

Rev. Joseph Gibson

Transcription of the obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. T Swallow

REV. JOSEPH GIBSON.
BY REV. T. SWALLOW.

“Go to the grave,—at noon from labour cease;
Rest on thy sheaves, thy harvest task is done;
Come from the heart of battle, and in peace,
Soldier, go home,—with thee the fight is won.”

Our duty, in reference to the pious dead, does not terminate in sorrowing because of their removal from earth. It behoves us to place on permanent record their godly lives, to emulate their holy zeal, and in all things to follow them as far as they followed Christ. God’s word declares, “The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” Hence, the pages of our Magazines will transmit the memory of the just, not only to those who now live, but also to future generations. Already the history of our own community has furnished thousands of bright examples of holy living and of holy dying. Amidst the honoured ranks of Primitive Methodism have been found those who dared to be singular in the Saviour’s cause. In valiant combat they faced the common foe in the high places of the field, and having fought a good fight and kept the faith, finished their course with joy. Their very names are redolent of sweetest fragrance, and will be for many days to come. To this “cloud of witnesses” another is now to be added. In the vineyard of the Lord his term of service, though comparatively short, was eminently happy and useful. He faithfully served his generation according to the will of God, and has early been called to receive a full reward.

JOSEPH GIBSON was born at Brotherlee, Weardale, in the county of Durham, on the 6th of January, 1828. He remembered his Creator in the days of his youth, and when about seventeen years of age was created anew in Christ Jesus. The particulars of this great change, and some of its important results, are thus described by his brother William, in a letter to Mrs. Gibson:—
“Having had an interview with Mr. Ralph Lee, I find that my deceased brother was converted in the month of December, 1844, under rather remarkable circumstances. Having been at the penitents’ form on the Sabbath evening, but having obtained no satisfactory relief, he struggled on until the following day; and while at work down the slit shaft, nearly seventy fathoms below the surface of the earth, he obtained the pardon of his sins, and was enabled to rejoice in God as his reconciled Father.”

In “An Essay on the Atonement,” published by the subject of this memoir, and which will well repay a re-perusal, we meet with the following appropriate passage:—“What, then, are the fruits of the opposite creed, which teaches that we have redemption through the blood of Christ? Has it ever led souls to abhor sin, cleave to holiness, and rejoice with joy unspeakable? Ten thousand undeniable cases proclaim, Yes. Perhaps we may be permitted to state, that we never can forget the happy hour when we passed from deepest distress of soul, which had lasted, with less or greater intensity for years, into inexpressible bliss, and, for weeks, were full of holy joy and praise both day and night. This glorious change was effected by simply believing that Jesus died to save sinners. Should this statement excite proud smiles, false inferences, or even contemptuous sneers from some, we heed them not; we are not ashamed to testify of the grace of God. Amid them all the fact remains unmoved and immovable,—

‘Soon as my all I ventured
On the atoning blood,
His Holy Spirit entered,
And I was born of God’ ”

In commencing his religious career this young disciple met with discouragement and opposition; but, having counted the cost, he held on his way, and waxed stronger and stronger in the Lord. Desiring to enjoy the communion of saints, and feeling his obligations to the Primitive Methodists, he said practically, “This people shall be my people, and their God my God.” The love of Christ now constrained him, and prompted the eager inquiry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Ere long the response was given, and in due time he began to preach that gospel, which had been made the power of God to his own salvation.

In the letter before quoted, the writer says:— “After continuing as a private member for three years, my brother became a local preacher. The first indication of his future usefulness was at Frosterley, in an open air service held on the station house flags. While preaching from the text, ‘So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,’ the convincing power came down, and three souls were saved. On another occasion, at Westgate, the Spirit again attended the word; there was a mighty move among the people, and several cried for mercy. The influence was so powerful, that Joseph came out of the pulpit, went up the gallery stairs, and exclaimed, ‘We have the victory!’ About the same time, in other instances, his labours were signally owned of God. From the first he was remarkable for prayer, sometimes spending nearly the whole night upon his knees wrestling with the Almighty.”

