

Rev. Jonathan Thomas Harrison

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Thomas Swindell

JONATHAN THOMAS HARRISON was born at Holm Hale, in the county of Norfolk, March 3rd, 1839. His parents are members of our Connexion, and have been for many years. His feet were early taught the way to the house of God, and strict morality marked his conduct. His father says, "he never knew him swear an oath, tell an untruth, nor say a bad word." He was also very particular in his choice of companions, and always set his face against anything which he considered wrong or dishonourable. But morality is not religion; nor did he experience the power of the Holy Spirit to renew his moral nature until he had attained the seventeenth year of his age; but this he then experienced, under the following circumstances.

In the summer of 1856, Mr. George Chapman, local preacher, preached in the open air at Holm Hale, and our departed brother was among his hearers. The word reached his heart, and he began to think seriously about his state as an unsaved sinner. Soon after that, he heard the Rev. John Moore preach from "What must I do to be saved?" Under that sermon he learned the way of salvation, and at once decided to seek the blessing, and in a day or two, while working in one of his father's fields, he believed with his heart on the Lord Jesus Christ, and was filled with peace and love. God was his reconciled Father, and henceforth he lived in the daily enjoyment of reconciliation with him.

Exemplifying the power of divine truth in his general deportment, diligently attending the ordinances of grace, and manifesting capabilities for public usefulness, the officials of his station (Swaffham) put his name on the preachers' plan. It was about this time—July, 1858—that I became acquainted with him, and judging him a youth of promise, I encouraged him in the work of publishing to sinners "what a Saviour he had found." Satisfactorily passing through the usual gradation of a probationer, his name appeared on the list of accredited local preachers, and in this honourable capacity he laboured as one who felt concerned to magnify his office. He read and studied to provide acceptable and instructive matter for his congregations, regularly fulfilled his appointments, and realized such encouragements as induced him to persevere in holding forth the word of life. In the June quarter of 1859, the Swaffham Station received an application for him to go out to travel, under the direction of the General Missionary Committee. He was fully and carefully examined, the result of which was a unanimous recommendation of him for the ministry. He was accepted; but immediately upon the General Missionary Committee's acceptance of him, he was advised to relinquish the idea of entering the regular ministry, as in all probability his physical strength would not be equal to the amount of labour which would be required of him.

Acting on the counsel of his advisers, arrangements were made for his going to reside with the late Mr. William Thoday, at Cottenham Fen, on the Cambridge Station. With this very excellent man our departed brother abode six months; and, while acquiring a knowledge of engineering, he also grew in grace and understanding, became better acquainted with the doctrines, movements, and usages of the church of his choice, and laboured as opportunities served to promote its varied interests at different places on the station. The six months' intercourse which he had with Brother Thoday and other officials on the Cambridge Station, greatly improved his judgment in reference to religious matters, gave a deeper tone to his piety, and imparted a feature to his preaching that appeared to advantage when he returned to his native circuit.

In December, 1860, the Yarmouth Station needed a young man to supply the appointments of the Rev. R. Howchin, who was laid aside by affliction. Our departed brother was recommended; he went, and "appeared to enter on his duties under due impressions of the responsibility of his new calling, and hence he laboured not only to cultivate personal piety, but also to improve his mind. He was well received, and

generally accepted as a messenger of the Cross. His general urbanity of manners won for him esteem and affection; whether in the pulpit or out, his constant aim was to promote the glory of God."

In April, 1861, he removed from Yarmouth to Cambridge, having accepted a call to enter the itinerant ministry; and during the few months that he travelled, his public, social, and private conduct was such as became one sustaining the dignified and important character of a Christian minister. He was anxious for souls, regular in his pastoral visitations, and faithful in his pulpit duties; though he did not realize that success in the conversion of souls which he so ardently desired. This was a source of grief to him. We quote an entry from his journals.

