

Rev. Benjamin Shimwell

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Lightfoot

Mr. Bensamin SHIMWELL was born at Youlgrave, in the High Peak Hundred, in the County of Derby, on October 25th, 1802.

Though his parents were not decidedly religious, yet they had respect for the ordinances of the gospel, were moral in their conduct, industrious in their habits, and anxious that their children should be respectably educated, and preserved from the immoralities prevalent among the majority of their neighbours. When sent to school, Benjamin evinced considerable aptitude for learning, and, before he was quite five years of age, he could read the sacred Scriptures with fluency; but not having been trained piously, he felt little or no religious concern during the most of his youthful days. Like the generality of young people, he was captivated with the vanities of the world, and sought to slake the thirst of his soul at the streams of sinful pleasure. However, in the midst of his frivolities he suffered many checks of conscience, and sometimes, when attending the public services of religion, he resolved to reform his life, and consecrate himself to God; but his purposes, like "the morning cloud and early dew," soon vanished away. Instead of offering effectual resistance to temptation, he yielded to it, and, according to his own testimony, became avowedly wicked. But God, who is rich in mercy towards the chief of sinners, convinced him effectually of the error of his ways, and brought him to a saving knowledge of Christ by the agency of the Primitive Methodist.

In the summer of 1822, when he was about twenty years of age, much excitement was caused at Youlgrave, and in the neighbourhood, by the visits of some of our missionaries, and curiosity led him and many others to attend their ministry. One of the sermons to which he listened from Mr. Delaney, arrested his conscience like the "trump of God," and he felt that, without an interest in the atonement, he would be undone for ever. After enduring much mental anguish, he obtained a scriptural assurance of the pardon of his sins, under the ministry of Mr. William Taylor. Soon he was identified with the people of God, and the great change observable in his tastes and habits became, to his renounced, wicked companions, a subject for mirth and ridicule. Repeatedly did they assail him with scorn, pouring abuse upon the new connections he had formed, and trying to shake his resolutions and induce him to return to their unholy fellowship; but he remained invulnerable to all their assaults, and proceeded steadily in his religious career.

Having experienced the power of personal godliness, his heart yielded to the impulses of Christian benevolence, and, thenceforward, the great object of his life was to diffuse the knowledge of a crucified Saviour, as the only effectual means of elevating and saving the world. Other things might, in his estimation, serve as subordinate auxiliaries, but the Gospel was deemed of primary and essential importance. On this account, though oppressed with a consciousness of manifold weaknesses, he willingly consecrated his life to the public ministry, and entered into his itinerant labours among us in the twenty-second year of his age, after he had been a local preacher about a year.

The scene of his labours, for the first six years of his ministry, included several parts of the counties of Derby, Leicester, Oxford, and Wilts; and during this time he was principally engaged as a missionary, visiting, and preaching the gospel to a people who had previously been supplied but very partially with the ordinances of religion.

At the present period we have very imperfect ideas of the hardships to which our preachers were exposed in the early part of the Connexion's history. Frequently they were assailed by ignorant and infuriated mobs, pelted with filthy and dangerous missiles, and inured to various privations; and in reading the journal of our departed brother, I learn that, in his early missionary tours, he shared in the hardships common to his brethren. Often, when proclaiming the gospel to the outcasts of society, his voice was drowned by the ribald shouts of depraved and priest-ridden multitudes, and his person exposed to insult and injury; but none of these things moved him. Like "a good soldier of Jesus Christ," he braved the hostilities of the enemy, "waxing valiant in fight;" and while his spirit was frequently refreshed by the copious effusions of Divine influence, his heart was gladdened by seeing souls converted to God under his ministry. Now that his warfare is ended, we can imagine the high ecstasy he realizes while associating with some glorified spirits who were led by his agency into the pathway to eternal life.

He continued an itinerant preacher till the close of his life,—a period of twenty-four years; and besides labouring in the counties already named, his ministry was acceptable and useful in Bradford, Swinefleet, Pocklington, Leeds, Scotter, Hull, Tadcaster, Halifax, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Sunderland circuits—in most of which he effectually discharged the duties of a superintendent. The frankness of his spirit and his obliging manners rendered him an agreeable colleague, and won the affections of his own people and the esteem and respect of other communities. His was eminently a catholic spirit—not pent up within the limits of his own church, but free as the air of heaven, and embracing the great Christian brotherhood. The spirit and design of the "Evangelical Alliance" met with his cordial approval, and secured his zealous co-operation; indeed, he was always happy when associating with ministers of evangelical churches in the philanthropic movements of recent date. He was much interested in the cause of temperance reformation, and, as a delegate from Monkwearmouth, he attended the recent Conference of Ministers assembled at Manchester, and occasionally presided over its sittings.

His death was alarmingly sudden: having been confined for a few days only, with an ulcerated throat, he was seized, on the afternoon of July 6th, 1848, with a fit of apoplexy, and instantly he expired. From the tenor of his personal and official conduct, and from the fact that, when interrogated on the day of his death concerning his spiritual condition, he replied, "Christ is all and in all to me," we cannot doubt of his eternal salvation. Previous to the removal of his remains, the Rev. Mr. Parker, Secession minister, offered an impressive prayer; the Rev. Mr. Watkinson, Independent, delivered an affecting address; and the Rev. Mr. Staton, Wesleyan Superintendent, concluded by praying with great feeling and energy; and a large concourse, including ministers and members of various religious denominations, composed the funeral procession. The forenamed ministers improved the melancholy event to their respective congregations, and brother Brining and I improved it before overflowing congregations in our own chapels,

A widow and five children survive to lament the departure of our brother; but his God has already raised up for them in Sunderland many kind friends, who have generously provided for them a comfortably furnished habitation, and given them other proofs of their Christian benevolence.

References

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