

William Bramwell Leigh

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by George Shaw

I yearn for realms where fancy shall be filled, and the ecstasies of freedom shall be felt,
And the soul reign gloriously, risen to its royal destinies;
I look to recognise again, through the beautiful mask of their perfection,
The dear familiar faces I have somewhere loved on earth;
I long to talk with grateful tongue of storms and perils past,
And praise the Mighty Pilot that hath steered us through the rapids.

SPENDING an afternoon in company with one of our ministers a few days ago at the house of a mutual friend, we took up a copy of the Primitive Methodist Magazine for 1859. Glancing over the stations of the preachers in the Hull district for that year we were surprised to find that, during the comparatively short space of eleven years, no less than *twenty* out of the sixty-seven had been cut down by the relentless hand of death. Many of them were well known to us, and several of them were among our most intimate friends and fellow-labourers. They were "mighty men," "men of renown," who "waxed valiant in fight," and were ever found fearlessly leading on

"The sacramental host of God's elect,"
but they are gone,—all gone,—and we sorrow most of all that we shall see their faces no more.

"Like clouds that rake the mountain summit,
Or waves that own no conquering hand,
How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land,"

And now tidings have reached us that another lamp of the sanctuary is extinguished, another star of the Redeemer's right hand disappeared from our view, another ambassador of peace recalled, William Bramwell Leigh, our late friend and colleague is no more.

The subject of this memoir was born in the year 1846. He was the eldest son of the Rev. H. Leigh. author of the "Life of J. Oxtoby." In early life he became the subject of strong religious convictions, which nurtured by parental Christian oversight preserved him from open sin. Though of a warm, impulsive temperament he showed a decided aversion to evil courses, and scrupulously avoided "the ways of wicked men." His conversion took place when he was a little over fifteen years of age. This was a new era in his history. Possessed of a very tender and compassionate nature, filled with sorrow at the sight of distress, and restless until he had given all he possessed to relieve it, his sympathies now found a new field for their exercise. Located in the large town of Bradford, his heart yearned over the perishing masses around him, and he was frequently in an agony of distress on their account, and rested not without making such efforts as he was able to bring them to Christ. His letters to his parents written at this time show that he had a strong desire to labour among the heathen. During the American war his sympathy in behalf of the "poor slaves" was excited to the highest pitch, and his prayers to God in their behalf were earnest and continual.

Appointed by the Keighley quarterly meeting to speak in public he entered upon his work with "fear and trembling." Though blessed with a good education, such was his idea of the importance of the work, and his sense of his unfitness for it that he frequently sat up until midnight for the purpose of mental improvement, and this at a time when he was engaged in the office in which he was clerk, until nine or ten o'clock every night.

After labouring efficiently and successfully as a local preacher for some time he was recommended for the itinerancy and sent to the college at York for the purpose of preparing himself more fully for the discharge of its important duties. Here he continued, under the care of the late Rev. John Petty—of whom he was in the habit of speaking in the highest terms— until he was appointed to supply a vacancy in the Pocklington circuit, caused by the sudden death of the Rev. W. Jones. Here he found excessively long journeys and numerous engagements, but undaunted by the difficulties he had to encounter he exclaimed, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus.”

The superintendent of the circuit, the Rev. R. Cheeseman, says, ‘I believe him to have been a good young man in the fullest sense of the term. He had received a tolerably good education and laboured hard to acquire knowledge. Indeed, in this respect he was in advance of many of our young men when they come out to travel. He was a young man of deep and fervent piety; he carried his religion into everything, and avoided the least appearance of evil; neither would he allow sin to go unreprieved in others. I have never known a young man who had such courage in rebuking the ungodly. . . He was an earnest and successful minister, and gave promise of great usefulness. Living the next door to me, I had an opportunity of observing him pretty closely, and I can bear testimony to the fact that often for hours together he was engaged in earnest prayer. I also found him to be a most kind and agreeable colleague, willing to do anything at any time to assist either his brethren or the Church. I cherished towards him the strongest affection, and was deeply affected when I heard of his sudden removal from amongst us. I doubt not he is now enjoying the fruit of his labours.”

