and far beyond—should hasten from an important business engagement in London or from the Bradford Exchange, that he might be present at a class, or leaders’, or Sunday school teachers’ meeting, and that he should put his soul, and brain, and strength into the one as much as the other! But in the eyes of Tom Fletcher these little meetings were of great importance, and these engagements sacred. One of the most beautiful things about him was that prosperity never spoiled him. He remained the same humble, faithful servant of God to the last. :The secret of the Lord” was with him. “The joy of the Lord” was his strength. It was true of him as it was of Richard Sibbes, the great Puritan:—

“Of this blest man, let this high praise be given:
Heaven was in him before he was in heaven.”

Being a great Christian, he was a great citizen, His was a minister’s home, and he was an ideal host and bounteous in hospitality. In the realm of commerce he was a prince among merchants and highly honoured on Mart and Exchange. He prospered and held his wealth in stewardship for God. Oliver Cromwell said: “It was part of a man’s religion to see that his country was well governed.” It was part of Tom Fletcher’s creed, and for nearly forty years he served with distinction on numerous Boards of public administration. In the cause of temperance he rendered yeoman service, and was the first president of the Keighley and District Band of Hope Union. He was a great educationalist and pioneered the way for the “Workers’ Education League.” His public services were recognised when he was made a Justice of the Peace in 1912.

In the sixty-five years of his life he has been an inspiration in goodness to thousands.

Two years ago he was compelled to leave his native heath to recuperate health and strength at Morecambe, but his interest and benefactions in all good work were not abated. The last letter the writer received from him expressed the hope of restoration for further service. It was not to be. God gently touched him, and on May 17th tenderly kissed him into sleep. His funeral at Morecambe was a very large and representative one. Amidst the sounds of singing birds and rustling leaves and gentle rippling of the sea, the Revs. E. Blake and J. Hall (representing the General Committee) read the committal and prayers by the grave side; and as the sun shone we sympathetically looked on through our tears. The memorial service in our Silsden Church—when the writer preached—was a great tribute to his memory and worth. He rests by the lapping waves of the Atlantic, but his spirit lives, his influence and work abide. The condolence of our Church is with the beloved widow and his sorrowing loved ones.

References

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