

Rev. Robert Tuffin

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by James Hawkins

The late Rev. ROBERT TUFFIN was born at Motcombe, Dorsetshire, October 13th, 1808. His parents, James and Elizabeth Tuffin, being members of the Wesleyan community, tried to train their children, nine in number—six of whom have died in the faith of the Gospel—in the fear of the Lord. Under their fostering care Robert, being naturally of a sedate temper, grew up a very steady youth, and at the early age of ten felt a strong desire to devote himself to the service of Christ. Writing of this period he says: “The first desire to serve God I remember to have felt was when I was about ten years old. My mind was then powerfully impressed, and I felt a love to God, to God’s people, and to the means of; but not being taken by the hand and encouraged, I lost my feelings and desires.” His reticence on the state of his mind was no doubt the cause of no one extending a friendly hand to help him.

In this state he remained until he reached the age of eighteen. “About this time,” he says, “the Primitive Methodist Missionaries came to Motcombe, the village in which I was born, and where I lived till called to the office of travelling preacher. A short time after the arrival of the missionaries a revival broke out, and many souls were converted to God; and in the course of this revival, early in the spring of 1827, I was converted. I remember being at a meeting held in a room at Motcombe, when Brother E. Vaughan (since deceased), preached. Brother W. Paddison and sister Watkins were present. In this meeting I earnestly sought the pardoning love of God, and the friends prayed with me for a long time; but I did not obtain pardon that evening. I returned home feeling the burden of sin and guilt, but having begun to seek pardon I continued to do so for about a week, when one day praying to God in a field, he spoke peace to my soul, and I was enabled to rejoice in the possession of his pardoning love, and could say with the apostle of the Gentiles: ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ Praise the Lord. The same week I joined the Primitive Methodist Society, a member of which I have been ever since. After my conversion I felt a love to souls and a desire for their salvation, and became convinced by the Holy Ghost that it was my duty to embrace and improve every opportunity of warning sinners of their danger, and to exhort them to flee to Jesus for salvation. I also felt it my duty to exhort in public, and made it a matter of earnest prayer to Almighty God, believing that he would give me a call from the Church; I also made this conviction known to Brother J. Moore, who wished me to accompany him to one of his Sunday evening appointments, where I spoke with some liberty and power. At the June Quarter-day, 1828, my name was placed on the preachers’ plan for the ensuing quarter. I filled the office of exhorter and local preacher in the Motcombe Circuit, till the autumn of 1831, when I received a letter from the Redruth Circuit, requesting me to come to them and labour as a travelling preacher. For some months previous to this I had felt an impression that the Lord had a greater work for me to do than that of a local preacher.

“After I received the latter named, I determined to make the subject of my going out to travel a matter of prayer to God, which I did for some days, and at length one day when on my knees in my closet, the Lord answered my petition. The answer came to me apparently, as clear as a person speaking to me, saying: ‘Go, and as thou art going, give thyself afresh to God.’ I felt my soul greatly blessed, that it was my duty to go forth in the name and strength of the Lord, to labour more earnestly in the vineyard of Christ. I also determined to give myself afresh to God, and to devote all my powers to the work of the ministry.”

On the 15th December, 1831, he left home, and on the 25th commenced his labours in Redruth Circuit, under very gracious influences, and laboured there for about one year with marked success in the conversion of souls.

From Redruth he removed to St. Austell Circuit, where many souls were brought to God through his instrumentality. Writing of his farewell service in June, 1836, after labouring on the station for three years, he says: "Preached at St. Blazey, the people knew it was my last time, and the chapel was quite full; I reminded them that I was about to leave them, when several who had been brought to God in the revival we had had there, and in which I had laboured much, cried aloud, 'The Lord grant that we may meet in heaven.'"

Brother Jones, our oldest class-leader at St. Blazey, was converted at that time through Mr. Tuffin's instrumentality. He removed from St. Austell to Moreton Circuit, Gloucestershire, and for a few days he was rather low spirited in consequence of the lowness of the cause in his new station. Soon after he entered the station he missioned a village named Cleve, a few miles from Cheltenham, where he says: "I had a little opposition from a quarter it ought not to have proceeded from. The clerk of the parish came and insulted me by talking aloud and endeavouring to throw me off my stand, but he could neither stop my tongue nor throw me off the stone I was standing on. A number of people heard with attention, one of whom threatened to thrash the intruder, and I was afraid they would go to fight, but glad they did not. I got through the service, published I should preach there again that night fortnight, and left."