It soon became evident that our beloved friend possessed those gifts and graces, which would qualify him for the most important, and though arduous, yet honourable sphere of labour, the church has to offer to those who are called, and chosen, and faithful. At the Conference of 1852 he entered upon our itinerant work, and travelled successively in the following stations:— Tadcaster, Driffield, Hornsea branch, Hull 2nd, Hull 1st, North Cave, Liverpool 1st and Liverpool 3rd. What were his views and feelings, his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows, his conflicts and triumphs, during those eventful years of devoted service and persevering toil,—we may learn, to some extent, from statements contained in a note-book, and written by his own hand. The first entry is:—

“1854. Sunday, January 22nd.— Preached at East Luton (Driffield circuit) in the morning; at West Luton in the afternoon; and at Weaverthorpe at night. In the prayer-meeting two souls were converted.”

“Wednesday, April 25th.— This being the day appointed by Government for humiliation and prayer, on account of the war with Russia, we had a prayer-meeting at six o’clock and preaching at nine ; after which I went to Wetwang, processioned through the street, delivered an exhortation, and preached in the chapel to a good congregation. After this went to Tibthorpe, sung through the street, obtained a house for a prayer-meeting, and a very powerful one we had. On reaching home I felt rather fatigued, having walked twelve miles during the day, preached three times, delivered three exhortations, attended four prayer-meetings, and processioned two villages.”

“Sunday, July. 2nd.— Attended Fimber camp-meeting. Fine day, powerful preaching and praying. Lovefeast crowded, though the barn was large; rapid and good speaking. Twelve souls saved in the prayer- meeting after.”

“Tuesday, Nov. 21st. — Visited ten families, and preached at Dalton. Got to a new home, a good one. Left my old home because the people had gone to a public house. They were very much offended that I would not continue with them; but I shall not make a regular home at one of the devil’s synagogues!”

Mr. Gibson was a total abstainer for many years, and a zealous advocate of the temperance cause. Would that all the ministers and members of our churches were the same.

“1856. March.— The year omitted is in my journal for annual list. The following is a summary of my labours since I began to travel. Seen converted, 249; families visited, 7,468; sermons preached, 1,563; speeches delivered, 102; miles travelled, 7,422.”

July 3rd.— I was this day united in marriage with Miss Mary Hebden, of Wistow, near Selby. The day was fine, company piously cheerful which tended to make the occasion a joyful one. But the main source of joy was the firm belief that I was joined to one who would be a true help-mate in the great work—one whose love to Primitive Methodism has been evidenced by years of membership and constant zeal for its support—one of industrious habits and unquestioned piety. May our union lead to closer union with Christ. Thou, who readest all hearts, knowest I want above all to please thee,—to glory in the cross, and turn sinners to Christ. Lord, help us both to live in holiness. Amen.”

“July 4th. —Set out for father’s, where, after a long journey, we safely arrived. Glad to find my parent in good health, and very joyful in the Lord. Two years had rolled away since I had visited home, during which important changes had taken place, grand and solemn. One brother had got converted, —a fine youth nineteen years old. For months he laboured, and promised fair for being a very superior man. But, alas! by sickness and death he was removed from the church militant. How mysterious the ways of our great Father! We sorrow, but not without resignation and hope. His end was triumphant. Dear Ralph, I shall meet thee, and Thomas, and mother, in a brighter clime—region of eternal day.”

“December 31st. —Attended the watch-night service at Leven (Hornsea station). Solemn season. Lord, help me to put on the whole armour of God. Time is going; and I tremble to think how little is getting done,—how few souls saved, how little information obtained. I begin to think I am passing through the world, and gathering little of any sort of useful knowledge. I seem to walk through fields of blooming flowers, and only pick up a very scanty few of faded ones. Talk about being saved by good works! I am lost for ever, but for Jesus. The views I have recently had of the holiness of God’s law, and my own weakness, shut out all hope but from Calvary. To the cross I tremblingly cling, assured there is salvation nowhere else.”

“1857. February 22nd. —Leven round. Felt the Lord present during the week. Glad to find this round prospering, and especially that souls are being saved at Leven. Oh, to be filled with the Spirit and deep travail for souls.”

