

## **Rev. John Graham**

### **Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by L.J. Harvey**

THE late Rev. John Graham was born at Giggleswick, near Settle, Yorkshire, in 1799, and joined the great majority, from Congleton, Cheshire, February 19, 1885, having reached the advanced age of eighty-six. When quite an infant he was left fatherless. As a consequence, his widowed mother had daily to go to work to obtain the necessaries of life for herself and child. She eventually married again, and our friend's stepfather was a steady, honest, industrious man, but neither he nor his wife feared God. During his infancy, John was much neglected, and at the early age of seven years he commenced toiling for his bread. As will be readily supposed, his secular, moral, and religious education was little attended to, and he was allowed to grow up very much as he listed, having little restraint or counsel. His life was often in peril, and on two occasions he narrowly escaped drowning. During his lad-hood he formed associations with wicked and reckless youths, which well nigh proved his ruin. This was hindered by his removal to another town.

In the year 1821 we find him residing in Blackburn. Here he heard some of the notable pioneer Primitive Methodist missionaries. Among others he listened to the Revs. Thomas Batty, George Tindal, and William Brining (men who were giants in their day), preach the unsearchable riches of Christ in the open air. He felt the force of Divine truth, so clearly and powerfully enunciated by these men of God. In deep distress of soul he went to a class-meeting, where he was shown the way of life more fully, and seeing Christ bearing his sins in His own body, he believed and lived. His new-born joy was very rapturous; he made the house ring with shouts of gladness and praise. Henceforth he lived unto the Lord. There was nothing vague or uncertain in his experience, he knew in whom he had believed.

Such were his moral courage and zeal for the Lord of hosts, that the following Sunday he stood up in the open air and preached to a number of his old companions from 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee.' Seven of his friends became Christians; they, with his wife and himself, formed a class, which regularly met in his house, and of which he was the leader. His name soon appeared on the plan as a local preacher, and when Blackburn was made the head of a circuit Mr. Graham was appointed the steward. The minister who was travelling in the Blackburn Circuit in the year 1825 resigned, and withdrew from the Connexion. The quarterly meeting, of which Hugh Bourne was a member, requested our old friend to act in the capacity of a travelling preacher until the ensuing Conference, promising him twelve shillings per week, if so much came in, for the support of himself and Mrs. Graham. Believing the call was from God, as well as from his brethren, he heeded it, and resolved to leave all his worldly prospects for Christ and His service. The pleasure of the Lord prospered in his hands, for he persuaded many to forsake their evil ways and live.

Having completed the year, and given full proof of his ministry, he was next appointed to the Isle of Man. He opened his commission at Douglas on July 2, 1826. While here, with true

apostolic zeal he did much real mission work. He took the gospel into villages where heretofore it had not been preached, and almost throughout the island his voice was heard making known the love of God, or warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Sometimes the services were conducted in cottages, often in barns, but most frequently out of doors. At one place many of the worst of characters were saved, and sixty of them formed into a society. Mr. Graham waited on the estate agent, and solicited a site for a chapel. The gentleman readily granted his request, and acknowledged how much the morals and habits of the people had improved since the cause had been formed.

The missionary then begged stone, and when the walls were up, he went to the same source and sought timber for the roof. The agent said, 'If you will convert Tom the waggoner (who was a big, strong man, and a very desperate character), you shall have all the timber you need.' The preacher agreed that the waggoner should be converted, for he took the words of our Lord as being literally true, viz., Mark xi. 24, 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' Special prayer was offered for 'Tom's' conversion. The following Sunday he was a member of the congregation. Mr. Graham preached a pointed and powerful sermon. Tom was smitten with conviction, and in the prayer meeting was made a new man. He became an exemplary Christian, was a useful local preacher for many years, and died in the faith. His master witnessed his genuine piety, gave the timber for God's house, and the chapel was opened free of debt.

