

MEMOIR OF RICHARD WHEELDON.
To the Book Committee,

Dear Brethren in Christ,

Hognaston, Dec.16, 1896.

If you think the following account of Richard Wheeldon, a much-respected local preacher, whose life and death exemplified the truth of holy scripture, will tend to the glory of God, and give an additional testimony to the truth and power of vital godliness to your numerous readers, an early insertion in our extensive Publication, will much oblige your brother in the Lord, PHILIP BROWN,

“He being dead yet speaketh.” Heb. xi. 4.
“The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” Ps. cxii. 6

RICHARD WHEELDON was born October 29, 1786, at Hognaston, in Derbyshire. His parents occupied a farm at Hognaston, and were possessed of a considerable share of this world's wealth; and, according to the maxim of the world, might be termed respectable people. Richard, their son, was brought up at Hognaston, and was favoured with his parents' kindness in giving him a liberal education. The former part of his life he spent at home, and was employed in the farming business. Afterwards he spent some time in occasional visits, being sometimes at home and sometimes abroad among his friends; and with an uncle, occasionally assisting in business.

His father purchased him. the office of a lieutenancy in his Majesty's service—the local militia; and at this time he made a genteel appearance in the world.

In the early part of his life he had serious and gracious impressions, made on his mind, and was sensible that he was a vile sinner in the sight of God. I, myself, have heard him and his associates say that when these impressions were made on his mind, be, for some length of time, seriously thought on his course of life. The Spirit of the Lord (when he was alone by himself) powerfully convinced him many different times, that he was a heinous sinner in the sight of God. He generally concluded, on these gracious visitations, that he would read the word of God more than ever. refrain from bad company, and live a life devoted to God. But, alas, these impressions were as the evening cloud or morning dew that soon vanisheth away. He soon forgot his frequent covenants which he made before the Lord, and was easily drawn away to follow the desire of a deceitful heart, and the wicked practice of a sinful course of life. It was generally when our deceased brother held his correspondence with those much respected of the world, that these gracious impressions were sacrificed, and the Spirit of the Lord was resisted, and grieved; and almost all seriousness annihilated, from his youthful mind.

The place of worship, our deceased brother was accustomed to attend, was the Church of England, and he became one of the principal bass singers. But how often has he been heard to say, that while it was announced, “Let us sing to the praise and glory of God,” his way of life at that time manifested he had nothing further in view than the praise of men, and his own glory.

It was a custom among the singers at Christmas, to go about from house to house to sing the glad tidings of a new-born Saviour. Frequently, at these times, he was overcome with what they called refreshments, so as to be intoxicated or become drunk. This he did not speak of in any way of reproach or ridicule to the Church of England doctrines; for he believed the doctrines of the Church of England to be the principles of a Christian life. But, alas, to his great error and shame, during the time he attended these means, he had no more than the form of godliness, being destitute of the power thereof;—as it will more clearly appear from a few verses of poetry, which he composed himself, while under the piercing arrows of a sin-avenging God, and the powerful conviction of a guilty conscience.—

My dearest friends a moment stay,
And read o'er these few lines;
And while pray that God may seal
Conviction on your minds,

'Tis but a little time ago,
And many know it well,
That I was posting down the way
Which leads to death and hell.

But on-a blessed sabbath day,
The Lord of Hosts did send
His servant for to preach his word,
To which I did attend.

Conviction, with the word was sent,
Like arrows to my heart,
Which made me willing to consent
With all my sins to part.

But, ah, I thought it was too late;
My sins had found me out:
And God, his wrath on me would pour,
Which fill'd my mind with doubt.

Such sorrow then did fill my heart,
No pen nor tongue can tell;
I thought I must from God be driven
Into a burning hell.

This did in me a cry beget-
Lord, what wouldst have me do?
I then by faith in Christ believed
For peace and pardon too.

At his first attendance on hearing the word of God preached by the Primitive Methodists, he was powerfully beset with shame, which caused him to stand at an outside when the word was preached out of doors; and likewise to stand behind the door when preaching was in the house, till some of his companions, that attended with him; encouraged him to join them in singing; which was a means of more fully drawing him to attend to the ministry of the word; and it clearly appears he did not hear it in vain.