“May 4th. —At the district meeting at Swinefleet. A very good one. Stationed for Hull 2nd. With trembling I think of it—feel my inability for such a weighty station; but God will be my helper, I believe.”

“July 5th. —Left Hornsea last Thursday, after being there two years, very comfortable. Had an increase of 30 members, two new chapels, and finances much improved. All glory to my heavenly Father.”

“July 19th. — Commenced my labours in Hull; was graciously assisted in the large chapel; two souls converted. Lord, help me to live in God.”

“1858. March 22nd. —This day our Quarterly Meeting was held. Good attendance—peaceable—39 increase for the year. Mr. Petty and myself invited to stay again.”

“1859, January 3rd.—I feel grateful to Almighty God, the giver of all good, for sparing me to enter upon another year. Last year was one of uninterrupted health, incessant labour, much spiritual joy, and an encouraging amount of success. O Lord, thou hast been my helper, my consolation. When I survey thy past dealings towards unworthy me, I am filled with wonder and love. Oh, my Father, at the commencement of this year I resolve, in Christ’s name, and depending on thy grace, to re-dedicate myself to thy service. Henceforth may all my power be employed for thee—my will entirely and constantly subjected to thine.”

“July 4th. —Left Hull for Weardale. I have spent two comfortable years in my last circuit; received many favours from man and blessings from God. On the 17th instant preached Westgate school sermons; in the evening, out of doors, to a large congregation, double the number that the chapel can contain. On the following Monday left for Hull 1st circuit, where I arrived safely. Lord, help. Amen.”

“1860. March 19th. —Our Quarterly Meeting was held at Beverley. Good increase, 66; invited to stay again. During the week long round; visited many families, had much temptation, saw some good done.”

“Dec. 9th. —At home with a dying wife. A week never to be forgotten. On the 17th of this month she departed this life ; unspeakable loss!”

“1861. January 6th. —This year opens upon me a widower, in much distress. Lord, help.”

“April 26th.—At North Cave. A good day. On Wednesday the foundation stone of our chapel at Broomfleet was laid. Crowds of people attended, and the Mayor of Hull presided.”

1862. July 18th.—Removed to Liverpool circuit. Had a good day on Sunday. On the 27th we held the camp-meeting, which was very good.”

“Nov. 21st.—On this day I was united in marriage with Miss Hewson, of Tetney, Lincolnshire, and hope this is of the Lord.”

“1863. March 23rd.—Here ends another connexional year. May the Lord pardon my numerous shortcomings, make me grateful for innumerable mercies, and give me grace to labour, if spared, with greater success during the ensuing year.”

“Nov. 1st.—Preached at Richmond hall and Benledi Street. During the week I have witnessed the salvation of five precious souls.”

“1864, May 29th.—Called to Weardale, on account of my father’s death. He closed this mortal life on the 28th, in his sixty-third year. O Lord, help me to live in readiness.”

“1865. July 30th.—At home this Sabbath, watching over a sick child. —Our dear (and only) child died on the 4th of August.”

The above transcript is the last, of general interest, found in the notebook. And surely the preceding extracts reveal the inner life of a truly spiritual man; while, at the same time, they present to our admiring view one who did the work of an evangelist, and was in labours more abundant.

