

William Knibb

Transcription of Obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

WILLIAM KNIBB was born at Birkhampstead, in Hertfordshire, on October 7, 1847, and spent the first part of his joyous life amid its rural scenes. When eleven years of age he was taken to Dunstable, in Bedfordshire, where, upon its chalky eminence, in sight of the Chiltern Hills, he grew to man's estate. His parents held a middle-class position, but were strangers to God and the power of His grace. Providentially, our departed brother was sent to a Primitive Methodist Sabbath-school, through the instrumentality of which he was brought in early life to Christ. His life-fruit soon appeared. As a local preacher he was useful, and exhibited powers which, it was thought, would in a wider sphere contribute to the glory of God by the extension of his church. Accordingly, he was called into the regular ministry, and laboured in Nantwich, Talk o' th' Hill, West Bromwich, Old Hill, Hasbury, Halesowen, and Presteign Circuits with marked acceptability, and has left behind a character of beauty and a name of sweetness and power.

His bearing was gentlemanly and gentle, and gave especial pleasure to different classes with various tastes. He was meek in spirit, and enjoyed the benediction of the peacemaker. His convictions were intelligent and deep, but they did not in him, as in many others, excite to enthusiasm. He patiently sought the end desired; his ministrations were quiet and thoughtful, and compassed the well-known round of gospel truth. He was successful in his work. Rough, low men, once despised by religious fastidiousness, but now somewhat polished and socially elevated, will, in the day of God, 'be the stars of the crown of his rejoicing.'

As a colleague he was obliging and faithful; as a husband he was affectionately considerate. His children were his joy and life-charm, and his love to them shone out in deeds that will long live in memory's richest soil. As a friend he was honest and honourable; he was genial and good-hearted, free from guile and full of affection. He never indulged in rancorous and splenetic expressions relative to his brethren; being good himself, he easily recognised good in others, and he rejoiced in a freedom from that peevishness and fretfulness which is the weakness of some and the life-bane of others.

His constitution was weak, and was finally wrecked by pulmonary consumption, assisted in its deadly work by a virulent fever. He bravely preached until a short time before his decease, and his last text, in the principal chapel of his station, was—'It is finished,' after which he administered the Lord's Supper, and observed, half apologetically, having made two collections that day, 'that he was especially wishful to do so, as he thought it would be the last time.' His feelings prophetic spoke of his end. On the Tuesday following, being his last service, he preached a most solemn sermon from 'Choose you this day whom ye will serve,' &c., and then hastened home to die. How sad, and yet how joyful, for he died in the Lord; dying to him was the crown of life, the birthday of a blessed immortality. Praise God!

A few days before his death, a relative enquired, 'How do you feel about dying?' He emphatically replied, 'That is all right.' On another occasion, when his longing soul, with feelings intense, made his physical vision the medium of celestial scenes, he enquired, 'Don't you see them, those beautiful creatures?' Again, when interrogated as to whether or not he had doubts relative to his spiritual state or happy future, he replied, with joyful earnestness, 'Doubts! Why should I doubt? Have not I a hope through the blessed blood and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ?' When his strength would allow, his joyous soul would pour forth in songs its inward life, and he would ask his friends with him to join to magnify the Lord Divine, and praise the God of heaven. His special and favourite hymn was—

'Depth of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?' &c.

Often in his delirium he would conduct divine service and preach a sermon, to the mixed grief and joy of others. His soul insane in Bethel lived. His circumstances during his last days were most painful, for, while he was sinking in one room, his dear and now mourning wife was dangerously ill in another, and was unable to see him, and yet, by the grace of God, he rejoiced with a clear mind, in prospect of speedy dissolution, and sought to comfort his wife by messages of love and the hope-words that they should soon meet again in the goodly land where, in spiritual union, they should live for ever. An hour or so before his death, in answer to the enquiry—'Are you happy?' he replied, with his face aglow with smiles, 'Oh, yes! quite happy!' Thus

passed away, on March 17, 1880, in the thirty-second year of his age, our dear brother, whose meekness and sweetness, and the general outcome of whose Christian life, made him indeed a brother beloved.

JOSEPH FERGUSON.

[In addition to the above account, we have received the following from Mr. John Davies.—ED.]

Our late lamented friend and minister, the Rev. William Knibb, came to Presteign in July, 1879. The occasion of his first publicly speaking to us the words of 'truth and righteousness' was on July 20, 1879, the Sunday-school Anniversary, when he preached two admirable sermons from Hebrews iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;' and the fourth chapter of John, subject: 'The Woman of Samaria.'

