

**Rev. Philip Rawnsley**

**Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Dumbell**

Was born in the village of Esholt, near Leeds, May 10th, 1840. The writer has no intimate acquaintance with his youthful years, but the following accounts found in his own hand-writing will throw considerable light on that period. "In my early youth" says he, "I was favoured with the prayers, the example, and the instructions of pious parents. Early they taught me to bow the knee in prayer, and strove to impress me with the value and importance of true religion; early they led me to the house of God, and taught me to reverence the sanctuary, and love its ordinances." Blessed with God-fearing parents who took such a deep interest in the moral and spiritual welfare of their son, and nurtured amid the hallowed influences of a pious home, no wonder that from a mere youth, he was often the subject of powerful religious impressions. Hence he says, "As far back as I can recollect, I had frequently very serious thoughts on religious subjects, I had great respect for all whom I thought truly loved God, and for the ministers of the gospel I especially felt a profound regard. In my boyhood I used to look upon them almost as a superior order of intelligences, and often thought I should realize consummate bliss, if ever I could become worthy to occupy so distinguished a position as theirs.

When he was about ten years of age, a course of special religious services was held in the village where he then resided. Our departed brother went to those services, he felt deeply impressed with the importance of giving his heart to God; and before their termination, he with several more young persons, believed in Christ, and was made happy in the realization of pardoning mercy. Referring to this period he says, "I believe at that time I was truly converted; for some time we were very earnest, no meeting was too early or late for us to attend, no distance was too far for us to travel, that we might enjoy the means of grace, and tell what the Lord had done for us."

Evidently the charge then produced in his heart was genuine; and well would it have been for him if from that time he had continued steadfast in the faith, but to brother Rawnsley a testing time came; and unhappily he yielded to the power of temptation, and lost the evidence of his adoption. He did not, however, cease to attend the Sabbath-school, and the house of God, yet his heart was not right; he had fallen into condemnation, lost the sweet sense of God's approving smile, and his mind became filled with disquietude and gloom. No doubt the influences and associations of his home had a beneficial tendency upon him, and operated as a powerful check to indulgence in those vices which too frequently corrupt the morals and embitter the lives of young persons. He was far from being happy. The charm of worldly pleasure was now broken, and his conduct when viewed in the light of eternity filled him with dread and alarm. Speaking of this time he says, "Often did I regret yielding to temptations, and neglecting my class meeting; and bitterly did I grieve when I remembered how I had lost that sweet peace of mind which had once filled me with such joy and gladness. The Spirit of God often powerfully operated on my mind, and urged me to return; and many resolutions did I make to give myself again and for ever to the Lord."

It was not, however, until he was between seventeen and eighteen years of age, that he again consecrated himself to the service of religion. For some time previous to this, his mind became unhappy, the conviction of sin became deep, and all the feelings of his soul were now concentrated in a desire for conscious pardon. One day, while in this state of mind, he took up one of our magazines which contained an article on conversion, written by the Rev. J. Barfoot. "That article," he says, "I carefully and prayerfully read, and most fervently did I pray that the great change spoken of by the writer, might again be realized in me." That wish was soon to be gratified; for in the evening of the same day on which he read the article on conversion, he went to a prayer meeting in the chapel, and before its close he was enabled to receive Christ as his only and

all sufficient Saviour, and to say with the Apostle, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "That night," says he, "I gave myself unreservedly to the Lord, resolved by his grace to love and serve him all the days of my life, and to live and labour for his glory." This resolution he faithfully adhered to till the final summons came.

