

Thomas Bailey (1819-1849)

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Scott

THOMAS BAILEY was born at Breccles, in Norfolk, on the 21st of December, 1819. His parents, occupying a small farm, allowed the things of this life to engross their time and care, to the exclusion of religion; and all their neighbours, except about one or two, were alike ignorant of vital godliness. However, though the deceased was thus unfavourably circumstanced in youth, yet at the age of eleven years he was much concerned about the salvation of his soul, and went, in company with another youth, to a Sabbath evening's service held in our chapel at Thropham. After the congregation had departed, the two youths were induced to stay outside the chapel, and listen to the singing of the following lines, by two of the members:

“When the pains of death are rending
This tabernacle, made of clay,
Bright angels then will be 'tending,
To bear my soul to endless day.”

These words so favourably impressed the mind of Thomas, that he was led to seek the Lord with all his heart; nor did he rest until he could sing,

“My God, I am thine! What a comfort divine!
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!”

Immediately he sought fellowship with the people of God; and it was cheering to witness the fervour of his devotion, and the earnestness with which he prayed for the salvation of his relatives and neighbours. His importunities availed with the Lord, for he was instrumental in the conversion of his mother. Shortly after his father allowed our people to preach in his house, which was at their service for some years, till certain of the “higher powers” caused it to be discontinued. They who had heard the word, and received it gladly, were then compelled to go to another village, to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. The opening of his father's house for preaching was a source of joy to Thomas, as it afforded him opportunities to become well acquainted with the preachers, for whom he had deep attachment. He grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was zealous for his cause.

At the age of fourteen he was a member of a planned praying company, next he was a joint exhorter with another person, and progressively he rose to the office of a local preacher, and filled it with diligence, acceptability, and success. It was not unusual for him to be planned every Sunday in a quarter of a year, sometimes having to travel the distance of twenty miles. Punctually fulfilling his appointments, he gained the confidence of his congregations; and though his ministrations were well attended, he was humble, faithful, and prayerful. His moral character was unimpeachable, his unaffected piety had won him general esteem, and the church regarded him as a promising youth. He realized the truth of the following lines:

“ 'T will save us from a thousand snares
To mind religion young,”

His attachment to the Primitive Methodist Connexion may be gathered from his following words: “When I was a wicked lad, they took me by the band, and taught me the plan of salvation; all I possess I obtained through their instrumentality, and I intend to live and die with them.”

He was called into the itinerancy by the Lynn circuit, in 1844, till which period his means for acquiring knowledge was limited, living as he did in an obscure country village. In his new sphere he sought to know

the works of great and good men; and having excellent natural abilities, his application and success in his study and the pulpit were highly creditable to him. His ministerial duties were faithfully performed; his zeal for the salvation of sinners was progressive; as a preacher he was much beloved; while he advanced in knowledge, he grew in grace, and the Lord made him successful in pointing sinners to the cross of Christ.

From the Lynn circuit he removed to Wangford, where he laboured one year with pleasure to himself and profit to the people.

His next station was Cambridge, where he found great facilities for studying; and during the three years of his residence here, he read many useful works, became well stored with grammatical knowledge, made considerable proficiency in the Latin and Greek languages, was a student of nature and of art, and could reason closely on a variety of subjects; yet he made no parade of his attainments, but consecrated them to the service of his Lord. Being affectionate and amiable, he was always a welcome visitor to the rich and poor, and to persons of all ages. When in the domestic circle he was not an idler, but endeavoured to find a subject suitable for the understandings of his friends, and adapted to interest and instruct them.

In the pulpit, while he defended the doctrines of the Gospel against the attacks of infidelity, and shivered the framework of hypocrisy and formalism, he did not neglect to preach repentance, faith, and holiness of heart, as necessary to the attainment of everlasting life. His enlightenment of the minds of his hearers did not set aside powerful applications of Scripture truths to their consciences.

