

## James Lee

### Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Mitchell

The REV. JAMES LEE was born at Walkden, January 14, 1841, and fell on sleep at Haslingden, on Lord's Day, April 24, 1892. He had the unspeakable advantage of possessing pious parents, who sought to train him in 'the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and in later years he frequently testified that he was converted when nine years of age. Unfortunately, through the influence of godless associates, and possibly also for lack of proper nurture and shepherding by the church, this early assurance of salvation was lost. But, in his early teens, under a sermon preached by the late Rev. S. Stafford, in Walden chapel, he was again led deliberately and consciously to renounce sin and trust in Christ, and from that time continued in the fellowship of faith and service. His father, who was the village schoolmaster, possessed remarkable mental powers, which he inherited. He was deprived, however, of his watchful care and guidance at an early age, and in consequence obtained only the limited education given to the industrial population of Lancashire forty years ago.

From his boyhood he showed marked aptitude for public speaking, and in a comparatively short time after joining the church he was placed upon the plan as a local preacher. When in his twentieth year, in the autumn of 1860, he accepted an invitation from the Silsden circuit to labour as a hired local preacher, and won such acceptance that the circuit pledged him at the following Conference of 1861. He was stationed in succession at the following circuits in Leeds District, viz., Dewsbury, Barnsley, Otley, Leeds First, Bradford First and Second (the circuit being divided during his appointment), and Hoyland. While at Hoyland the dangerous illness of Mrs. Lee led him, under medical advice, to ask a transfer to Torquay, in the hope that change of climate would save her life. The expedient was vain; in a few months she passed away, leaving him in charge of two motherless children. Here he remained three years, and having again entered into the marriage relation to Miss Cooke, daughter of Mr. Cooke, Ludboro', near Louth, a family long and honourably associated with Primitive Methodism, he removed to Dublin, and was subsequently stationed at Cardiff (which he entered as a mission station, and left on the verge of becoming a circuit), Bristol First (where Ebenezer Chapel was renovated, and the commodious Mount Tabor Chapel built), Hammersmith, Maidenhead (where Heatonwick Chapel was erected) and Haslingden.

During his appointment at Dewsbury Mr. Lee lived with the parents of the writer, and won their esteem and affection as a good man and a faithful minister of Jesus Christ; and as the result of over thirty years' intimate acquaintance—having been stationed several times in adjoining circuits—I can testify that his whole career illustrated and strengthened his Christian profession. By aiming at the cultivation of all his powers, and seeking practically to recognise all his relationships, he exhibited a combination of excellences too often dissociated. He owed much to natural endowment, but more to self-culture and discipline and divine grace. He exhibited remarkable completeness and symmetry of character. His devout spirit, cultivated tastes, expansive sympathies, enlightened conscientiousness, and earnest solicitude and toil for the benefit of others, associated as they were with true modesty and entire freedom from affectation, caused him to appear, as Carlyle said of John Sterling, 'a most beautiful human soul.' To a superficial observer, indeed, there was nothing very striking in his life, so quietly, persistently and unostentatiously did he work; but 'the day' alone will declare at what cost of pain, even to agony, that work for years was done. For many years he suffered from organic disease of the heart, he was never free from pain, and often suffered paroxysms of great agony. When at Maidstone it was no uncommon thing on the Lord's. Day for him to lie upon a form in the schoolroom or vestry in pain and weariness while the preliminary services were conducted by some brother, from which he would rise to 'preach as if he ne'er would preach again,' retiring to continue

prostrate in pain until the evening service, when the same process would be repeated. And he kept in harness for years longer than he otherwise would through his medical knowledge and skill.

His intellect was subtle and searching, and yet of a decidedly practical type. While not wanting in the faculty of imagination, the more solid qualities greatly preponderated. He was ever faithful to his convictions of duty, and would persevere in what he believed to be the right course at all costs. But associated with this loyalty to principle and unyielding integrity, there was a marvellous tact and persuasiveness in managing men. Few equalled him as an administrator. His judgment of men was rarely at fault. His self-possession never failed, and he was well versed in Connexional polity and usage. In all his circuits progress was reported. His appointment to Haslingden was specially opportune. He came at a critical period, disorder reigned and grave disaster threatened; but under his firm, wise and kind pilotage the church was brought out of the breakers, and directed to a prosperous career. The estimation in which the church held him, both for his character and works' sake, is seen in the fact that they defrayed the expenses of his funeral.

He had a fine sense of honour and self-respect, he was transparent, true, and above the suspicion of anything low or mean. Withal he had a keen relish for the humorous side of life—held somewhat in check perhaps by his bodily indisposition—but highly appreciated by those admitted to the inner circle of his friendship. His intelligence, his heartiness and wide social sympathies, his quiet touches of humour, left behind wholesome and pleasant memories in the social circle.

As a preacher he was far above the average. His style was, perhaps, better fitted to convince and rouse than to melt or soothe, yet to many he was a veritable son of consolation. His discourses were carefully prepared and effectively delivered, and but for the drawback of his weak physical constitution, he would have taken a much more prominent position in the Connexion.

