

Rev. William Smith

Transcription of obituary published in the Minutes of Conference by E. Dalton

WILLIAM SMITH was born at Wootton, in Lincolnshire, on August 19th, 1844. His early life was surrounded with religious influences, which were very powerful in many of the villages of this county in those days. He mercifully escaped the bewitching temptations to which young people were subjected who were reared in great cities. From his earliest days he was favourably disposed towards religion. He regularly attended divine services on the Sundays and not seldom on the week days. His thoughtful, steady, sober, industrious, and gentlemanly conduct when a boy made a great impression upon all who knew him, and not the least upon the ministers who regularly visited the village. He was a promising youth. In a series of revival services he was urged to surrender to the strong convictions under which he was evidently labouring. After careful consideration and a clear consciousness that his convictions were the result of the operations of the Holy Spirit upon his conscience, he fully surrendered, and was, as he defined it, 'beautifully saved.' Of his full salvation he never afterward was troubled with a doubt.

There was not much change in his public conduct, but there was in his heart a radical change. He knew he was 'born again.' He now gave himself diligently to reading the very best literature published. His limited means forbade the purchase of many books, but what he did buy were of the best. He was always anxious to be guided in his selection by experts. Some of these books demanded almost herculean strength to master; but he wrestled with these master minds until he made their productions his own. His unquestioned devotion, his whole hearted consecration, his profound interest in religious matters, his activity in the services (especially in the Sunday evening prayer meeting), his studious habits, and his general exceptional ability to express his thoughts very soon marked him out for higher service. He was called by God and the circuit to be a local preacher, and was received with great acceptance wherever he was planned. He never offered to his congregations what had cost him nothing. Every effort bore signs of brain sweat. He was not only an efficient preacher but a great soul winner.

He was very soon invited into the regular ministry, and after very much thought, prayer, and counsel with men he trusted he accepted the invitation. He soon gave promise of taking a front place in the ranks of the ministry. His opportunities for mental culture were limited (they were travelling preachers in those days); but, in addition to preparing for somewhat stiff examinations, he laboured hard to read the Bible in the original, and succeeded to an admirable degree. His circuits prospered greatly under his ministry, and very many will be the crown of his rejoicing in the day of God. Every detail of circuit and Connexional work was conscientiously and promptly performed. Nothing was done indifferently. The commonest task was done seriously. Law and order were always carefully observed by him.

His work in the active ministry was suddenly terminated when he had served nine years. By accident he was placed in a damp bed, which brought on a physical weakness from which he never permanently rallied. This was a terrible blow to the Connexion, but even greater to himself. He verily loved his work. He resignedly bowed to what he believed was the Divine will. He fixed his residence in Hull, and became a member and official in the Fountain Road Church. He soon became a tower of strength, and remained there many years, where he was beloved and trusted by all. He was always loved most by those who knew him most intimately. Ministers, officials, and members alike sought of him counsel and guidance in most difficult circumstances, and always found him more than willing to give of his best.

One of the circuit ministers says: 'He was a man to be trusted. His opinions were carefully formed, his judgments well weighed, and his counsel safe. He reached his convictions slowly but held them with great firmness. His knowledge was wide, his grip of truth vigorous and his nature many-sided. His life was simple, spiritual, saintly. The things of God were real to him, and he was most at home in the religious atmosphere. It was easy to converse with him on spiritual things. Heaven lay open to him, and business and religion were one.'

Soon after his settlement in Hull, his manly, Christian conduct, together with his remarkable aptitude for business, soon gained for him unbounded confidence among all sections of the community. Very few men were better known and none more implicitly trusted. There was no sphere in public life where the popular vote decided the issues that was not open to him. His physical limitations compelled him to limit his operations. He bravely faced and conquered what to many would have been insurmountable difficulties. He often did in weakness what many healthy men would have feared to attempt. He wisely selected those appointments where business aptitudes blended with philanthropy and religion could be operative. For several years he was a prominent and successful member of the School Board. Very few philanthropic institutions were without his practical sympathy and service. He was largely interested in orphans, blind, and crippled, but specially interested in the deaf and dumb—indeed, he gave his life for others.

He was busily engaged in an arduous task for the needy when the final summons came. In his domestic arrangements he was perfectly happy, and his children call him blessed. As a Primitive Methodist he was loyal, large-hearted, generous, and devoted. The work in which he was specially interested was Missions. He was, indeed, a Missionary enthusiast. When the summons came it found him quite ready. After the seizure he lingered a few days, and our hope was that such an immensely valuable life might be spared. Happily consciousness was allowed him to the last. It was indeed a benediction to be with him. His victory was complete and triumphant. There was no fear, and certainly no sting, in his death. He died as he had lived—'a good and faithful servant.' A widow and five children mourn his loss. Ebenezer society and Hull I. Circuit have lost a stalwart.

References

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