The next time he went the opposition was more severe, but he stood his ground, and good was done. After labouring on the station for one year he removed to Chippenham, where he spent one happy year, and from thence he removed to Blaenavon, where another year of his ministry was spent in peace. From Blaenavon he removed to Swansea, where he spent two prosperous years. While on this station he entered the marriage state, with Ann, the third daughter of Mr. Llanwarne, of Park Farm, Herefordshire, whom he now leaves a widow. From Swansea he removed in 1841, to the cathedral town of Salisbury, where he was most happy and successful. Speaking of his station there at the last district-meeting, he said: "A better staff of local preachers I never met with." After spending two years there he removed to that "Queen of the West," the city of Bath, where he spent four years of hallowed toil with good success. On this station, in addition to purchasing the first property possessed by the connexion in the city, the site on which the old chapel stood, and on which the present chapel stands, Westgate Buildings, he built two new chapels, the one at Twerton, and the other at Bradford, while the income of the station increased from £9 17s. 9d. to £21 1s. 9d. per quarter, and the number of members rose from 95 to 206. From Bath he crossed the Severn, and went to Tredegar, South Wales, where he spent two successful years. Thence he removed to Cornwall, after being absent from the county thirteen years. St. Ives was now his station. He laboured here for three years, in great peace and with good success. In his journal for July 6th, 1852, he writes: "Left St. Ives Circuit, a considerable number of weeping friends and neighbours came to see us off, some of whom travelled on foot to Hayle, whence we started by steamer via Bristol to Frome." There he laboured with moderate success for one year. His prayer on entering the station was, "May God make me useful in this station." Hereford was his next station, where he spent two years, and then returned to Bath, after being absent for eight years. At the end of the first year he was pressed to remain a second, but he refused to do so. The entry in his journal will explain the matter: "Thursday, July 10th, 1856. Left Bath for Redruth. I felt very much at leaving the circuit at the end of one year. It is my own choice. I could not endure the thought of spending another year with the very unpleasant colleague I have."

In Redruth he spent the next three years of his useful life, labouring in great peace and with noble success. The station so far improved that they were enabled to divide it into two stations, St. Day becoming the head of the new circuit. His name throughout these two stations is like ointment poured forth. From Redruth he removed to Stroud, where it was my happiness to be his colleague for two years; and the high opinion I formed of his sterling piety, deep zeal, and devotion to his hallowed work, combined with his gentlemanly bearing and superior abilities, increased to the last. I found him a friend to be trusted, a counsellor to be

consulted to advantage, and a noble pattern, worthy of being imitated. While in Stroud he succeeded in the erection of a neat and commodious chapel at King Standly, clearing off the debt of Chalford Chapel, making considerable improvements in Stroud Chapel, without increasing the debt thereon, and otherwise improving the station.

From Stroud he removed to Radstock, where he laboured very hard and successfully for two years. His removal from the station at the end of the second year he never considered providential, as the district meeting insisted upon his being removed against his own and the unanimous wish of the circuit. Nevertheless, he was most happy and comfortable in his new station, Aberdare, although he found it a wreck. He spent four most prosperous years effecting great improvements throughout the circuit, the last being the building of an elegant and commodious minister's house in Aberdare. His next station was Kingswood, where he laboured hard, and was moderately happy for two years, saying to me, as I had occasion to go to the station, "I seem as though I wanted rest, and to be free from toil and care," little thinking that he was so soon to enjoy the eternal rest of heaven. At the last district meeting he was appointed to Pillowell Circuit, to the great satisfaction of the entire meeting. Returning home from this meeting he writes— "Wednesday, May 11th, 1870, left Swansea, at 10 a.m. and arrived home at 6 p.m. Found my family well and pleased with our new station." He had not been home quite three weeks before he took a severe cold which brought on a bilious attack, which completely prostrated him; but in the course of a week he had so far recovered that he thought himself sufficiently strong to attend the June quarterly meeting appointed to be held at Staple Hill, in a neat and substantial chapel, which had just been completed under his superintendency, about a mile and a half from his residence. He was too weak even to walk this distance, so a conveyance was secured for the purpose of taking him to and fro. The anxiety and excitement of the journey and eating were too much for his enfeebled health, and a sad relapse was the result. Reaching home he took to his bed, from which he never rose. He gradually grew worse until June 28th, when his medical attendant said that any of his friends who might wish to see him should be communicated with at once. Telegrams brought his children and friends from Dorset, South Wales, and Cornwall, who all arrived in time to see him alive. He took an affectionate farewell of them, requesting each one to meet him in heaven, and then said— "Now I have nothing to do but die, and I would rather die than live, all is right and well." He gradually sank until Friday, July 1st, when at nine o'clock p.m. he gently breathed his last, and before his weeping friends were well aware he was away with the angels, and at home with his Master. Thus he died in the sixty-second year of his natural life, the thirty-ninth of his ministry, and the forty-third of his membership in the Primitive Methodist Connexion.

