

Rev. Philip Newton

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.T. Shepherd

The Rev. PHILIP NEWTON was born at Clayton West, in the county of York, June 8th, 1840. His parents were consistent Primitive Methodists, and were perhaps amongst the first members of the connexion at Skelmanthorpe, then in the Barnsley, now in the Clayton West circuit. "Their union with the connexion" (says the Rev. E. Tyas, a native of the same locality), "was based in union with Christ, they gave themselves unto the Lord and then to the church. The union thus formed was of the heart, and has been lasting. They do not belong to the class of religionists who are tossed like straw in the wind, but have remained firm to the connexion in all the stages of trial through which it has passed for nearly half a century. At an early period of the connexion's history Mr. James Newton, the father of Philip, became a class leader and local preacher, and has sustained those offices without intermission, and with credit to himself and profit to the Church." No wonder that the son of such parents should be called to the Christian ministry.

When about four years of age Philip was sent to the Primitive Methodist Sabbath school, in which he subsequently became a teacher, and he continued one until he left home to perform the duties of an itinerant minister.

On the 1st of September, 1855, while at his employment he met with a severe accident, by which he lost a portion of his left hand. About this time he became the subject of serious impressions with regard to divine things. His conversion to God, however, did not take place until some time afterwards. A record of his own says, "I was converted in February, 1858, through the instrumentality of a private person." As was to be expected he joined the Church, of which his father was an office bearer, and his mother and sister were members. The genuineness of his piety was evidenced by regular attendance at the means of grace, and by holy consistency before the world. In addition to a diligent improvement of the services of the Sabbath, his custom during the week was to attend the class one night, the prayer meeting a second night, and the preaching service a third. 'The rest of his leisure time he devoted to the cultivation of his mental powers.

Friends who know him at this period, say, he was what might be called a "great reader;" not of newspapers and novels, but of religious books, such as improve the head and the heart. His mental and his religious progress were so manifest that in March, 1859, he received authority to officiate as an exhorter or local preacher, and in due time he went forth to announce the glad tidings of the Gospel to his perishing fellows. In this sphere he acquitted himself with acceptability, and with profit to the people. In 1860, he was employed by the Barnsley circuit to supply the appointments of its afflicted superintendent, and, having in this capacity given general satisfaction in the Barnsley circuit, on January 1st, 1861, he commence his labours as a hired local preacher in the Scarbro' circuit, and at the following conference (the requisite preliminaries having been duly attended to), he was received as a probationary minister in the connexion.

After labouring a few months in the Scarbro' circuit he removed to Driffield, where for two successive years he toiled to "'turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The testimony of his superintendent (Rev. E. Tyas), in relation to this period, is as follows, "We found him a very agreeable colleague, ever ready to do what he could to advance the kingdom of Christ. His body was feeble, for he suffered much from dyspepsia. The vigour of his mind greatly exceeded the vigour of his body. He was sincerely pious and lived in communion with God. He was extremely conscientious, and would rather injure himself than injure another. His calling was his pleasure, but sometimes he thought he must retire from the ministry on account of his physical infirmities. He was an ardent student, and had his health been sustained he would no doubt have shone some day in the connexion, if not as a star of the first magnitude, yet as one

of a high order. His sermons were not crude extracts from flashy authors, but well digested compositions, showing a maturity of mind which scarcely accorded with his youthful appearance. He studied to show himself ‘a workman that needed not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.’ When seen in the pulpit he had the appearance of a boy, when heard he sounded like a man, not so much in the strength of his voice as in the maturity of his thoughts, and the deliberateness of his manner. The Lord owned his labours, and his preaching was profitable to many.

Out of the pulpit his gravity of deportment exceeded his years. He manifested nothing of that giddy flirting glee by which too many young ministers damage their standing, and deprive themselves of influence among those whom they ought to save. He was not the companion of such as were fond of cracking jokes, so much as of the thoughtful and the sober. The absence in him of the young gentleman’s dash, and his incessant absorption in thought lost for him with some parties that admiration and esteem to which his lofty qualities entitled him. Yet he pursued his steady course, acting, we believe, from the noblest motives. If he did wrong it was infirmity; of sin he had a horror, and to that which is pure and holy he was firmly attached. Of him we think it may with truth be said, he was a Christian both in his public and his private capacity.”

By the conference of 1863 he was appointed to the Louth circuit, where he was cheered and encouraged in his ministerial toil by a measure of success.

In July, 1864, he commenced his labours in the Filey circuit. “His appointment to this circuit,” says the Rev. G. Shaw, “was very congenial to his own mind, having for some time, while in the Scarbro’ circuit, laboured amongst the Filey people and become attached to them. He entered upon his labours with a full determination faithfully to preach Christ and him crucified. He had a growing conviction of the importance of preaching plain practical sermons, and constantly enforcing the necessity of personal religion, and the open avowal of it in the family, and in the world. He was anxious to see the members of society manifest the beauties of holiness in the ordinary affairs of life, and most earnestly did he endeavour to show them the importance of attending to family and closet devotion, and he warned them of the serious consequences which must result from unfaithfulness in these duties. Though he was far from being what is called a ‘fault finder’ in the pulpit, he was jealous over the people with a godly jealousy, and laboured to teach them the various branches of practical godliness that they might stand complete in all the will of God. Many profited much under his ministry, and all believed him to be a sincere, laborious and faithful minister of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

At the Hull district meeting for 1865, having travelled the usual probationary term, he presented himself according to connexional order for examination. His answers to the questions proposed, especially those questions proposed, especially those which related to Christian experience and doctrine, were highly satisfactory. In history, geography, and the higher branches of literature he acquitted himself with credit, and at the following conference he was duly received into the “approved list,” and appointed to labour in the Doncaster circuit.