While one of our local preachers, in Belper Circuit, on the 18th of January, 1818, was preaching from these words—"For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke xix. 10, the Lord himself, by the energy of his Spirit, applied the word to his heart; deep conviction took place in his soul, and the word was as a nail fastened in a sure place by the Master of Assemblies.

Conviction for his sins, at times, was so heavy, he was scarce able to bear. At that time he was accustomed to occasionally sleep with another brother who was unconverted; and, on account of his conviction being so heavy, he was, as he said, afraid of his brother discovering the restless distressed state of his soul.

Our dear deceased brother manifested many a wish and desire to me, to be liberated from his sins, and from the condemnation of a broken law. I, myself, took most of the seasonable opportunities I could, to encourage him to go with me to the promised land. I thank God for the sensibility, which I was permitted both to see and hear. The invitations were not in vain in the Lord. But a reason may be assigned, why our departed brother did not cleave in sooner with the offers of mercy. At that time there was no society at Hognaston. I had, for some length of time, gone on a sabbath day morning to meet at Kniveton class. And on Sunday morning, May 9, 1820; I called at our brother's house, and kindly solicited him to go with me. He did not embrace the first invitation, but immediately felt conscious that he had done wrong in not complying with the invitation. He, at the same time decided it in his mind, and told me after, that if I should again call, he would gladly accept the offer; and I believe, if I prove faithful to the end, we both shall have to praise God to all eternity, that I was directed by the Lord, on the

16th of May; to call on him, to go with me to Kniveton class. His soul truly experienced there an inexpressible change. While the class leader was speaking to the first part of the class, the Lord did manifest himself in such a glorious manner unto him, that while sitting in the class meeting, before the leader had spoke to him, his soul was liberated from under the terrors of a guilty conscience, and the condemnation of a violated law. The love of God did so powerfully fill his soul, at that moment, he could willingly embrace every soul in the meeting in his arms; yea, and every soul in the world too. So marvellous was the change wrought in his soul.

After his conversion to God, and his commencement in the Christian course, he was a diligent attendant at the means of grace. He next saw the necessity of exercising his talent in public prayer among the people of God. But he was reproached in the world and in public prayer meetings, he underwent great harrassings of mind, and heavy repeated temptations from the enemy of his soul. In his first exercises of public prayer, the enemy was permitted to try his sincerity:—he, at times, possessed an impediment in his speech, and had heavy times in public prayer; on which account he had frequent temptations to give up public prayer, and also that he could not hold out to the end.

But he proved Satan a deceiver and a liar, as he was from the beginning; and he experienced the trial of his faith to be more precious than of gold, as though it were tried in the fire. It was noticed by several of his brethren in the Lord, that when he got more liberty in prayer, he more abundantly laboured for the prosperity of Zion, and for the good of precious souls. He very commonly pleaded at the throne of grace with ardent exertion; yea, I and others, at the time of his zealous labours have experienced that his prayers were prevalent before the Lord, and that he had access to the throne of grace.

He joined himself as a member of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in Hognaston class May 30, 1819. These means (the class meetings) in particular, he truly prized, and spoke highly of, as being the most favoured privilege for the soul's establishment, edification, and benefit, that ever were instituted for the Christians' welfare through this world to the Heavenly Canaan. One reason why he valued these means so great and precious was the mere immediate presence of the Lord was made known and displayed to him at those seasons.

His labours or office as a class-leader commenced on April 16, 1820, as an assistant-leader for Hognaston class; it might be said with timidity and fear, but with faithfulness and sincerity, to promote the glory of God, and the welfare of precious souls. When he discovered the protecting and delivering mercies of God towards his soul, it led him to take up the language of the Psalmist, — "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." At other times when he was passing through his greatest straits, and wading through deep waters, he viewed his trials in that light which led him to take up the language of the prophet Micah,— "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."

I wish to observe and notice, that our late brother had the gracious favour, at a class meeting, of seeing and speaking to one of his brothers in the flesh, concerning the state of his mind or the dealings of God with his soul. His soul was so rejoiced and animated with gratitude to his gracious Redeemer for such a manifest evidence—that the Lord both hears and answers prayer. He said he had many times earnestly pleaded at the throne of grace for the conversion of his brothers and sisters. He observed that he had many a powerful temptation from satan, presenting to him, that none of them would go with him to heaven; but this singular proof of meeting his brother in church-fellowship did greatly increase his faith, and did clearly confirm it, that the promises of God are, yea and amen, to them that believe in Christ.