December 31st, 1861.— "The year has fled; and while I look back upon the first year of my ministry, my heart is pained at the limited success that has attended my labours. I may most reasonably prostrate myself before the Lord, and implore forgiveness through Christ for my lack of earnestness; and I pray that I may be more abundantly useful in the (coming) year, more devoted to His service, and more successful in the conversion of sinners."

As a student he was diligent in his pursuit of knowledge, often burning his lamp at midnight,* and seizing truth wherever he found it; and had he been on a station affording time for the maturing of his thoughts, he would doubtless have appeared to greater advantage, and have been more efficient in the pulpit. But he did his best to meet the constant demands of our three pulpits in this town. Indeed, no young man in the first year of his ministry, could have read, studied, visited, and preached to the extent which he did without being always at work, as in fact was the case with him up to the last day on which he preached, namely the sixth of February, 1862. Next day he was unable to attend to his duties. His illness was, at first, thought to be a bad cold, of which a medical gentleman hoped he should be able to relieve him in a few days. But alas! alas! he grew worse and worse, and his sickness was pronounced the typhus fever—a disease he very much dreaded. The disease continued to gain ground, but he was much comforted by the fact that he had not to seek religion in the furnace which was trying him as gold is tried. He had believed in Christ, and now he felt firm footing on the Rock of Ages.

From the commencement of his affliction he was anxious to recover, that he might serve the cause of Christ, and, when it was thought that the fever had turned, and he was likely to recover, he expressed his gratitude in these words: "The Lord has been very gracious unto us." But the disease returned, and his mind began to wander; in his wanderings however, he prayed such fervent and connected prayers as if he had been conducting the devotional exercises of a public congregation. On one occasion his prayer referred particularly to his own affliction, which he regarded as the means God was employing to bring him nearer to Himself. At another time, thinking he was recovering, he said, "If I had died, I should have gone to heaven." He was grateful for acts of kindness, expressing a hope that he should be able, in one way or other, to repay them. But his hope of requiting the kind attentions of his friends failed him; and when he knew that he must die, that there remained no more ground on which to rest his ardent, confident hope of restoration, he said, "If you come and find I am gone, don't fret; think I am gone to the land of rest." Anticipating death, he asked me, "Do you think there will be a struggle?" I made the most appropriate reply I could, and he signified his satisfaction. "Do you," he inquired of two friends, "think I shall not get better?" Being answered in the affirmative, he replied, "I shall soon be in heaven;" and he began to praise the Lord.

On Saturday, March 22nd, Mrs. S. called to see him, and he was in such pain of body that it was thought he must be in the agonies of death. Perspiration in large drops was rolling from his forehead, and he exclaimed, "Oh these mighty drops!" She reminded him that Jesus had shed drops of blood for him. The remembrance of the bloody sweat of his redeeming Lord instantly comforted him, and he said, "Bless Him." She repeated

the second, third, fourth, and fifth verses of the three hundred and twentieth hymn. "Ah," said he, "that is a favourite." A heavenly smile played on his countenance, and, shaking her hand as well as his remaining strength would allow him, he cried at the top of his voice, "Glory! hallelujah!"

On Sunday, March 23rd, he was very wandering, and his articulation indistinct, but the following sentences were heard to drop from his lips. "I have prayed to the Lord that he would bring me nearer to Himself, but I did not think that it would be in this way." "If this be dying, oh, the pain, the bliss of dying." "Here is the valley; oh yes, it's all light." "Blessed Jesus." His last words were, "Father, mother, Mary; Lord, help me." And on Monday morning, March 24th, 1862, at twenty minutes past five o'clock, he fell asleep in Jesus, realizing the truthfulness of one of his own observations made a few days before, 'Mine is a short life; I shall soon be in heaven.' That our young men may imitate his excellences, and that his surviving relatives and friends, with the readers of his biography, may meet him in the better land, is the prayer of THOMAS SWINDELL.

* Had this anything to do with his early decease? Better for a young man to remember the maxim— "Early to bed, early to rise," &c,—ED.

References

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