Being sympathetic, he never came in contact with the poor and afflicted without making some effort to mitigate their sufferings and soothe their sorrows. For nearly twelve months, while in this circuit, his colleague, brother Chapman, was unable to labour, through affliction; and during the whole of this period, brother Bailey supplied the week-night appointments, walking many hundreds of miles, and enduring much fatigue, in order to oblige his friend and the circuit. Often was he weeping at the bedside of brother Chapman, and praying that God would, for the sake of his family and the church, restore his health; and brother Chapman was constrained to say, "He was the best colleague I ever had." His piety was deep and unwavering; wherever his lot was cast, he read the Scriptures, sought by daily example to enforce those truths which he taught from the pulpit, and adopted various plans to increase the prosperity of Zion. In short, it was the great business of his life

"To glorify his God below,
And find his way to heaven."

Mr. J. Read, of Cambridge, says, "Brother Bailey was a person for whom I entertained the deepest respect. His labours were constant and wisely directed, his habits regular, and his love was lasting. Many hours have we spent in sweet converse beside my fire; and of the numerous subjects about which we conversed he had a general knowledge and an instructive method of stating them to others. He was remarkably punctual and persevering: I am not aware that he neglected a single appointment while in our circuit. His piety was deep, and he was never ashamed of his profession. Many of the Psalms he had committed to memory, and he usually recited them after his meals. Hundreds of prayers did he offer up in my house, and many tears did he shed, because the work of God did not prosper so much as he wished. Within our circuit there are some seals to his ministry, that will, no doubt, be his crown of rejoicing in glory."

By the Conference of 1849 he was stationed for the Upwell circuit; and the friends cordially received him, and hoped that his ministrations would be generally useful. This "fenny district was not so congenial to his mind as the classic city;" hence it was for a while difficult to reconcile himself to his new scene of labour. After he had seen the majority of the friends, and satisfied himself that they had much moral worth, his

attachment to them became strong, and he strove with all his might to do them good. A little more than three months had elapsed, when, as he was going to an appointment, he fell into a ditch, and then conducted a public service in his wet clothes: thus was laid the foundation of his death-illness. For ten days after the incident had occurred he continued his labours without complaining much. On October 28th he closed a week's protracted services, which he had conducted at Downham; and the day will be long remembered by those who were present to participate in the Divine baptism which was vouchsafed. While he related his Christian experience in the evening the glory of the Lord seemed to pervade every heart; and before the service closed several persons cried for mercy, and two obtained the forgiveness of their sins. He went from this service to his couch, and was immediately seized with the scarlet fever. At first we apprehended no danger; but on the second day his throat was so much swollen, that he could scarcely speak; yet his appointments were uppermost in his mind. Under his intense sufferings he exercised all the graces of Christianity, and taught us how to die. His faith, patience, meekness, peace, joy, and love, abounded. When I asked him if he thought he should recover, he said, "I do not know; I shall make myself quite easy about it, and calmly submit to the will of Heaven. Respecting the eternal future, I have no fearful apprehensions, but have full confidence in that Gospel which I have preached." Shortly, fever of the brain rendered him delirious; but on November 14th he was quite sensible, and exceedingly happy. Being reminded that many prayers were sent to the throne of grace for him, he burst into tears, and exclaimed, "What, for me? what, for me? - numerous prayers for me? Praise God! Hallelujah! How happy I am! how happy I am! God is with me! Christ is here ! My soul! my soul! how full - how full it is! Glory to God! I have had a mighty conflict; but God is with me; Christ is with me; the battle is the Lord's; my soul is full of glory; I am the Lord's; all is well." The Divine presence seemed to fill the room during the whole of the evening; and this we regarded as an answer to the many prayers that had ascended to heaven. On the night of November 15th, 1849, he fell asleep, in the thirtieth year of his age, and the sixth of his itinerancy. Asleep, - yes,

"Asleep in Jesus! blessed sleep!
From which none ever wake to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes."

May it be our happiness, and that of his sorrowing family (three of whom are in church fellowship with us), to meet him

"Where our best friends and kindred dwell,
And God the Saviour reigns."

References

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