The first cause of his name being put upon the Primitive Methodist Plan, which commenced July 28, 1822, manifested itself from a proof of his love which he bore to precious souls. His life and outward deportment proved the truth of our Lord's saying to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Mark v.13. He endeavoured to leave a savour of grace behind him wherever he went. Yea, his beloved wife's relations say, they scarcely knew him omit a time when he went over to see them, but he was frequently entreating them all to prepare for a future state. He was rather noted for reproofing open sin in people, which was a cause of terror to the wicked, and a praise to them that did well.

He did not, at first, give a full consent to have his name inserted on the plan, from a sense of the greatness of the work, and from the heaviness of the cross. Such views of the work of the ministry, and such impressions of mind, led him to say with the apostle of old, - "Who is sufficient for these things?" Also he was led to think he was not called of the Lord to the work of the ministry, but if he could be made conscious that it was the will of God for him to warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come, he would faithfully comply with the divine call. He attended and took his appointments that were upon plan for twelve months, during which time, he sometimes took a portion of scripture for a text, as divine openings were given him; and at other times he gave exhortations, as the Lord gave him liberty to speak. He was well received by the congregations. His word was plain and pointed, powerful and affecting, ministering grace to his hearers. Several individuals said they received much good from his public labours, notwithstanding the repeated and powerful temptations which he underwent, during the time his name was on the plan.

When he had been exactly twelve months on the plan, he had a heavy time in speaking in his afternoon congregation. And in going to his night's appointment, he sunk under the temptation; instead of going forward he returned home, or was like Jonah when fleeing from the presence of the Lord. After this conflict, which he had with the enemy of his soul, he wished to have his name taken off the plan. But still on occasional wants, he took up appointments, and other opportunities or helps, when the work of the Lord needed a helping hand, he would use his endeavours to push on the ark.

In returning with a friend from an appointment at Ible, he said he was sensible, that he himself, as well as others, might for a season, make a shining profession of religion outwardly, when there was an inward consciousness that the will of God was not done by them. This he spoke in reference to an inward conviction that he had done wrong in taking his name from the plan.

Having some business of a worldly nature, to transact with some who were strangers to religion, he was seriously exercised; and it was powerfully impressed on his mind that he could not claim the Lord for his deliverer and protector, while he omitted doing his will. Under this trial, he was constrained to tell the Lord, if he would deliver him at that time, he would receive it as a particular proof of his divine care over him, and would deny himself, take up his cross, and give his consent to go on the plan again; if by any means he could bring precious souls to a knowledge of the truth. A signification of his name was put on the plan again, by a star, on the 21st of November, 1824, and he took his appointments regularly. Soon after he had given himself more fully to the work of the Lord, he was more clearly convinced, that it was the will of God, he should preach the gospel; yea, he further added, that his first moving cause to preach the word of life to his fellow mortals, was the love he had to precious souls. But now he had more extensive views of the worth of precious souls. He saw things in a clearer light to what he had done before; and he was resolved, by the grace of God, to warn the congregations faithfully; and to be clear of the blood of the people. The more the close of his life drew near, the more, did he faithfully warn the people. The general scope of his preaching was, repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet he occasionally, as the Lord gave him utterance, treated on death and judgment; apprising the people of appearing before God in an unconverted state. It has been remarked by many of his hearers since his death, that two or three of the last times he spoke in different places in the circuit, it was particularly noticed, how faithfully he warned them to prepare for death: for that he assuredly should be a witness against them at the bar of God, if they died in an unprepared state.

The last time he spoke at Wirksworth, which was on Sunday, March 12, 1826, the friends there say, he mentioned these words once or twice. That he called heaven and earth to witness, that he warned them faithfully; and was clear of the blood of the congregation; and he repeated these words two or three times over just before closing his discourse, that it was more than a thousand to one if ever he saw their faces again in the flesh, on this side eternity. The same or similar words he was noticed to speak at Doveswood and Kirkireton, two of the last times he preached to them.

The last time he spoke in his appointment was at a missionary-meeting, at Ible, on the 19th of March. There his beloved partner and he were appointed, together with others.

