

## James Dunn Whittaker

### Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Joshua Smith

The Rev. JAMES DUNN WHITTAKER, son of Mr. James Whittaker, was born on the 14th of January, 1822, at Hippings, Lancashire. We learn from an extract from his journal, that at the time of his birth his parents were members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society; they were “devoted to God, and very zealous in promoting the interests of God’s cause at Hippings.” Thus, in infancy, our departed brother was nurtured under the benign influence of the religion of our Lord Jesus. Referring to this period, he says, “My parents were anxious that all their children might early be brought to God, and enjoy his favour, which is better than life. As early as possible we were led to the prayer meetings and to the class. The Divine impressions made at those meetings were strengthened by regular family worship, at which we had gracious visits from on high.”

When seven years of age, “the work of the Holy Spirit became more and more clear, and the desire of my soul for peace with God, became more ardent. One day, in the summer season, there was an awful storm; the thunder, lightning, and rain were dreadful; my mind was drawn out in solemn musings on the day of judgment; the importance and final consequences of that day’s decisions filled me with great concern about my own destiny. My father stood in the doorway musing, and speaking on the grandeur and terrible majesty of the storm. I silently retired upstairs, and by my father’s bedside knelt at the chair often used for the purpose, to pray for the salvation of my poor soul. I felt I was a great and hell-deserving sinner in the sight of God. I wept, I prayed, I agonized—the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed in terrible majesty; and all seemed to say that God was displeased, and would avenge himself of his enemies. On that day, in the evening, God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, set my soul at liberty; my acceptance with God was clear, I knew, I felt, through Jesus, I was saved.”

Subsequently, our deceased brother lost his “confidence, hope, and prospect of heaven.” Referring to the time of his restoration from his spiritual backslidings, he says, “The first Monday in 1835 was the beginning of a new era in my life. Henry Hargraves was visiting, in the plain Methodist way, from house to house. He called at ours, and said, ‘I have called to invite you to class;’ the good man went away after we had answered, ‘We cannot come.’ After he was gone, Joseph said, ‘I will go;’ I at once replied, ‘Well, I’ll go then.’ We formed an attachment to the class, and continued our weekly visits. On the 21st of November, in the band-meeting God set my soul at liberty; then I could rejoice in him, and call him, Abba, Father.” During two and a half years our brother was employed by the Wesleyans, as a tract-distributor, and, “it was not without seeing good done.”

In a succeeding part of his journal our respected brother says, “In the fall of the summer of 1840, I had an attack of inflammation of the lungs and pleurisy. The doctor and our family had doubts of my recovery; nearly all hope was gone, but the hope of heaven was never lost in my soul. My prospect was bright, my confidence in God through Christ unshaken, during the whole of the affliction. I never thought I should die; I had the conviction that it was allowed, because I did not yield to the Spirit’s work on my mind. For a long time I felt it to be my duty to preach the word of God. On the ground of my youth, lack of qualifications, and other things, I often resisted the impression, and would have moved otherwise; but God followed me. And in this affliction, I promised God if he would in mercy spare me, my life should be his; and when my way was open, I would make the feeble attempt to exhort sinners to flee from the wrath to come. The thing I promised the Lord I kept quiet, and went on my way as before, waiting for an opening, but I saw none.

“In the year 1842, my sister Ann got converted among the Primitive Methodists, and became an ornament to that church. At her request, my father gave the Rev. Samuel Smith a general invitation that when in that part of the circuit he should make our house his home. Some time in June I went with my friend, P. Gardinor, to Haslingden, and here I made my first effort to preach. I commenced work at Haslingden Foundry in July, 1842. Being a stranger in the town, I was for some time under the necessity of walking to and from my work. Finding this more than I could well do, I went to Mr. Smith, and asked him to recommend me to some place to lodge; he could not then, but very kindly said I might stay at his house until I could obtain a more suitable place. I found Mr. and Mrs. Smith a second father and mother. I have to thank God that my lot was cast with them. A class meeting was held in Mr. Smith’s house; I at once joined, not as a matter of convenience, but from principle, believing it to be my duty to do so.”

About two months after our deceased brother became a member of our connexion, his name appeared on the preachers’ plan, and he continued to labour as a local preacher until the year 1845, at which date he received an invitation to enter the itinerant ministry, and was appointed to travel in the Birmingham circuit. In England, he laboured on the following stations:—Birmingham, Ludlow, Leominster, Darlaston, and Congleton. In all these portions of our connexion he faithfully and efficiently fulfilled his ministerial functions, but as the writer has not been favoured with a perusal of his journal, he can say nothing definitely on this part of his devoted life.