On this, his first appearance amongst us, it was observed by many, what a calm, kind, peaceful expression there was in his countenance, which seemed to breathe itself out in love to those whom he was addressing, imbued as he was with a rich fulness of God's Holy Spirit.

From this time we all felt that we had a good and amiable man amongst us, one free from ostentation, and possessing the qualities of a Christian gentleman, his very manner attracting us to him in love and affection. His sermons were far above the ordinary standard, marked by originality, simplicity, expository powers, earnestness, and, above all, easy adaptability of forcing home the grand old doctrine of justification by faith.

His life and conduct, however, were his best sermon; and by all classes of the community, whether Churchmen, Nonconformists, or non-professors, he was highly respected and esteemed; wherever he went, he was beloved by all. He possessed a very close resemblance to the disciple whom 'Jesus loved,' and always had a kind word and pleasing smile for everybody. Of him it might be truly said,

'His life was gentle; and the elements
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world, *This was a man.*'

Though never strong, he continued working in the cause of Christ most energetically and unceasingly, until he was seized with the illness which terminated fatally in five weeks. His end was unmistakably hastened by over-exertion. The very day on which he was attacked, he had walked to an appointment and back, a distance of about eight miles.

It is singular, and worth recording, that the sermon he delivered at Presteign Chapel, on Sunday evening, February 8, was taken from, the text, 'It is finished.' As it was the last Sunday he was able to speak to us from the pulpit, it appeared as though he knew his end was nigh, for he not only preached with marked earnestness and power, but whilst administering the Lord's Supper, he casually remarked that he 'was pleased to be able to celebrate it, as perhaps it might be his last opportunity of doing so.'

On the Tuesday evening (February 10) he preached for the last time from Joshua xxiv. and part of the fifteenth verse: 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,' and from his manner it was thought by some they would not have the pleasure of hearing him again, he seemed so very weak, a supposition, alas! too true, for on the morrow evening (Wednesday) he was brought home ill, never to recover.

Throughout his illness he was most patient, and extremely happy. Always considerate and anxious about the many friends who visited and nursed him, lest they should over-exert themselves, he would exclaim, sometimes a dozen times during the night, 'How kind you are to deprive yourself of rest, but the Lord will reward you.' Never once was he heard to speak an unkind word of anyone, but was, on the contrary, most charitable, and remarkable for his humility. He frequently conducted whole services during his delirium, even preaching and singing as if he had been in the pulpit. One of his favourite subjects was 'faith and hope,' from it he preached many times. Often did he request his friends to sing with him one of his favourite hymns, 'Depth of mercy,' &c. Being asked if he had any doubts, he replied, 'Doubts! Why should I doubt? Haven't I a hope through the blessed blood and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?'

On Thursday night, March 11, it is thought very possible that he had a clear view of heaven and of the angels, for suddenly his face brightened up, as it were with heavenly lustre, whilst he exclaimed, with his finger pointing heavenwards, 'There ! There ! Do you see them, those beautiful creatures?'

On Wednesday morning, March 17, about half-an-hour before his departure, in reply to a question whether he felt or suffered any pain, he said, 'No,' very faintly. 'Are you happy?' he was asked. 'Oh! yes, quite happy,' he replied. The last words he ever uttered were in answer to his mother, who said, 'You are my precious boy.' 'Yes, mother, I am precious,' and directly afterwards he breathed his last, quite calmly and peacefully, as if he had sank into a sweet and balmy sleep. It is well to mention that 'special' prayers were offered up in his behalf in every place of worship in the town, and could the people of Presteign have restored him, they would most willingly have done so, but God willed it otherwise.

On Friday, March 19, his remains (on the way to Leek) were followed to the station by a large number of friends of every denomination; and the greatest possible respect was shewn by the tradespeople and others; all shutters being up, and blinds down, with scarcely a single exception. Thus did we bid farewell to one whom we had learned to love,—solemnly, sadly, and sorrowfully. Although gone from us, he will always be remembered as one of the kindest and best of men, and one who, had he lived, would have been the means of doing incalculable good. But though absent from us, he is

'Not gone from memory, not gone from love,
But gone to the Father's home above.'

His death was improved on Tuesday, April 13, 1880, by the Rev. J Ferguson, F.R.A.S., who preached to a crowded congregation a most excellent and eloquent sermon on 2 Corinthians v., 1st verse.

Genuine sympathy is felt for his widow and children in their deep distress, and all deeply deplore the loss of him who has been so early taken from amongst us.

JOHN DAVIES.

References

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