While Mr. Graham stayed on the island he often visited the prisoners in Castletown Gaol, and was the means of much spiritual blessing to many of them. He was instant in season and out of season. During his term here he went to Ireland, and for several months toiled hard and endured much, but not without seeing the salvation of God. He subsequently travelled in the following circuits:—Silsden, Bradwell, Stockport, Belper, Chesterfield, Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Tunstall, Brierley Hill, Birmingham, Lichfield, Ramsor, Cwm, Macclesfield, Sandbach, Dawley, Congleton, Bromsgrove, Dudley, and Darlaston. It is said, and we believe truly, that he never reported a decrease, but year by year, in circuit after circuit, he rejoiced over additions being made to the churches over which he had the supervision. In Shrewsbury he met with Philip Pugh, and seeing the making of a great man in him, took him by the hand, and, though much opposed by men of little sympathy with the promising youth, sent him into the itinerancy.

In 1835 he was stationed to Ludlow. At that time the circuit was very weak and low, but, undismayed, he, with his colleagues, wrought and prayed, and wondrous blessing came. Some of the most notorious sinners were converted, and became valiant soldiers in Christ's army. After labouring here five years he reported eight new chapels built, and an increase in the membership of 388. In the Sandbach Circuit also he was eminently successful. The quarter prior to his going there, the total circuit income was less than five pounds, and all the interests of the station were equally low, but under his judicious guidance and indefatigable labours, the wilderness blossomed as the rose. Three chapels and two schoolrooms were erected, the debts on all the other chapels reduced, and at the close of

his five years there, he left 118 more members than there were when he went, and a substantial balance in the hands of the circuit steward.

Space forbids our following him into all his stations, and giving detailed account of his forty years' labour in town and country. Few men were more honoured than he in the soul-saving work. The aggregate increase of members on his circuits, so far as can be ascertained, was 1,797. In most of the circuits where he spent the major part of his ministerial career, the journeys were very long and fatiguing, homes often poor and fare scanty, difficulties formidable, trials numerous, sorrows great, and enemies both without and within the church many and bitter, but he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. Sometimes having no place to lay his head, he would walk the lanes all night, and when completely worn out he has lain under a hay-stack and slept. All honour to men who would do and dare and suffer what he and others did for the glory of God and the good of their fellows. After retiring from the full ministry, he laboured some years as an active superannuated minister, and rendered valuable service in several circuits.

Our now sainted father in Israel was a hard worker. He was always devising or carrying out some scheme for the well-being of the churches under his care. He could not rest and be thankful; he believed this life was the scene of action, not an harbour for repose. The walking, visiting, preaching, collecting, and praying he did are simply marvellous. He had a wondrously strong physical constitution, and great powers of endurance, otherwise he would have broken down long before he did.

His piety was unquestionable, and of a most pronounced type. He never put his candle under a bushel. He spent much time with God in secret, and was mighty in public prayer. He thoroughly believed the great verities of God's word, and out of the fulness of his heart he preached the Christ he so much loved and so faithfully served.

He was a splendid open-air man, having a stentorian voice and a good share of tact. Few men could lead a camp-meeting procession better than he. He was never seen to better advantage than when officiating under heaven's bright blue. How much our denomination and the world owe to him and men of kindred spirit, God only knows.

Since his marriage to her who nursed him in his last illness, and smoothed his path down to the grave, he lived in Congleton, So long as his health allowed, he did all he could for Zion's weal, but for many months before his decease he could do little but stay at home and pray. His strong frame gradually gave way, until it quietly succumbed to death. During his feebleness and pain, he found God true to His word and Christ very precious. He sometimes would talk of his labours and sufferings, but would say, 'I am not relying on these for salvation. All my hope is in the blood of Jesus.'

Bronchitis and general decay of nature brought his earthly house down to the dust. Shortly before he joined the white-robed multitude, he was heard to say—

‘Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.’

He then desired his wife (who has been a local preacher and class-leader for many years), to bring some bread and wine that they may have the sacrament together once more. Having done so, while his room was full of heaven, he closed his eyes, and ‘was not, for God took him,’

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1885/483