In 1854, Brothers Whittaker and Cole were appointed to labour in our Colonial mission field, and they arrived at Adelaide, South Australia, towards the close of that year. The following are extracts from a letter from the Rev. H. Cole:— “Brother Whittaker evinced great earnestness in labouring to improve the (Adelaide) Mission. Through his judicious business transactions, good sound preaching, and earnest pastoral labours, there was soon an improvement in the mission. I was his colleague for three years, and I always found him up and doing, planning, or executing to the best of his ability his plans for the good of the cause of God. Having a good knowledge of architecture, he rendered valuable service to the connexion in this department of labour. After travelling at Adelaide four years, he was stationed at Koorunga, and he had not been here long before a glorious revival broke out, and he laboured incessantly in it. In writing to me about this time, he says, ‘We have a blessed work going on here, one of the best and most solid revivals I have witnessed since I left Birmingham.’ . . . As a *man*, he was rather sensitive; as a *friend*, I always found him make himself friendly; as a *husband* and *father*, he was affectionate and kind, at the same time, when necessity required, he was strict and faithful. As a *Christian*, so far as I have seen and heard, he was one who walked and talked with God. As a *preacher*, he was above mediocrity; the more he preached—the oftener he was heard—the more he was liked. He could bring out of his treasury things new and old. As a *colleague*, I travelled comfortably with him. I have been with him on sea and on land, at religious meetings and in official meetings, and, also, in family bereavements; and I found him a consistent Christian, a faithful minister, and an affectionate brother in Christ.”

The Rev. Joseph Warner writes, “My acquaintance with Brother Whittaker dates from my arrival in this colony, November 23rd, 1858. He was then just closing his labours in the Adelaide circuit. On his entering the station it contained less than 100 members. During the time he travelled here it was divided into two circuits, containing a total of 199 members. During the same time eight connexional chapels were erected, at a total cost of about £3000. Brother Whittaker was an able minister of the New Testament. Our cause in this colony owes much to him. He was sincerely attached to the connexion, jealous for its reputation, and anxious to extend its usefulness. He is held in high esteem by many. The savour of his name will not soon perish. Soon after his removal to Koorunga, he began to complain of failing health. We hoped that his ailments would soon pass away, but contrary to this hope he became worse. When at length application had been made, and orders received for his removal, the whole of his brethren in the ministry, and many

other sincerely attached friends, mourned sorely for him. The last time I saw him at Kooringa, at the close of the District Meeting, will not soon be forgotten. Some of us hoped to see him again, others not. But now we shall see his face no more. Our sympathy with the *widow* and *fatherless* is deep and general. I revere the memory of Brother Whittaker as a firm friend, a wise counsellor, a good man, and a faithful minister."

Mr. Whittaker, with his dear wife and three children, arrived at Wellington, New Zealand, on December 1st, 1861. His first appearance indicated that he was "a man who had seen affliction," but the *voyage* from Australia had evidently operated beneficially on his health; and he cherished a strong hope that soon his strength would be restored. He attempted to take his country appointments, but, alas, had soon to relinquish the idea, the disease—malformation of matter in the abdomen—entirely incapacitating him for the long journeys to the country parts. He continued to preach in the city occasionally, till within a month of his decease, and the congregations were edified and blest under his earnest and faithful ministry. One peculiar feature in him as a preacher, was, if I rightly opine, *a natural aptitude preaching to the eye as well as to the ear of his audience*. Those who sat before him were impelled to *see*, as well as *hear* "the truth as it is in Jesus."

After such eulogistic memoranda as those given above, from the pen of my esteemed brethren, it would be superfluous for me to expatiate further. We will now lead our readers to

"The chamber where the good man meets his fate."

About twelve days prior to his demise, his left leg became swollen and inflamed, and his beloved wife wished to call the doctor in. On Friday, Sept. 26th, Dr. Kebble was in attendance, and instructed him to remain in bed. On Saturday I left town for my country appointments, and returned the following Tuesday. I called as I came home, and found him quite eased of pain, and he expressed a hope that the worst was past. Wednesday, he was quite conversant, and asked several questions relative to the approaching chapel anniversary, and other matters. I informed him that I was afraid he had come to bed to die, and wished him to be quite composed respecting all external affairs. He replied that he could not rid himself of the impression that his sickness was not "unto death," and he thought his Master had something more for him to do. We drew near to God in prayer, and while we were at the mercy-seat, he heartily responded to the supplications offered. On Thursday, he thought himself much revived, and his hope was sanguine. As I sat by his bed, I repeated a couplet by Dr. Watts—

"Thy saints in all this glorious war  
Shall conquer though they die."

He remarked, "Paul's affirmation was better than any poetry: 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'" I read a portion of Paul's writings and prayed, and subsequently left him tranquil. Early on Friday morning, Mrs. Whittaker was aroused by her husband's restlessness, and would have risen, but he wished her to be quiet. No vigil had been kept at night. Brother Francis, who had been very attentive during the week, came in haste for me in the morning. I went, and found Mr. W. partially deprived of his sensational powers, and he continued in this state till his eyes were closed in death. During the whole day he was unable distinctly to articulate a sentence. The last words I heard escape his dying lips were, "*For ever and ever!*" He expired about eleven o'clock on Friday night, October 3rd, 1862. His mortal remains were followed to the grave by a number of respected ministers and friends; and the whole of the obsequies were deeply impressive. Members of other churches, as well as our own, have come forward with practical expressions of sympathy towards the bereaved relict and children, by private donations and a public subscription. This is a good feature in the colonies in almost all cases of respect and need. May we meet our brother in heaven! Amen!

P.S. In a letter of condolence to Mrs. Whittaker, the Rev. R. Hartley, of Sydney, says, "The valuable testimony he bore in my letter is worthy of insertion in his memoir. He says, 'I now feel, Brother Hartley, the consolations of that gospel I have preached to others to be of great value in a long affliction. Precious blood of Christ !'"

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1863/385