About seven months after this happy change he was called upon to make known to others "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Possessing good natural powers, and being favoured with a liberal education, and manifesting by his holy walk and conversation the unmistakable characteristics of a genuine Christian, we are not surprised to find that he was soon marked out as one every way likely to occupy a prominent position in the Church of Christ. Accordingly his name soon appeared on the local preachers' plan. This sphere of labour was not entered upon by Mr. Rawnsley without much fear and trembling; having a clear perception of the vast responsibilities which attach to the Christian ministry, and of his own insufficiency for the work, he did not take the office lightly nor without much prayer. "With very strange feelings," says he, "I received the message one Monday, that I was appointed to preach in our chapel on the following Sunday evening. I trembled, and feared; yet I did not refuse. I earnestly prayed for the divine guidance and blessing; and the Lord did help and bless me greatly that night as I tried to set forth the necessity, and value of religion; and many felt it good to be there."

After labouring with acceptability in the capacity of local preacher for a period of two years, he received a call from the Manchester First Station, to become one of its travelling preachers. That call he regarded as an expression of the divine will; and believing that the Christian ministry was destined to be his future sphere in life, he, on the second day of November, 1864, left his friends and the home of his youth to share the honours and the toils of a Primitive Methodist minister. He deeply felt the solemn responsibilities of his new position; but encouraged by the sympathy and kindness of the people amongst whom he was called to labour, and blessed with instances of success and the smile of heaven, he moved on in the path of duty, studying and praying for those qualifications that would make him not merely great in the estimation of men, but useful in sinners to Christ.

After remaining nearly two years in Manchester, he was appointed to the Preston Brook Station, where the writer and he spent two very happy years together. His next removal was to Liverpool Second, where he remained one year. During these years he sustained several painful family bereavements, being called upon to witness the death of his beloved parents, and a brother; and that home which to him had been so dear was now broken up. His next appointment was to the superintendency of Haslingden Second Station. Shortly after this he entered the marriage state with Miss Storey, of Carlisle, who is now left to mourn her great loss. After remaining two years in Haslingden, he removed to Staleybridge Station, where he had only just completed one connexional year, when death put an end to his mortal existence.

In endeavouring to form an estimate of Mr. Rawnsley's character, there are a few things of which we may make special mention. He was humble and unassuming in his manners, he was free from everything like ostentatious display, and, though pleased when conscious that his sermons were appreciated, yet there seemed to be no hankering after mere popular applause. He was a diligent student, possessing good natural powers; these he endeavoured carefully to cultivate, convinced that it was his duty to improve the mental capabilities with which God had endowed him, and believing that the highest culture of the intellect is quite compatible with the deepest experience of religious truth; that the rays emanating from the lamp of knowledge harmoniously blend with the light flowing from the Sun of Righteousness. He diligently sought, by a systematic course of study, to furnish his mind with a good supply of solid information. By "redeeming the time" and hard study he had acquired a tolerable knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, as well as a correct and pretty extensive acquaintance with the grand themes of the Bible. There is little doubt, had

his valuable life been spared to an average length, that he would have risen to a very respectable position in the Connexion, both as a scholar and a theologian. He was also an acceptable preacher. His sermons were generally well prepared; his language, for the most part, was well chosen; and his style, luminous and clear, so that the most illiterate of his hearers might understand his meaning. However much he delighted in the study of metaphysical subjects out of the pulpit, he was careful to preach Christ and him crucified to the people; while he strove to be logical, he also aimed at being practical. His tall and somewhat spare form, always neatly appparelled, gave him a dignified appearance in the pulpit. And this, combined with a graye and unaffected demeanour, gave to his preaching (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) a power and impressiveness which frequently reached the hearts of those who listened to his appeals.

He was also a great admirer of the Connexion with which he stood identified. He was a Primitive Methodist in heart; and, while he was a lover of all good men, yet he claimed to have a greater respect for the Church of his early choice. In one of his written addresses, now lying beside us, we meet with the following expression of his sentiments: "I rejoice," says he, "to be a member and a minister of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. I am a thorough Primitive Methodist. I love the Connexion; in it I was brought up, converted, and educated; amongst its members I have always lived, and I have no stronger desire than to live and die in its ministry. I love its doctrines, because I believe them to be the doctrines of the Bible; I love its polity, because I believe it to be in harmony with the New Testament, and with the requirements of the times; I love its spirit, because I believe it to be the spirit which influenced the Apostles, the early Christians, the martyrs, and the truly good in all ages; I appreciate its aim, which is nothing less than the conversion of the world to the faith of Christ."