If any appointment in the circuit was likely to be neglected, it seemed as if he could not rest satisfied till he had gotten the place supplied by a substitute.

For several months previous to his death, there was something more to be noticed in his life than before. He told his partner in life, how powerfully death was presented to him as being very nigh at hand. This impression he repeatedly spoke of, as viewing his life drawing near to a close.

From the outward appearance of his person, most people would have taken him to be a stout healthy man, and of a strong constitution; but, he for some years, had not enjoyed a good state of health. The doctor he employed, at times, said that his body was frequently in an inflammatory state. His first illness commenced March 23, 1826, from a violent cold, which he got when assisting his brother in sowing oats, he having sweat very much, and afterwards took cold; and he renewed it again on the 27th, through which it produced an inflammation all over his body; he was then unfit and incapable of much work; but on the 29th and 30th, he did a little gardening for himself, and, on Friday 31, he rode to Derby market, on a little business. He was taken very ill in Derby; but, with difficulty, he rode home, and was very poorly all that night. On the Saturday medical aid was procured, but his illness bid defiance to all medical assistance. But the anchor of his soul was both sure and steadfast, and he possessed an unshaken peace in his soul. On the Sunday night, I called to see him, and asked him the state of his mind. He answered me as follows, — “Well, I am perfectly satisfied with what the Lord is doing with me. He does all things well. He does all things right.”

For two or three days his illness was so great as to affect his brain; and he frequently fancied himself to be falling down some precipice, or from rocks, pits, and other dangerous places.

On Tuesday night, Mr. Wain, schoolmaster, went to sit up with him; and he began to speak of what dangerous places and apparent dangers, he had been passing through. Afterwards he was silent for a short space of time, and apparently as if going to sleep. Some time after, he said, “Hark! don’t you hear something?” Mr. Wain said, “No.” “But,” said he, “I do.” Mr. W. said, “What doest thou hear? What is it like? Is it like a drum or a band of music?” He said, “No.” By his manner, he seemed at first to hear it at some distance; but while he was listening, he heard it as drawing nearer. and asked Mr. W. to hearken again. Mr. W. then drew the window curtain, with a design to hearken more particularly. And brother Wheeldon repeated three or four times, “Don’t you hear it yet? Can’t you hear it now?” Mr. W. said it was perhaps a cart or carriage coming down the street. “Ah! nay, it is not,” said he; and seemed surprised that Mr. W. could not hear it. Mr. W. asked whether it was like an organ or some sort of music. “It is sweeter than ten thousand organs,” was the reply.

His wife had gone to take a little rest, and shortly after she came to him, and asked how he was. He said, “The Lord is going to cure my soul and body together.” And he told her what sweet music he had heard and did then hear, and wished her repeatedly to lay her head down to his to try to hear the music which he heard, She complied, but could not hear it.

On the Wednesday, he told his wife what a desire he had to talk to the people who came to see him, concerning their souls. She observed, the doctor had said he must not talk much. He said, he thought it was very hard that he must not talk to people about their souls, when he considered what God had done for his soul. He frequently repeated verses, and a great deal of some chapters of holy scripture. At times he was drawn out to pray much, both mental and vocal, so as to be heard a considerable distance.

On the same day the doctor who attended him, gave very favourable hopes of his recovery. He thought, with care, he would come about again. His sister-in-law, Mary Kirkham, on telling him what the doctor said about him getting better again. He said, Ah! the doctor might say what he pleased, but he knew he should never be better again in his life. She asked him his reason for so saying. He told her what a glorious light he had seen in the chamber that day; and he viewed it as a signal of the Lord’s going to take him to himself.

On Thursday, his brother-in-law, Mr. W. Haynes coming to see him, he began to talk to him about his soul; and he told him, with respect to himself, that it was the best day’s work he ever did in his

life, when he began to serve the Lord; and entreated him in a very affectionate manner to consider his course of life, and make provision against the time to come.

His dear wife, assisting him to take a little coffee, was overwhelmed with grief in his presence, which caused him to speak rather in a reproving spirit. He asked her what she was looking to; and said, "Ah what weakness! what weakness!"