The following remarks from his own pen in relation to the Christian ministry, and his connexion therewith, may be interesting. “I believe that the institution of the Christian ministry is divine. It was instituted by Jesus Christ before he left the world. The authority of Christ is the authority of God, because Christ is divine. The objects of the Christian ministry are to save men, to glorify God and promote the holiness and happiness of the world. The ministry is, therefore, of vast importance, and claims the attention and support of all men, I believe the qualifications necessary for the Primitive Methodist ministry are a sound constitution, a good voice, good mental powers, business habits, much acquired information, firm faith in the Scriptures, sound religious experience, intense love to Christ and sympathy with the souls of men. I approve of the discipline

of the connexion generally, and think myself called to its ministry because of inward impressions, and the desire I have to promote the holiness and happiness of man, and I intend by the help of God to make myself generally useful therein." With such views and purposes no wonder that he became an acceptable minister of the New Testament.

On June 17th, he was united in marriage to Miss Sarah Wilson, of Scarbro', and both he and his chosen companion in life doubtless anticipated many years of active usefulness in connexion with the church on earth. But how little we know of the future! On July 17th he and his youthful wife entered the Doncaster circuit, and were cordially welcomed by the office bearers and people. He laboured with general acceptance, though sometimes in physical weakness, for a few months; the congregations listened with interest and profit to his ministrations, and some under his ministry were brought to a knowledge of the truth. In pastoral visitation too he endeared himself to the people, and it was hoped that he might live and toil for years to bless the church and the world. How mysterious that he should be taken so early from the scene of his labours on earth to his rest in heaven! At this, however, we must not murmur but bow in reverent submission.

On December 27th, though very unwell, he walked seven miles to a country appointment, and for the last time preached the word of life. The following morning he returned home, and was advised to desist from his labour for awhile, but to this he objected and expressed a wish to toil on. But his work was done. On January 1st, 1866, medical aid was called in. His affliction was found to be fever, which eventually assumed the character of typhus. Hopes were entertained that he would survive the attack, but he gradually sank beneath the power of the destroyer. As is usual in such cases his mind was sometimes delirious, but in his lucid intervals he testified to all inquirers that his confidence was in God, and his hope blooming with immortal life. On one occasion a brother minister remarked, "The good Lord sometimes puts us into the furnace that our principles may be tested, and that we may learn the value of those lessons we seek to impress on the minds of our people." He assented and added, "My affliction is right, It will be of great service to me." His utterances were usually in relation to his loved employment, or to some of the great teachings of our holy religion. During the week preceding his death, on three nights he awoke out of sleep, and sweetly sung the following touching lines,—

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly," &c.

And subsequently the following, which was a favourite verse with him—

"Jerusalem, my happy home!
Name ever dear to me!
When shall my labours have an end
In joy, and peace in thee?"

One day, addressing his beloved wife who stood at the foot of his bed, he said, "Go on, love—go on." Not apprehending his meaning she asked what he meant? "Do go on," he continued, "it is so sweet! and that delightful chorus! Were you not singing?" Being answered in the negative, he added, "I thought you were singing so sweetly." May not this possibly afford some reason to suppose that he was already listening to the choristers of the celestial temple? At another time, as if he was within sight of the holy city and beheld its bright and shining inhabitants, he articulated, "The great company—the white company." When articulation became difficult he was asked, "Are you happy? Is Christ still precious? If so hold up your hand." He at once held up his right arm at full stretch, and with a vigorous effort waved it thrice; thereby testifying his holy confidence in God and his assurance of final victory.

The following incident seems to indicate that he had some presentiment that his dissolution would occur at the exact time at which it took place. Sometime during Saturday, January 13th, which was his last day on earth, he spoke significantly of the "midnight hour," and repeated, "The midnight hour" — At the midnight hour." Time passed and the significant solemn midnight hours approached. At a quarter past eleven he asked, as he often had done, the time. Being told, he counted numbers up to seven and with difficulty articulated twelve. He slumbered a few moments, and then waking up he said with much feeling,—

"I find him lifting up my head,
He brings salvation near."

After a little further slumbering he awoke, and said, "The last—last —last long lane of life is turned. The last sound—the year of jubilee is come." At about five minutes to twelve he grasped the hand of a friend about to leave the room, fixed his eyes upon the ceiling, and pointing upward he exclaimed, "In the blood! in the blood! in the blood!" The clock began to sound the significant and looked-for midnight hour, and as the sixth knell was heard his spirit took its flight to be for ever with the Lord. Thus lived, and thus died a faithful friend, a loving husband, and a devoted minister of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the following Monday his mortal remains were interred in the Doncaster cemetery; a large number of office bearers, members and friends testified their esteem of his character, and their sorrow (though not as of those without hope), at his departure, by attending his funeral. "Devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." Brothers A. Johnson, W. Leaker, and the writer, took part in the sad and solemn service, and we left him to sleep in the cold grave till the trumpet shall sound and call him forth at the resurrection of the just.

On the evening of Sunday, February 4th, a sermon was preached in our Doncaster chapel, having especial reference to his death. The congregation was large, the service solemn and impressive, and in a prayer meeting, held at its close, seven souls professed to obtain the pearl of great price; six of these were young men. May the mantle of the deceased fall on them.

References

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