Surveying, in their various aspects, the Christian course and character of our esteemed brother, first and foremost may be noticed, his personal piety. This was genuine as well as deep, and was seen in his conversation and conduct. While he could be cheerful, and enjoy himself in the social circle, he was not given to sinful trifling or unbecoming levity. Indeed, as many can testify, his general demeanour, whether in public or private, was marked, in an unusual degree, by seriousness and gravity. In his choice of friends he was somewhat select; but when his friendship was once formed, it was affectionate, confiding, and lasting. In biblical knowledge and general literature his attainments were highly creditable to his diligent application and perseverance. He was a keen observer, a close student; and the mental power which he evidently possessed enabled him to think deeply and comprehensively on any subject he considered worthy of serious notice or practical regard. His attachment to Primitive Methodism—to its doctrines, its polity, its ministers, its people, was strong and increasing. The Christian ministry was a work he loved with a love that was ardent, sometimes even impassioned. He once said to the writer, “I should like to labour in the itinerancy fifty years.” Yes, it was in his heart to do so; but for reasons at present unknown to us, it has been otherwise ordained. His pulpit discourses, as well as platform addresses, bespoke previous thought, careful preparation, and were calculated to edify the saint, and on some occasions especially to alarm the sinner. The manner of his address was thought by some to be rather stern and severe; but under the exterior of that seeming sternness, there existed it is believed, a tender pity, a yearning compassion, a longing desire for the salvation of his hearers. To say that he had his failings, is only to say he was not absolutely perfect. Nevertheless, taking him for all in all, it may safely be affirmed, he was an excellent man, a good Christian, a faithful minister, who, as he went in and out before the people, seemed to think, speak, and act, as though the following admonitory words of the great Master were ever present to his mind; “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.”

What has just been stated was illustrated and confirmed, in a remarkable degree, only a very short time before his lamented death. He and the writer were appointed as missionary deputation to the Douglas circuit. During that week of services we were in close converse on the inner spiritual life; the duties, requirements, encouragements, and discouragements of the Christian ministry; the wants of the church, and the woes of the world; together with other matters of a kindred and congenial nature. The particulars of those conversations may not here be written; but they are inscribed on one memory not soon to be effaced. Suffice it to say, that if our departed brother had

known that week's work was the last of the kind in which he was to engage; if he had seen clear prospect the solemn change so soon to take place,—he could hardly have been more spiritually minded, weighty, and effective, than on each occasion he was found to be.

On the 8th of October he preached the anniversary sermons of our chapel at Tunstall. The Rev. James Pritchard states that “The afternoon subject was the prodigal son; the evening one, the love of God to fallen humanity. Our friends say the discourses were very impressive and instructive. The preacher was very solemn as he urged all his hearers think about their future destiny. On Monday morning he walked to Mow Cop, to see the place where the first English camp meeting was held. I was in Leicestershire at the time of his visit to Tunstall, and therefore had not the pleasure of being in his company. The news of his death created a great sensation here, this being the place where he spent his last Sabbath on earth.”

For several years Mr. Gibson was subject to severe bilious attacks, which sometimes produced great prostration and debility. Hence it was no wonder that his friends felt some anxiety in reference to his health and life, though none were at all prepared for what occurred on Friday, October 13th last. In the afternoon of that day, in company with George Pennell, Esq., he attended at an attorney's office in the town, to take his part in completing the purchase of a small chapel, since added to the circuit. On returning home he appeared cheerful. After tea, while reclining on the sofa, he suddenly exclaimed, addressing the servant, “Where's Elizabeth?” He spoke no more. In a moment his beloved wife was by his side. The doctor was called in; the Revs. T.H. Hunt and D. Maylott were also speedily present. But, notwithstanding medical aid, and every affectionate attention, in the course of one short hour he breathed his last. Thus died the Rev. Joseph Gibson, in the thirty-eighth year of his age, and the fourteenth year of his itinerant ministry. But his was more like a translation than death. Truly may it be said of him, as it was said of Enoch of old, who walked with God—“He was not, for God took him.” One hour still in the body, the next hour absent from the body, and present with the Lord. No sons of holy triumph, no shout of final victory escaped his lips. At this we repine not, for assuredly in that solemn moment which marked his exit from time to eternity, a voice—though not his—was heard! methinks we hear it now; it comes from heaven, and says, “Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

It was found that the immediate cause of death was an effusion of blood upon the brain. The interment took place on Monday afternoon, the 16th, at Anfield Park Cemetery, in the presence of a great multitude of sorrowing friends and ministers from the Liverpool and surrounding circuits. The burial service was read by the writer of these pages. In the cemetery chapel Mr. Pennell delivered a very suitable address, after which the Rev. G. Stansfield offered a most impressive prayer. On Sabbath evening, October 29th, the funeral sermon was preached in Richmond hall. The Liverpool Mercury stated that upwards of 2,000 persons were present. The hall could not contain so large a number; it was, however, densely filled in every part. The text chosen for the occasion was Job xix. 23—27. The whole service was solemn, as well as deeply affecting, and will not soon be forgotten. Funeral sermons have been preached in other circuits, where the deceased was well known and much loved. The following communications, kindly and promptly sent, were read at the conclusion of the sermon at Richmond hall. They are well worthy of a place in this memoir, and will be perused with mournful yet pleasing interest.

