

In Memoriam: Ald. Abram Peel, J.P.

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ON more than one occasion Alderman Abram Peel was described as "Nature's nobleman." It was an apt description and a fitting testimony. He had a charm of personality and a fineness of character which gained not merely the highest respect, but also the warmest love of every section of the community.

He was a native of Bradford and loved it, and lived for its truest welfare. From early life he knew what it was to serve strenuously. At seven years and a half he was working in the mill as a half-timer. His father was a miner, and his mother a weaver, and he was ever ready to pay tribute to their worth. His homage to his mother, who became a widow early in his life, was beautiful. He loved to think of her as one who generally prayed first in the prayer-meeting. He gave the valuable site of land on which the new Sunday school at Dudley Hill is erected, in memory of his mother.



By sheer dint of sound character and devoted service he rose from humble rank to the highest honour his native city could confer upon him. All through his career his life was marked by lofty purpose. He had a big heart, full of tenderest sympathy, which opened wide to the trials and struggles of his fellows. His genial personality radiated sunshine wherever he went. No one feared to approach him. People felt they were in the presence of a friend to whom they could confidently tell their tale and be assured of warm sympathy.

It would be difficult to over-estimate his public service. For twenty-two years he gave faithful and diligent service on the Bradford City Council. His personal influence had wide ramifications. His advice was sought and valued by all. He could bring about reconciliation and pour oil upon troubled waters as few men could. After his death, an Alderman in the City Council, paying tribute to his worth and memory, said: "The peacemaker has gone from us." Little wonder when his public career was crowned with the Lord Mayoralty it was greeted with unmistakable delight and approval. It is no exaggeration to say that never was there a more popular choice; he so thoroughly belonged to all the people. To everybody he was not only Lord Mayor, but he was "Abram Peel." The week after he was made Lord Mayor, an old man who had known him all his life, remarked: "Well, Abram, I don't know what I will have to call thee now thou art t' Lord Mayor." With his genial, unaffected Yorkshire bonhomie, he replied: "Tha' mun still call me Abram." He was a big-hearted human, unspoiled by any dignity or success.

Though so delightfully and naturally genial, he was never vulgar or coarse. He ever upheld the high traditions and maintained in the best sense the befitting dignity of public life. He enshrined in himself the finest qualities of a high-souled public man. His unrivalled personal influence was notably shown during his Lord Mayoralty, when he raised over forty thousand pounds in three weeks for the

Lord Mayor's Fund for Soldiers' and Sailors' Dependants. It is questionable whether anyone else could have done it. There were those who were for subscribing fifty pounds or one hundred pounds who put their names down for two hundred pounds to five hundred pounds ere he left, and did not resent it when it was suggested that they were capable of giving a higher figure, so genuinely was his influence respected.

Wherein lay the secret of the charm of this choice personality? Without fear of contradiction, we can say that he derived the inspiration of his life from his faith and simple trust in Jesus Christ. Our church at Dudley Hill was the apple of his eye, and as the very gate of heaven. The primary duty and joy of his life was to gather there on the Sabbath with his family for the worship of God. The Church was the power-house of his life, and the fount of his inspiration. For thirty-five years he was superintendent of the Sunday school—since the early age of nineteen years. It was his great delight to be amongst the children and endeavour to bring to them some knowledge of the Bible and God. During the busy year of his Lord Mayoralty, when he could have been easily pardoned for absence, he never neglected his Sunday school duties. When not his Sunday for the desk, he took a class for some lad who was in the trenches. He showed a rare and unselfish devotion, and was an exemplar to all public men. The absorbing passion of his life was such that it could be said of him: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." His deeply religious character supplies the key to his successful public and business life. It was a benediction to hear him pray. His expectant face was an inspiration to the preacher. His kindly consideration was a joy to his fellow-worshippers. Primitive Methodism has produced few men of a richer and more varied type of character. He was a great soul and a simple Christian.

He was a Primitive Methodist to the backbone. Had he lived, undoubtedly he would have come to the Vice-Presidential chair. He respected all Churches, and helped them generously, but there was no Church like his own. When other Churches of venerable tradition offered him hospitality for his Lord Mayoral service he courteously declined. There was to him only one Church, which the finest cathedral could not have outbidden—the little church on the hill-top. We honour him for his love and loyalty.

How delightful to see him in the centre of some company, whether business friends, young people, or a company of elderly ladies. You could tell by the peals of merry laughter that he had been telling one of his inimitable stories. A more genial companion you could hardly imagine. He had a genius for friendship. His friendship with Alderman G.H. Robinson, J.P., his partner in business and bosom comrade, will rank in Bradford as classic, where they were known as "David and Jonathan." So perfect was this friendship that up to quite recent months, when trade reasons called for it, they did not have even a written agreement in their partnership.

Alderman Peel linked his home and church life by the closest ties, and in this was affectionately aided by his devoted wife, who is just as thoroughly interested in the service of the Church. With the example of such a father and mother it is impossible for the children to do other than love the Church. The eldest son has succeeded his father as treasurer at Dudley Hill, and also has become junior steward. The second son has become school superintendent.

Alderman Peel died on June 9th, 1919, at fifty-four years of age, leaving a widow and ten children to mourn his loss, but to rejoice in his life. The funeral service was attended by the Lord Mayor, the City Council, the magistrates, and numerous representatives of public bodies.

References

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