

Rev. Thomas Rushworth

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J Ayrton

To those who start the inquiry as to whether the ministerial supply to the distant places in our circuits is, in a connexional sense, remunerative, the account following may be instructive, whilst to those who, for various reasons, desire the vigorous maintenance of 'village Methodism,' it will certainly be interesting.

Denholme-Clough, a place with a considerable, though scattered population, adjacent to the moors which in that part of the West Riding separate Yorkshire and Lancashire, was the birthplace of the brother whose name stands at the head of this article.

It was always the distant place—first in the mother circuit, Keighley, and after the division of the circuit, it occupied the same position towards Bingley, its present circuit-head. The chapel really stands nearer to Halifax, five and a half miles away to the south. Keighley and Bingley are each six and a half miles off, but the pioneers of the Connexion paid more attention to Providential openings for their work than to the geographical delimitation of their spheres of toil.

The mere distance is not great, but by those who know the rugged unevenness of the country, and the bleakness of the roads, especially in wild weather, the journey is regarded as far from eligible. Of course, when we think of the performance of the journey by successive relays of ministerial and local brethren during more than sixty years—the chapel was built in 1834—there is represented a large sum-total of toil for the glory of the Lord. It is humbly submitted that that glory was largely secured and reflected in the character and career of Brother Rushworth,

He dated his life from February 14th, 1839. His childhood days did not invest him with many advantages, and hence, what he subsequently became was the more to his credit. Of course he attended Sunday-school, and as he grew up his mind was imbued with the truths of the Christian faith.

He does not appear to have run to any excesses of evil in the period before conversion.

Touching his manner of life: at that time, I have before me certificates covering a period of several years, dated 'September 19, 1859,' from his employers, Messrs. Foster of Denholme Mills, and from the Rev. P. Eggleston, the incumbent of Denholme of the time, testifying to Brother Rushworth's excellent conduct and workmanlike ability, the latter stating his fitness for responsibility and trust.

Let the meed of praise be given to this clerical gentleman, that he could descry the qualifications that Primitive Methodism subsequently ratified for thirty years!

The influence of his sister (who through much tribulation was faithful to death), was a main factor of the inducing causes of his conversion. Need we wonder that he expressed a desire to be interred in the same churchyard where her ashes repose?

He came to realise himself a sinner, and after struggling under the burden of his sins for about a week, the all-momentous decision was taken in connection with a lovefeast which he attended in our chapel at Denholme-Clough.

Immediately on obtaining consciousness of pardon, he rose from his seat and asked the people to praise the Lord with him, for He had saved him from all his sins. This occurred in the year 1860. In after years he was accustomed to say he had 'been telling of this great salvation ever since!'

From the day of his conversion he began to work for God. His first effort at 'exhorting' was attended with definite success. An 'old mate' was 'listening' in the porch and got converted.

Very soon his name was put on the plan 'on trial,' and he preached his first sermon at Harecroft (an adjoining hamlet) on February 10, 1861, his text being Matt. xi. 5. His trial-sermon, based on Isaiah i. 3— which being approved, he was raised to full plan— was preached in Keighley (Queen-street) chapel.. These things, however, were but the beginnings of 'responsibility and trust,' for he was soon pledged by the Clayton West circuit, then under the care of the late Rev. J. Baldwin, and commenced his itinerant work by preaching at Denby Dale (in the same circuit) on July 20, 1862. After labouring two years there he travelled: at Knaresbro' (two years), Pickering (two years), Burnley (three years), Colne (two years), Shipley (one year), being then made Superintendent, Silsden (three years), Easingwold (three years), Malton (two years), Wakefield (three years), Sowerby Bridge (three years), and lastly Scholes circuit, where he had almost finished his fourth year when he was suddenly summoned from this mortal sphere!

It is thus apparent that our lamented brother had nearly completed thirty years' 'active work.'

In several of these stations he had long and toilsome journeys, but was favoured with cheering instances of success.

The Rev. G. Annakin says : 'About twenty-six years ago, he was second preacher in Knaresbro' circuit. He was the colleague successively of the late Rev. J. Hedley and Rev. R. Davies. He was then young, vigorous and active, and much admired and loved by all who knew him both as a Christian gentleman and as a minister of the Gospel. He was my first class-leader, and from him in this capacity I received much valuable instruction and encouragement. The class met at Harrogate, and many refreshing seasons we had in those cays the fragrance of which lingers with me still. As a preacher he much excelled. His sermons were instructive, interesting, pointed, faithful and practical, and he delivered them with natural ease, force and pathos. On his removal from the circuit I felt I was losing the friend and counsellor of my early Christian life.'

Gladly would we reproduce the many testimonies now before us to the sterling and lovable qualities of our brother, furnished by ministerial friends, former colleagues and others, but space forbids. An exception, however, must be made in favour of the witness of the Rev. A. McKechnie, who knew Mr. Rushworth from the time of conversion; being stationed in the Bingley circuit when that event occurred. He says:

'I perceived in him at that time,

'1. Good intellectual powers.

'2. Excellent ready utterance.

'3. Deep, earnest, steady-growing piety.

'4. A settled purpose to work for God in every way that opened before him.

'These good qualities decided me to select him for the ministry.'

