

William Stafford

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Henry Stafford

WILLIAM, the son of William and Jane STAFFORD, was born at Woodley in Bredbury, Stockport Circuit, February 26th, 1817. His parents were members of the Primitive Methodist Society at that place, and they endeavoured by prayer and good example, &c., to train up their children in the way they should go. At the age of thirteen years, William was converted to God, and joined the society. This took place one Sabbath evening, in the old school-room, after the preaching service. His elder brother, who had been previously brought to Christ, got him, with four others, to go to the bench to which penitents were invited, and I hope all of them are now in heaven. So clear was William's knowledge that all his sins were forgiven, that in after years when speaking in lovefeasts, he has been heard to refer to the hour, yea, to the minute when he was saved. His young mind, which was highly capable of improvement, began to take in the precious truths of the gospel with great delight, and he gave himself to prayer, reading, and study; by these means he made rapid progress.

At the age of sixteen years he became a local preacher, and when nineteen he was called out to travel by the Stockport Circuit. But his constitution being too delicate for the work, after four or five months trial he returned to his former employment. Still he devoted himself to the diligent pursuit of useful knowledge, by which he obtained qualifications to be of great service in a variety of ways.

As a preacher he was generally admired. Some of his sermons were of no mean order, but often faithful expositions and clear illustrations of Divine truth. He was approved of by the Church, and owned of God in the conversion of souls; and we trust there were some in heaven to greet him on his arrival, and there are others to follow him, who will be the crown of his rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus. He preached his last sermon, November 1860, from Proverbs iii. 17,— "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace." Speaking of this in his affliction, he said, "I had an impression that night that I should never preach again."

As a class-leader, he was faithful and pointed in his admonitions and counsels, and was greatly beloved by his members.

As a teacher in the school, his instructions were much sought after by young men, whose improvement he ever strove to promote, and some now labouring in the ministry feel grateful for the benefits they received at his hands. He was a member of the orchestra, where he could be useful either by assisting with the flute or the violin, as well as in other ways. Considering his means, there are few men to be found who have made a greater proficiency than he had in English grammar, and the way in which he taught it in his class was really pleasing and beneficial, allowing any scholar to ask any question about it which he might think proper. He made himself conversant with various sciences, on some of which he gave lectures, viz., grammar, music, geography, astronomy, and electricity.

As a Christian, his religion was the result of a firm and intelligent faith in the great truths of the Book of God, and it may be said of him, that having believed, he kept the faith, and by a consistent walk and conversation adorned the doctrines of the Bible.

As a husband and father, he was faithful, loving, and kind, ever seeking by honest industry to provide for his family, and by precept and example to lead them all in the way to heaven. The bent of his soul was to be upright, honorable, and clear of the world. But God, who seeth not as man seeth, suffered him not to triumph in these things. For a long time he was delicate in health, and suffered much through bodily affliction, enduring at the same time the trials of rearing a large family.

For nearly three of the last years of his life he was unable to follow his employment as overlooker in a mill, during which time he tried the business of newsagent, stationer, &c. About last Christmas he took a very severe cold, from which he never rallied, but gradually grew worse, until consumption and bronchitis terminated his earthly career. He bore his affliction with meekness and resignation, evidently ripening for eternity. He repeatedly said, "Death is no terror to me." To his brother S., who asked him the state of his mind, he said, "My experience is, I believe I am saved, I feel I am saved; I am not afraid of death. Death is no dread to me, I feel a settled peace with God, a calm assurance that I am saved through the blood of the atonement. I believe I am saved; I feel I am saved. Glory! glory! to the Lamb!" On another occasion, after the services of the first opening day of the new school (in the beginning of the erection of which he had taken a very active part), he said, "Glory, glory! I shall soon be ten thousand thousand times better off; I feel I am saved through the blood of Christ. I have no fear of dying, but long to be gone. I shall soon be free from all these pains, and heaven will make amends for all. Glory! glory! to the Lamb!" He made the following verse for his own funeral card:—

"My feeble frame though long oppress'd,
Has now obtained a lasting rest;
My soul, through Christ, has gained the shore,
Where griefs and cares are felt no more."

To his eldest brother he expressed his grateful satisfaction that God was doing all things for the best, and a short time before he died, he desired him to write his last request, to be read to his family after he was gone.

The following is a copy:—

"Dear children,—I leave this as my dying and last request, that you attend punctually and strictly to the school and chapel services. Don't take offence at trifles, and run off to other places. Don't be petty, but put up with inconveniences, hold fast, and persevere. I die in full assurance of faith, and God has said (Jer. xlix. 11), 'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.' My dear wife and children, farewell; do your duty, meet me in heaven.

'And when we meet, no tongue can tell
How great our joys shall be.'

WILLIAM STAFFORD."

When written, he looked it over, wept, and said, "It is just right, every word of it."

On the 1st of May, 1861, he fell asleep in Jesus. He has left a widow and seven children to mourn their loss. May they all meet him in glory.

"How blest the righteous when he dies,
When sinks a weary soul to rest,
How mildly beam the closing eyes,
How gently heaves th'expiring breast."

"Life's labour done, as sinks the clay,
Freed from its load, the spirit-flies;
While heaven and earth combine to say,
How blest the righteous when ho dies."

References

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