The Rev. William Whitby, of Grimsby, thus writes:—

“It was my happiness to travel with my late dear friend and brother, Joseph Gibson, in the Hull first circuit, when a valuable friendship was commenced, which, I am proud to say, continued to the day of his death. I have been thinking of several facts illustrative of certain traits in his religious and ministerial character. On one occasion, he and I, and the late Rev. W. Lonsdale, were walking between North and South Cave, on a missionary tour, when the conversation turned upon the subject of praying to God to save sinners. I well remember brother Gibson's manner and words. Stopping suddenly, and looking both of us full in the face, he said, ‘Now I'll tell you my experience, I was engaged holding protracted meetings at North Cave recently. The services were not productive of Divine results, and I resolved to spend an afternoon in prayer. I was carrying out my resolution, when, in the midst of my wrestling, the thought occurred— but is not God willing? Does he want me to pray him into a willingness? Why, I must be wrong, I ought to believe more. With this thought I at once stopped praying, arose from my knees, and intended engaging in

something else. Still I did not feel right about ceasing to pray, and I stood and began to think about the matter; till at last I said to myself, Well, prayer cannot be wrong, and what cannot be wrong, I know must be right, so I fell again upon my knees and wrestled, and prevailed.'

"Permit me to say that the earnest and unctuous way in which this was spoken, and the beautiful sentiment it contained, strangely affected me. I felt my heart to warm towards the man, and my eyes to moisten, while brother Lonsdale lifted up his hands and exclaimed, 'What a great man,' and turning to me, he whispered, 'He is a Christian philosopher.' I wish you much Divine help on Sunday night. Spare not. You cannot say too many-good things about my dear brother."

The Rev. Thomas Hindley says:— "My knowledge of the late Rev. J. Gibson is of comparatively recent date, but the impressions produced upon my mind are of a most favourable kind. I have had the privilege of being with him at district and other meetings, as well as in the private circle. In many respects he was a man after my own heart. I admired him as an earnest student, a faithful preacher, a devoted Christian, and a true friend. In all his transactions he was as transparent as a mirror. I can never forget the kindness he evinced towards me on and after my arrival at Birkenhead. As is well known, I had been laid up nearly five months by severe affliction, and was, at the time of my coming, very feeble indeed. He interested himself in various ways to facilitate my recovery, and, strange to say, he is gone, and I am still left behind. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! He fell suddenly, but I have no doubt he fell safely."

The Rev. Charles Kendall, of Hull, remarks:—

"The intelligence of brother Gibson's death fell with awful suddenness upon us here. I was in Jarratt street chapel on the Sunday morning, and when I told the congregation many were visibly and deeply affected. The period of my acquaintance with our deceased friend was somewhat brief, and I was not favoured with having him for a colleague. Before I knew him I had heard many things said of him to his credit, especially of his studious habits, his earnestness, and spirituality of mind. I always found him very interesting as a companion, ever disposed to converse on matters of connexional interest, and on questions which occupy the thinking minds of our countrymen; and especially was he ever disposed to converse on the experimental things of God. He could examine a subject in its various bearings, readily detecting what was false and dangerous. He had great pleasure in reading the productions of master minds, which he found to interest, stimulate, and strengthen his own. But his strength of character lay in his devotion to the Saviour, and the work of the ministry. He was no trimmer nor trifler, he was consecrated to the highest achievements of our being. Evidently he had graduated in the school of experimental piety. We do not suppose that his sermons were specimens of finished composition, or that his rhetoric and emphasis were always harmonious, but his discourses were replete with the fundamental verities of the Gospel. He was a man of wrestling prayer, and was anxious for the spiritual safety of those to whom he ministered. He laboured twice in this town, once in each circuit, and in both was much esteemed on account of his many excellences. Some who knew him well predicted for him an influential future. But the future to us dying ones is veiled. We know not what may be on the morrow. I deeply sympathise with his young and pious widow, and the afflicted circuit. May our gracious God help and strengthen them."