He was a good pastor. He gave himself to the service of the sick especially, with the most unselfish and generous devotion. In fact, to his assiduity in this department of work, when suffering from debility consequent on influenza, his death is probably attributable. None but members of his family, and they only in part, know at what cost of pain and exhaustion that work was done. Nothing but an indomitable will could have enabled him to do it. Few in his condition would have attempted even half of what he successfully accomplished. Nor was it wise. The strain upon the crippled heart was too great, and there can be no doubt that his final illness was induced by his persistence in pulpit and pastoral work when rest was imperative. True to his nature he laboured to the last.

The sword was too keen for its sheath. The unwearied activity entailed utter collapse of heart, and secondarily of lungs, liver, and stomach,—all being congested through the stasis of blood. He longed to live, that he might give the benefit of his ripe experience and knowledge to the service of the church, but his work on earth was done. When visiting him some days before his death he said, 'I shall soon be at rest. I shall enter it earlier than I had hoped, though I always feared I should not live to be old, but God knows best, and it is right. He suffered much, and in spite of the most devoted nursing, attention and medical skill, on Lord's Day, April 24, 'after having served his own generation by the will of God, he fell on sleep.' About a month prior to his death he preached for the last time a funeral sermon from the text: 'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh, shall find so doing.' That blessedness of the faithful servant is now his portion.

The interment took place on Thursday, April 28. In the presence of a large congregation a service was held in Haslingden, Chapel at eleven o'clock, attended by the mayor, the Nonconformist ministers of the town, and most of the ministers of the neighbouring circuits, when a sympathetic and appreciative address was

given by the Rev. W.L. Spooner. Afterwards the body was removed for burial to the Swinton Cemetery, where the "Revs J. Macpherson, F.N. Shimmin, J. Watkin, and R. Heppenstall took part in the service. On Lord's Day, May 8th, the Rev. J.H. Best conducted a memorial service at Haslingden.

To my personal knowledge all his superintendents esteemed him highly as a faithful colleague who proved himself a true yoke-fellow in 'the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,' and the following letter from the Rev. Alfred Jones, of Paisley, shows that he was equally capable of winning love and loyalty; he writes:— 'Brother Lee was one of the dearest friends I knew; he and I became closely attached during our ministry in the then wide and important Hammersmith circuit, and since then my admiration for him grew. He was so true and real, so kind and good, that no one could know him without feeling that he was a Christian gentleman. He was a clear, scriptural preacher, a faithful and diligent pastor, and a wise, shrewd, genial, but faithful administrator. Brother Lee was a friend to the poor—he had large sympathies for those in physical suffering, and was a valuable friend to the sick. He was ready at all times to give younger ministers and others the benefit of his counsel. He was a most sincere Christian; humble in walk, manly in all his actions, gentlemanly in his bearing, true and noble in nature, persevering in his efforts to do good, devoted and consecrated to and in his Master's work. He really sacrificed himself to be a blessing to others. In writing me on April 12, he referred to his recent illness thus: "I am better; we shall soon have to begin the packing up, and hear the voice, 'Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest,'" Little did he then think that when he referred to his new circuit, (Chester Second), whither he was to remove according to human engagements, that those words would have for him a higher and grander signification. He has departed, he has arisen, to enjoy the rest which remains for so faithful a toiler as he.'

Without quoting from the very numerous letters of sympathy and appreciation sent from all parts of the Connexion to Mrs. Lee and his two daughters, we cannot forbear referring to the testimonies of the Rev. H. Cooke, who entered the ministry the same year, and of the Rev. W.L. Spooner, his neighbour in Bristol. In his interesting communication Mr. Spooner dwells on Mr. Lee's unique personality, his intellectuality, the activity of his social and moral sympathies, his steadfastness as a friend, and the tireless energy with which he fulfilled his ministry.

The Rev. H. Cooke writes, 'As a young man, though somewhat retiring and reserved, I found him fairly frank, wisely confidential, and always true as a friend. Like many others who have done nobly in the Methodist ministry, he had only slight early educational advantages; yet, possessed with a keen taste for knowledge, a retentive memory, a sound judgment, and plodding perseverance, he soon made considerable progress in mental culture and development. He showed superior skill in his choice of books, and in thoroughly mastering those he read. He obviously believed that books are like farms and gardens—the more labour and skill are put into them, the more produce will be obtained from them. While in theory he was orthodox and Methodistic, yet he was liberal and progressive in his views. His preaching was not of the ornate, rhetorical, and declamatory style, but calm, clear, thoughtful and instructive. By the more intelligent he was the most appreciated in his stations. Gentlemanly in deportment, kind in disposition, judicious in counsel, faithful in friendships, and diligent in duty, he ever won the respect and esteem of his people. Over twenty years ago he laboured on this ground (Bradford Second), but his memory is still fragrant among the older members. On the morning of the Sunday on which he died some of our Great Horton people came to me after service and said, "Have you noticed from the papers how ill Mr. James Lee is?" "Yes," I replied, "but I hope as he is wiry, though delicate, and has considerable medical and hygienic knowledge, he may with the Divine blessing, be spared." Soon, however, we learned that, he had gone to rest, and great and repeated were the expressions of regret that we had lost him from the church at such a comparatively early age, and that his family, too, were so sadly bereaved.'

To the writer and doubtless to many others Earth has been made poorer and heaven richer and more attractive by brother Lee's 'departure to be with Christ.'

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#### References

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