On our succeeding the writer of the above in the Pocklington station we found our young brother occupying the position of third preacher. During the twelve months that he remained we laboured most harmoniously together. He was very successful in the conversion of sinners, and though he was considered “rather peculiar” in some things, the general remark respecting him when he left was “we never had a young man who prayed so much as Mr. Leigh.”

The next year of his ministry was spent in the Tadcaster station, under the superintendency of the Rev. D. Ingham. Writing respecting him during his stay in this station, Mr. Ingham says:— “The Rev. W.B. Leigh was my colleague twelve months in the Tadcaster circuit; during that time he was subject to depression of spirits, no doubt partly from a natural tendency thereto, and partly from the low state of the circuit; but I believe he ardently desired to live holy and to be instrumental in promoting the prosperity of the work of God.

“in his letter to us during that period, he speaks of being subject to strong temptations and deep depression of mind, owing principally to the ‘work dragging heavily along.’ He was cheered, however, by the kindness of his superintendent and many of the friends, especially that of ‘good Mr. and Mrs, Eccles, the worthy souls,’ with whom he abode.

“The pious training and liberal education which he had received were considerable advantages to him in the ministry, so that he was adapted for extensive usefulness in the work of God, but an unerring providence has seen good to remove him from the field of conflict to the rest and joy of heaven.”

In the summer of 1869 he removed to Retford, where he found a congenial colleague in the Rev. J.R. Parkinson, who writing of him says:—

“My first acquaintance with the late William Bramwell Leigh, took place in the month of June, 1867, when he attended a course of missionary services in the Winterton circuit. At that period his sermons were impressive, and his addresses from the platform effective; as he possessed piety, a robust form, and a powerful voice, with a well-informed mind and a ready utterance, there were in him the elements and prospect’ of future usefulness.

“Two years elapsed, and he became my colleague in the Retford circuit. On his arrival it was evident that a great change had taken place. His strength had been reduced by affliction, and some time passed away before he was able to begin his allotted work.

“With returning health, however, he entered upon the vocation to which he had been called with great zeal and devotion. Threatened with arrest and imprisonment, in connection with others, for preaching the Gospel in the market-square of Retford, as it was alleged, too frequently, he said, by his actions, ‘None of these these things move me.’

“During the eight months he was enabled to labour in the Retford station, more than £500 were given or promised, for the erection of new chapels at Retford and Sutton-cum-Lound, and for the reduction of debt on other places of worship in the circuit, while during the same period, there was an addition of about forty members to the different societies.

“The last religious service in which he took part was the laying of the memorial stones of the Retford New Chapel, April 15th, 1870, in which project he took great interest. After this period his health visibly declined, and he expressed a wish in consequence to return to his paternal home. The writer accompanied him on his way, and after that time saw his face no more, but he has no doubt but that he shall meet him before the throne, where are songs of sweet melody, and harps that sound no discord, and flowers that never wither, and friends that love for ever. May it be so. Amen.

The following extracts are from an account furnished us by his father:

“During my dear boy’s illness, he frequently expressed his confidence in God. During the former part of it he strongly desired to recover, yet when he found he must die, he said, ‘Blessed be God, for I am fully ready.’ All things seem to indicate that he was nearing his heavenly home. I have found a number of pieces in his pocket-book, all on heaven, and not long before his death, he actually began sermons on Isaiah xl. 8. ‘The grass. withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever;’ and Psalm xvii. 16. ‘As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness.’ When he was dying, he pressed my finger in token that Christ was precious to him, and departed in perfect peace, August 11th, 1870. He was a noble boy, full of disinterestedness, tender to the suffering, and compassionate to all in distress; and out of his paltry income gave much to relieve them. He had the strongest affection for his parents, brother, sisters, and Christian friends. His heart was full of his work, and while hope of life remained he clung to his studies. I could not induce him to allow me to remove Benson’s Commentary out of his sight as long as he lived.”

We could quote numerous other testimonies to the fervent piety, quenchless zeal, and deep devotedness of our departed brother, but the above must suffice. He is gone where his works do follow him. He has entered into rest, and is now beholding the face of the Saviour, whom he loved and served on earth. Freed from languor and pain, “he *stands* before the throne,” singing with a clear voice the praises of him who has translated him into *his own marvellous light*.”

O, may I bear some humble part
In that immortal song;
Wonder and joy shall tune my heart,
And love command my tongue.

References

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