

REV. T.J. McKENZIE.

Transcription of obituary published in the Minutes of Conference by G.H.Hanney.

Thomas John McKenzie was born at Littleborough, Lancashire, in 1893. As a son of the Manse he was the worthy son of a very worthy father, and as the only boy he was very precious to his now sainted mother. His life made manifest the spiritual stock from whence he came.

Early in life he began work in the Church. At Derby during the ministry of the Rev. C.P. Maynard, and later of his own father, he passed from scholar to teacher, then local preacher, making full proof of his calling to the ranks of the ministry. His years were not many when he began to work for the Master, for at twenty-one he entered Hartley College, days of precious memories and friendships to him. These were only stepping stones on the way, his eyes were on the Fields beyond, Africa was calling with a voice that would not be denied.

From College to St. George's Hall Mission, mainly for the purpose of receiving! medical training to fit him for the work of a foreign missionary. War conditions prevented his proceeding immediately to Africa. Young men were not allowed to leave England save in a uniform other than that he desired to wear. Two years were spent at Biggleswade, and under the ministry of the Rev. J.H. Saxton were years well spent for one who loved to preach the Word. Then came the opportunity for which he had long waited, and in 1919 a long cherished desire became possible, and the dream of years came true, he was a missionary in Africa.

His first term was spent at Jamestown relieving for the Rev. John Enang Gill, then on a visit to England, and later he passed on to Oyubia Station. His second term was also at Oyubia maturing plans for the development of the work that had arisen out of his experience during his first term. Here he was not alone; Miss Fairley, daughter of one who had much to do with the inception of our Nigerian Mission, had come out to the Girls' Institute at Jamestown. During the Christmas holidays they met at Oron, and it was not long before there were two hearts that beat as one, and the Institute lost a worker and the missionary gained a helpmeet. They were married during his first furlough, and their labours together were not in vain. The stations and members increased greatly during the time they were in charge of the Circuit.

His last term was divided between Oyubia and Bende. Robert Banham's death had created a difficulty in stationing, and a difficult station needed to be supplied. "Send me if you like, I will do my best," and the best was good. There were no idle hours, time was precious and work must be done. An attack of phlebitis kept him for some weeks to his chair, and walking was dangerous, but the work went on. He never seemed too robust, the flesh sometimes was weak, but the strength of the spirit was great. He seemed a boy, but behind the boyish smile there was a man's heart of gold and an intellect that was far from boyish. In business he was keen and astute. In debate he was always helpful, and oft saw the way out when others failed. He delighted in routine work, the humdrum detail of station work had no fears for him, his business training helped him there, and forms and figures, returns and accounts had no difficulties for him.

Everyone loved Mac, his cheery smile won through where often arguments would fail. Natives are not always tractable, and sometimes one has to use the wisdom of the serpent to be as harmless as a dove. Mac could do it; men came to make trouble, he would sit and listen, a few kindly words to show the way, then a smile and a laugh, and away the folks would go with a smile, sometimes a grin as they realised how he had turned their wrath away. Well did he deserve the success that attended his work.

His return home from Nigeria for the last time was tragic. His beloved mother lay at the point of death, was Striving to live to see her boy only a few days' journey away. At Liverpool the news greeted him that his mother had passed away only the day before. One who saw him in the Customs room said, "It knocked him to pieces." Well it might, it was no ordinary tie that bound these souls together. She lived for him, he was the joy of her life, and for him she was all the word mother implies. How proud of him she was at Grimsby when he set forth on his Missionary career. Never shall I forget the love in her eye when she brought him to me and said, "This is my boy, look after him, will you?" Little did he know that the parting was not for long.

His furlough was one long effort to regain strength to return to Nigeria. With valiant heart he made his preparations, his stores were ordered, boxes were packed, but it was a longer voyage he was to set forth upon than even that to Africa's shores.

During the very cold weather of December he caught a chill, and rheumatic fever set in, and the strength to overcome it was not there. With startling suddenness the Higher Call came, the heart so full of courage and hope and love failed to beat, and on Christmas Eve of 1927 he heard the song! the angels sing.

He has joined a small band of souls who live again in minds made better by their presence, Annie Dodds, Frances Groves, Robert Banham, Mary Hanney, Tom McKenzie. They counted not the cost, but having received much they gave much even to their all.

In Lincoln Cemetery, with loved ones gathered round, his mortal frame was laid to rest; from that scene one turns away and the words that abide are the words of the Master, "he that believeth in Me shall never die."

References

PM Minutes 1928/266