The following is from the pen of the Rev. J. Macpherson, of Manchester: "I need scarcely say how much we all were surprised and afflicted by the sad intelligence of the sudden and unexpected death of our dear departed brother, Joseph Gibson. I very much sympathise with his widow, and pray that, while she feels the desolation of bereavement sweeping over her spirit, she may be divinely enabled to stay herself upon the ever-living God; and that he will impart unto her that comfort she requires in this 'time of need.' Every expression of human sympathy will doubtless be a solace to her deep heart-sorrow; but no sympathy, except that which is from above, can assuage the pang which has pierced her soul.

"Not having such systematic instruction and vigorous training as are provided for candidates for the ministry in many other denominations, our ministers enter upon their arduous duties under serious disadvantages. They are like raw recruits called into the thick of a hot engagement, to fight alongside a disciplined and veteran corps, and against a powerful and well-disciplined army. If they come off triumphantly, it speaks well for their courage and patriotism.

“Brother J. Gibson was called into our ministerial ranks, and required to engage in the moral conflicts of the Gospel, under such disadvantages. He, however, rose above them, and gained for himself an honourable name and position among his brethren in the ministry, and the cordial affection of the people among whom he laboured. His success is no argument in favour of his disadvantages, but it does illustrate the piety and energy of the man. What connection there is between his mental struggles for pulpit power and efficiency—and that fatal stroke which has so mysteriously levelled him with the dust—I cannot tell. But many an individual has sunk under difficulties beyond his power to master, who would have succeeded, had his difficulties been reduced by a little timely aid. Thank God! there is now a prospect of such aid being rendered to young men offering themselves for our ministry.

“Brother Gibson had in him the materials of an able man. The acquisition of knowledge was to him a sufficient compensation for the previous toil it behoved him to perform. He loved knowledge for its own sake; but he equally loved to communicate it. Hence he cheerfully laboured as a co-tutor of probationers in this district, and I believe his labours were as gladly received as they were willingly performed. His removal from us has occasioned a gap in our ranks, which may not very soon be filled.

“May this solemn visitation of Divine Providence be sanctified to our spiritual benefit; and, like the wise virgins, may we ultimately be found ready to meet the Bridegroom—and waiting to hear his voice.”

The Rev. John Petty, of York, to whom the deceased was greatly attached, writes as follows: “It was my privilege to have the late Mr. Gibson for a colleague, first in Hull Second Circuit, next in Hull First Circuit; and it is simple justice to his memory to state that I found him to be a kind, faithful, and valuable colleague. He then enjoyed excellent health, had apparently a strong constitution, and possessed a strong and ardent mind, and he devoted all his energies, bodily and mental, to the great work in which he was engaged. He studied to show himself approved unto God; a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Earnest application to mental culture was connected with much private devotion, diligent pastoral visiting, and the other active duties of his office. His instructive and faithful preaching, his powerful prayers, his unquestionable integrity, his pious and intelligent conversation, enabled him to accomplish much solid good, and to exert a very salutary influence upon the societies. He was then fast rising to eminence in our ministry, and bade fair to occupy a very prominent position in the denomination. His removal to Liverpool was regarded as a heavy loss to Hull district. Those, however, who regretted his loss, entertained a confident expectation that he would render important service to the societies in the large town to which he was appointed, and to the populous district to which it belongs. In one respect, however, their expectations have been cut off; his useful course has been much shorter than they anticipated: his sun went down while it was yet noon; he has departed in the prime of life, in the vigour of his days.

Farewell! brother beloved. We could fain have wished thy stay longer on earth, yet dare not murmur at the mysterious dispensation which has called thee away. We purpose, by grace divine, to follow thee—and many other loved ones, “who, through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Yet a little while, and we shall meet thee again; meet thee in our Father’s house—where are many mansions—and where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying—neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed. away.”

References

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