On Friday he was very weak and low in body; scarcely took any notice of any thing, or was able to be heard speak most of the day. His sister Mary came to see him, and he immediately began to talk to her about her soul, he particularly wished her to consider that she was intrusted with a family, and he desired her to bring her family up in the fear of the Lord. He afterwards turned towards his wife, and said, "And thee, my dear wife, don't fret for me; for the Lord will be a husband to thee when I am gone."

A little while after, the doctors came, and they wished him to settle his affairs. — His sister Mary, brother John, his wife, and two doctors, all stood by him in tears. "Oh! Sir;" said he, 'it does not alarm me in the least, if you had told me the first day you came, you would not have alarmed me in the least. It was more than a thousand worlds to me, that day I set out for the kingdom of heaven.' The doctors were induced to say, "This is well! this is well!"

After the doctors had left the room, he began in a very affecting manner, to talk to his brother John respecting his course of life; he very earnestly requested him to leave off the practice of swearing, and to consider that if he was in the same situation, and as near death as he himself was, nothing but hell would be his portion. He talked to his brother-in-law, W. Haynes, in a very affecting manner; about making preparation for another world; and told them both he should like to meet them all in heaven. His affectionate wife said, "If the Lord is going to take thee to himself, my great loss I hope will be thy great and eternal gain." He said, "Yes: and I hope we shall meet again in heaven." All night, and all day on Saturday, he was weak and low in body, and said but little; but was much engaged with the Lord in prayer, and moved to pray very loud at times.

About-eleven o'clock, on Saturday night, and others stood by his bed-side, and powerful symptoms of death were upon him, I related several encouraging passages of holy scripture applicable to his state. I told him he must wait a little longer with patience, and the Lord would soon send a convoy of angels, to convey his soul to the paradise of God. This appeared to raise and elevate his spirit. I asked him if he should like to get better again; he answered me as follows, — Well thou seest as it respects this, I should very well on some accounts, if it should not offend or displease my God; but rather than I should offend or displease my God, I had rather a thousand and a thousand times to depart and to be with Christ, which will be far better."

Brother J. Webster said, "Thou wilt soon have done bearing thy cross." He said, "I praise the Lord! But thou must go out in the name of the Lord, and warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come. It is a glorious work." He then said, "I have many people about me and give a deal of trouble, but my Master is a good payer, and he will reward you all for what you do for me. I am very ill indeed now, but when I get round my Father's table; in his kingdom, I shall be amply rewarded for all these sufferings."

About four o'clock on Sunday morning he struck up with singing, and sung,
"My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim;
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of thy name."

He said, "There, thank the Lord, you may know he has enabled me to do that." He bore his afflictions with the greatest resignation and submission, and was never heard to make a complaint, but was enabled to say, the will of the Lord be done. At length the weary wheels of life stood still, and he calmly fell asleep in the arms of Jesus, on the Sabbath-day morning, April 9, 1826, about half-past eight o'clock, in the fortieth! year of his age.

Brother J. Hallam preached his funeral sermon from 2 Tim.iv. 6, 7, 8. It was preached in the open air, on Sunday, April 30, 1826, to a large concourse of people. Several were in tears, and we have reason to believe good was done. He was so much respected in the circuit, that people came as much as ten or eleven miles to hear his funeral sermon.

FURTHER REMARKS.

He frequently at lovefeasts and at other means of grace, would break out in strains of praise and thanksgiving, that ever God did send the Primitive Methodists to Hognaston, he should never be out of debt, but should praise him to all eternity for what he had done for his soul; and as a token and proof of his great respect to the Primitive Methodists, he has left a bequest of fifty pounds towards erecting a Primitive Methodist chapel, at Hognaston.

He entered the marriage state with Elizabeth Hunt, of Belper, then a Primitive Methodist travelling preacher, in Belper Circuit, on the 18th of June, 1822. She says, she never knew him, in one instance, to break his word, or act contrary to the conduct of a sincere man of God.

After he was converted to God, he walked before the world as it becometh a Christian, and was an honour to the cause of God, a light in the world, and an ornament to his profession.

Note. — He frequently heard the music before spoken of, till a day or two before he died. He requested his wife on Friday morning between four and five o'clock, to rest herself by him in bed; quickly after, there being no light in the chamber, there appeared a glorious light from heaven. He said, "Dost thou see that light?" And she did see it perfectly, herself, for a small space of time.

P. B.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1827/82