

Rev. Thomas Tanfield

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Herbert Hedges

The Rev. Thomas Tanfield was born on June 5th, 1849, at Halifax, Yorkshire. He was a child of the manse, his father being the late Rev. Richard Tanfield, who, after forty-four years in the regular ministry, had twelve years as Treasurer of the Conference, and initiated and named during his time the Connexional Fund. It was his wish that his son should follow in his steps—a wish that was gloriously fulfilled. Thomas proved to be a worthy son of a worthy sire. When a boy he made the great surrender. He soon manifested spiritual gifts and graces; and, in his early 'teens, he became a local preacher. A few years later he entered the ministry at the age of twenty. Our Church owes much to him. He travelled at Barnsley, Pocklington (twice), Louth, Tetney, Chippenham, Glastonbury, North Cave, Barton-on-Humber, Hadnall and Chinnor. On all these circuits he exercised a powerful influence for good, and is remembered with gratitude by many. At Hadnall in 1904, he lost his beloved wife—a loss he mourned deeply to the end.

His last thirteen years were spent at Chinnor—three on active service and ten as a superannuated minister — and his passing has created a breach that will not easily be filled. He was society steward and trust treasurer. Besides this, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the work of the circuit, talking: five or six appointments a quarter. He was also in great demand for the chapels of other denominations in the surrounding villages. His gifts were many, though it was easy to be deceived about them, for no more modest man ever entered our ministry. He never advertised himself or sought the limelight. To him, service for Christ brought its own reward. Nevertheless he several times served on District Committees.

Preaching was the joy of his life, He loved to exalt his Lord before the congregations. It was pathetic to see his grief when the doctor told him three weeks before the end that he must preach no more. His sermons, which were carefully prepared, and abundant in rich thought, revealed a well-furnished mind. There was a clear evangelical ring in his preaching, born of a passionate love for Christ and his fellow-men. He knew in whom he believed, and in consequence was able to persuade others to believe. His life gave a note of authority to his preaching. He not only told the truth, but he made the truth tell by the charm of his personality.

Absolute unselfishness was the keynote of his character. Possibly had he cared more for himself and less for his work he might have added years to his life. Despite the entreaties of his friends, he often persisted in going to some distant village to preach when he ought to have been in bed. His sense of honour was most acute—one instinctively felt that he was incapable of anything mean. With wrongdoing he was divinely patient, whilst his sympathy for those in trouble was of a most tender and practical nature.

He had a great fund of good humour, and his genial, brotherly manner made him beloved as a pastor, and welcomed in the homes of his people. He loved little children, who were always glad to be in his presence.

The writer thanks God for the privilege of a fellowship which, though short, has permanently enriched his life. The end came rather suddenly. After preaching at one of the neighbouring village chapels, he returned home exhausted. The following day the doctor called and told him that he must stop preaching. He had a premonition that the end was near, for he advised his daughter what to do after his decease. This proved to be only too true; for after an illness lasting about three weeks, he passed into the Homeland on September 14th, 1922, in his seventy-third year, having served forty-three years in the active ministry, and ten as superannuated minister. His memory will ever remain an inspiration.

The interment took place at Chinnor on September 19th, the Revs. J. Miles Johnson and H. Hedges officiating. A memorial service was held at Chinnor, when the Rev. H. Hedges referred to our brother's beautiful life and gracious influence. He leaves one daughter, who is a faithful worker at our Chinnor Chapel, and two sons, for whom we sympathise; but for him we rejoice in the true and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1923/435