Mr. McKechnie adds that all he has known of Mr. Rushworth since has confirmed his opinion as first formed.

His business abilities were good—both in financial and general official work. And in connection with this his non-ambitiousness must be noted. Whilst quite willing to take his share of extra official work, (in 1888 he sustained the office of General Committee Delegate at district meeting, and was thrice delegated to

Conference) he was not only willing, but glad to, see his brethren share the 'honours.' Further, he had that kind of ability, that when he had weighty or difficult matters on the way, showed itself in the cautiousness of seeking counsel of his ministerial brethren. This the present writer can testify. 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.'

Loyalty to the Connexion was a constant feature—little needing to be avouched in words because so constantly evidenced by deeds. Whilst some might withdraw, and others, though remaining, disturb or murmur, his heart continuing to approve the church of his choice, his hands still laboured in its behoof.

Geniality was another prominent feature. This won-him: friends both within and without his own community. A quality that often facilitated, aye, and felicitated the affairs that he was called upon to manage. Although he was not strictly speaking robust, his health had been almost invariably good; at least, the reports of the 'Sick Preachers' Relief Fund' have no record against him.

His Lord came in an hour when he looked not for Him. On April 17, (Easter Day) he went to Gatehead, where he was appointed to preach. There he was seized with sickness whilst in the pulpit, and had to be conveyed home.

Medical aid was obtained and it was found he was suffering from 'influenza.' During the next ten days he was supposed to be slowly improving, but in the evening of the tenth day he was seized with a fainting-fit, said, 'Lord Jesus, take me,' and at once passed away.

This was universally felt as both sudden and unexpected.

The widow and adopted daughter, Miss Martin, painfully realised Lord Tennyson's description:

'That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common | never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.'

His friendliness and the suddenness of his death, evoked a most marked display of feeling. Within a few days of the death more than eighty letters of sympathy and respect were sent to the mourning family. One of these was from the Rev. J.E. Brigg, vicar of Hepworth, the parish in which Mr. Rushworth was residing at the time when he died, declaring that he 'had the highest respect for' Mr. Rushworth, and that he 'regarded him as a true friend of a thoroughly Christian disposition.' This was followed by a visit, in company with his lady, to condole with the family.

On Sunday, May 1, the same gentleman preached in his church a sermon 'In Memoriam' Mr. Rushworth, from Ps, cxvi. 15.

The Congregational Church at Honley— Rev..R.. Briggs,.M.A., ,minister—sent from its 'church meeting' a loving and sympathetic message.

Mr. Briggs himself preached an 'In Memoriam' sermon in our chapel at Honley, to a large congregation on Wednesday evening, May 11, the choirs of the Congregational, Wesleyan, and Primitive Methodist chapels uniting to assist, specially printed sheets of hymns being used, including two known to be favourites of Mr. Rushworth, 'Hark! Hark! my soul,' and 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,' the service concluding with the 'Dead March in Saul.' Mr. Briggs discoursed on Acts xiii. 36, and stated his feeling towards the departed one was as

of a son to a beloved father, and that his life 'would always be richer for having enjoyed the inspiring friendship now terminated.' Several letters were received from Mytholmroyd in the Sowerby Bridge station, where our friend had about five years ago done good work in connection with the erection of a handsome new chapel—(another success at the 'distant cause.')

On April 30, the interment took place at St. Paul's Church, Denholme. A long service was held in the chapel which thirty-two years before had been the scene of his conversion. The Revs. A. McKechnie, J. Ayrton, J.F. Parrish, H. Cooke, J. P. Osborne, and J. Holroyd, took part. Both the Leeds and Bradford district meetings (in session at the time, and at the latter of which Mr. Rushworth had been expected as Delegate) appointed deputations to the funeral.

In response to a request for our own ministers to officiate at the grave, (legal notice not having been given in sufficient time), the Rev. A. Brown, vicar, wrote Mrs. Rushworth a letter of sympathy. He further invited the ministers to take part in the service inside the church, though this, through the information not reaching the proper parties in time, failed of being done. The funeral company proceeded from the chapel to the grave, where the service was finished by the Revs. A. McKechnie and J. Ayrton.

It is fair and exemplary to record Mr. Brown's catholicity.

The day following a man might have been seen standing by the grave wrapt in solemn meditation; he had learnt the sad news (too late to attend the funeral), and had travelled from Lancashire to visit the spot rendered sacred by the dust of his dear friend. Such an action is readily understood by anyone that ever felt the touch of the vivacious and genial spirit of Thomas Rushworth.

It remains to be added that on Sunday, May 15, his death and life were improved by the venerable minister whose protegee Brother Rushworth had been, Rev. A. McKechnie, in the chapel at Scholes in the afternoon from Heb. xi. 9 and to, and in the chapel at Wooldale in the evening from Rev. vii.9, 13 and 14, 'What are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?' &c.

And in conclusion, to link the end of this account with its beginning, we may ask would the now sainted preachers of by-gone years, who tramped their weary way and established influences at Denholme-Clough that led to our brother's conversion and his life of devoted service, consider the result of their toil as any other than grand success when they greeted him as the 'new-arrived,' and welcomed him to the 'land without a storm'? I trow not.

References

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