

John Wilcock

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by G.W. Armitage

JOHN WILCOCK, of Barnsley circuit, was born at Cow Brook, near Sheffield, October 25th, 1804. His parents continued in an ungodly state till after his conversion, so that he was not favoured with a religious training, either by precept or example. He was naturally of a cheerful and vivacious disposition, and possessed more than ordinary comprehensiveness of mind and resolution of spirit which in his unrenewed state exposed him to evil and danger. But his course of sin was comparatively short. In 1820 the Primitive Methodist missionaries visited Cawthorne, and John and his companions went to one of their meetings rather from motives of curiosity, and to ridicule the proceedings, than to hear words by which they might be saved. But the word of God cut him to the heart, and he fell prostrate in supplication at the feet of mercy, and by faith in Jesus found peace with God. This took place when he was- about sixteen years of age.

The reality of the change wrought in him was apparent in his life; and the infant society soon found his adhesion thereto to be an acquisition of importance. Accordingly he was encouraged to take part in the public exercises of the church, and possessing mental powers superior to those of the generality of his compeers in life, together with a good voice and ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, and his mode of address being agreeable, his services were both acceptable and useful. It was not likely that a young man of his parts should long be confined to a small circle of benevolent efforts for the spread of religion, considering also the rapidly developing energies of the Connexion. Hence both inward impulses and outward calls concurred to bring him before the world as a public expounder of the word of God. And now the germs of his subsequent usefulness began to put forth their stems, and to aspire to their appropriate altitude. Multitudes of admiring hearers hung upon his lips, while he with force and sweetness poured out of the fulness of his heart, things both new and old. In 1823, the Barnsley circuit, in which he resided, being in want of additional preachers, called him out to labour in the itinerancy. But being a very free labourer, and hard fare following excessive physical exertions, his robust health gave way, and he retired for the itinerant field to prevent coming to a premature grave.

After his return to his former occupation, which was that of a coal-miner, he entered the marriage state, and settled at Silkstone, and rendered important service to the society there, and to the circuit at large, and ornamented the domestic circle of which he became the centre. Subsequently he removed to Thorgoland, where he remained till called to the better world. The responsible office of class-leader now devolved upon him, in addition to that of local preacher; and for the last fourteen years of his life, the office of circuit-steward was vested in his hands. For many years he represented the circuit at its district meeting, and several times was delegated to the conference. Preachers and people equally confided in his integrity, benevolence, and regard for their comfort and prosperity.

Amid the various and frequent depressions this circuit has endured, he was a constant friend, an untiring labourer, and a generous supporter of the cause. Yet he took no honour to himself on this account; there was no lordliness nor dogmatism apparent in his official deportment. His prudence, combined with manly firmness, gave him considerable influence, and earned him no little respect; but this influence was consecrated to the promotion of peace and goodwill among the brotherhood. And so far as he was known in the Connexion, beyond the limits of his own circuit, he also enjoyed a liberal share of respect and confidence. The writer can bear testimony to the amiableness of his Christian and official deportment at the last conference, where he had the pleasure of first making his acquaintance and of observing his conduct. As a staunch friend of the Connexion, his eloquent tongue was used, his commanding influence exerted, and his pecuniary aid cheerfully accorded on all suitable occasions.

As a liberal man on Christian principles, he devised liberal things, and most liberally did the Disposer of all things reward his liberality. From a hired workman he rose to be a master, and in this capacity he was both loved and respected. Never did he forget his former position, therefore those who wrought for him always regarded it as a privilege to do so. In his sound judgment and equitable dealing they reposed perfect confidence; and all with whom he had to do business, regarded him as an upright and respectable tradesman.

And in the relations of a husband and father, was he no less admired for tenderness and firmness. His loss is deeply felt by his widowed partner and two sons. It must also be stated that while he was a zealous Primitive Methodist, he could fraternize with all the true lovers of Christ Jesus; and he was much loved by good men of other communities. His labours as a local-preacher were highly acceptable; and most incessant was he in the discharge of his duties in this wide circuit.

The last sermon he preached was at his own village. It is difficult to say to what extent he was successful in 'the salvation of souls, as there is no record of these matters left by him; but it is well known that this was the object he kept steadily in view, and endeavoured to attain it to the uttermost of his power. Numbers can bear testimony to the blessed seasons they have enjoyed under his powerful and well-digested discourses; and the day of the Lord will declare how many were the seals of his ministry, which we presume are not few.

Notwithstanding his robust appearance, his general health was occasionally interrupted during the last five years; but about six months ago he was called to grapple with disease in a new and rather virulent form. Everything that first-rate medical skill could devise was had recourse to, and partial success for a time rewarded the appliances. However, about the 24th of March, 1852, symptoms of a decisive and fatal character began to develop themselves, and he thought it prudent to arrange his temporal affairs. On Friday, the 26th, the agonized sufferer fell into the arms of death in a calm and tranquil manner. He was forty-eight years of age, and in the thirty-second year of his membership with our Connexion. As to the frame of his mind during his protracted and painful affliction, he invariably possessed his soul in patience. There was a dignity in his calm and submissive endurance of the strong pain he had to suffer which did honour to his Christian principles. The writer saw him frequently with profit and satisfaction; but the last time was especially profitable. Oh, what a touch of heaven had we both while conversing and praying together! To his intimate friend Swift, on the Tuesday before his death, he said, he felt assured of his interest, in the blood of Christ, and entertained no doubt whatever of his being accepted of God. And to his sorrowing wife he said, on the following day, "Don't make yourself uneasy about me; I am going to heaven, and we shall soon meet again." To say that our late brother had no infirmity, nor ever felt any cause for abasement before God, would be incorrect, but his excellences were great and numerous.

The society at the village in which he resided, the circuit of which he was a main pillar, the Connexion of which he was a bright ornament, the poor of whom he was the patron, friend, and employer, and the domestic circle of which he was the sun, have each sustained a great loss by his removal. May they follow him as he followed Christ!

References

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