But, above all, he was a good Christian; his piety, we believe, was of the genuine stamp. At the commencement of his religious life he was deeply impressed with the necessity of an entire change of heart; and he never rested till he obtained the pardon of his sins and the renewal of his nature through faith in the atonement of Christ; and in the light of Gcd's countenance he continued to walk to the end of his days. With him Christianity was the grand central fact; to him it was the most real of all things; and hence he was rooted and grounded in it, and felt it to be a living power in his soul.

It will, perhaps, be asked if our departed friend possessed so many excellencies, what were his faults? We pretend not to pourtray a faultless character; high as he stood in the estimation of many, and much as he was beloved by those who knew him best, yet he was but man. Doubtless, like other men, he had his defects; but, like the spots on the orb of day, they were concealed from general observation in the brightness of his consistent walk and conversation; considering his life as a whole, he exhibited a pattern worthy the imitation of all who are desirous of living according to the Gospel of Christ.

His end, as we have already intimated, was very sudden. He had just made arrangements to spend a few days with his wife and children at Southport, thinking that change of air would prove beneficial to Mrs. Rawnsley's health, which, for some time past, had been very delicate. For this purpose he had packed his baggage, and made all ready on the Saturday evening, intending to start early on the Monday morning, but an All-wise Providence had otherwise determined; for, within three hours after retiring to rest on the Saturday night, he, without uttering a word, passed away to the skies; we doubt not, to be "or ever with the Lord." Thus died Brother Rawnsley June 20th, 1869, having just completed the twenty-ninth year of his age.

The news of his sudden departure was a severe shock to the different members of his family, to a large circle of friends, and to many of his brethren in the ministry; numbers felt as if they had lost a true friend and brother, and wept because they would see his face and hear his voice no more on earth. At the inquest held on the body, the medical gentleman present attributed the cause of his death to disease of the heart.

On the 23rd of June, his mortal remains were interred in Duckenfield Cemetery, followed by 300 friends, including members from all the chapels in the Staleybridge Station, and several ministers from the surrounding circuit. The sublime service for the burial of the dead was impressively read by the Rev. J. Macpherson, and a very touching address was delivered at the grave by the Rev. W. Hall. "I would offer," said Mr. Hall, "to the widow and friends of our deceased brother, the sincere and affectionate condolence of my brethren in the ministry. We have so recently spoke to him, and seen him in our assemblies, that his death appeared more like a translation than death in the ordinary way, He is risen, and his spirit has gone to rest in heaven. The suddenness of the event should lead us to believe that God has done it. If I were called upon to pronounce a eulogium upon his character, the interest displayed by this large and affected concourse of sorrowing ministers and members would speak more for his moral excellence, than anything could do that I might say. He was a most exemplary and deeply pious minister, and was rising to eminence amongst his brethren; and his life justifies me in saying— "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

The Rev. G. Stansfield (\*) says: "I always felt a warm attachment to the Rev. P. Rawnsley, from my first acquaintance with him, and deeply deplore his sudden death. I had to do with calling him out into the ministry, and he travelled with me nearly three years. I found him an agreeable and laborious young man. He was much esteemed both as a preacher and a Christian; and had his life been spared, with health, he would have been of great service to the Connexion. He was an humble, intellectual, pious grave, useful, and, in all respects, a worthy young man; and to be cut down, like the almond tree, in the midst of his bloom, is a mysterious Providence; doubtless, he now flourishes in the regions of immortality, and has left behind him a name that will be remembered with respect by all who knew him, and especially by those who knew him best."

JOHN DUMBELL.

\* Mr. Dumbell furnished testimonials to the worth of our departed brother from several ministers, but, as they substantially agree with that of Mr. Stansfield, we have not published them,—[Ed.]

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#### References

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