His character and life might be briefly epitomised thus:—

1. His piety was deep and earnest, embracing nearly the whole of his long life.
2. He had a sound judgment and far-seeing wisdom and sagacity.
3. He was an efficient superintendent, a vigilant and affectionate pastor.
4. He was most loyal to the connexion of his choice, and indefatigable in his labours to promote her welfare. A better disciplinarian it would be difficult to find.
5. He was most kind, and yet prudent in all his movements, a thorough hater of cant and vain glory. How many times we have seen him smile at and heard him deplore the puffs which too often find their way into religious prints. Exaggeration was too unprincipled a thing for him to indulge in.
6. He was an original preacher, always making his own sermons; and most solemn and effective in his delivery of the truth.
7. He was a man of prayer. He always endeavoured to go from his closet to the pulpit. During the two years we travelled together, we never remember calling to see him, but he always requested that we prayed together before we parted, and rare indeed was it for him to visit any person without praying before he left.

The Rev. E. Ball, Superintendent of South Molton Station, writing us a sympathetic note soon after his death, says:—"It was my privilege to be his colleague for twelve months in the Stroud Circuit. During that time I always found him pleasant and agreeable, in fact, he was a good man—a man of God; one of the best superintendents I ever had. Peace to his memory. I hope to meet him again in our Father's house."

The Rev. J. Best says: "I regard the death of the Rev. R. Tuffin as a loss to the church generally, and to Primitive Methodism especially. It was so unexpected that I can hardly realize it, especially when I recollect that it was but a few days before his illness that he called on us at Emerald Place, Bristol. He served the Connexion long and faithfully. He was a thorough hard-working Primitive Methodist preacher, and an efficient connexional officer. He early studied the doctrines and polity of the body, and was deemed a good disciplinarian. His counsel, experience, and business tact were never more seen and valued than at the last district meeting at Swansea. His earnest and able address to the young ministers received into full connexion, gave undoubted proof, if proof were needed, that he himself was a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. In doctrine he showed uncorruptness, in ministerial labours diligence, and in loyalty to the Connexion 'good fidelity.' He was a faithful minister, and a tenderly sympathetic pastor; his death took us all by surprise. He several times called to see me in my illness, sympathised with me in my broken condition, and little suspected that he would be the first to go. Three days before he died I visited him, and was deeply affected to see how soon his hale and robust frame was shattered. In consequence of the feebleness of my voice, I was not able to say much to him, nor was it necessary. His life had anticipated and answered all the questions that are usually put to persons in dying circumstances. I told him that I had no question to ask respecting his spiritual state and prospects, but he feebly yet firmly, told me of his faith in Christ. He said, 'I rest on the atonement made by our Lord Jesus Christ.' We prayed together and were refreshed. We parted, no more to meet in this world."

The Rev. G. Dobson says:—"During the last fifteen years of our acquaintance as brethren of the same district, I have known him as a devout Christian Minister, a prudent and consistent temperance advocate to the last, a peaceable and successful superintendent of circuits, a thorough connexional disciplinarian, and one of the leading business spirits of the district. As his immediate successor in this (Kingswood) Circuit, I frequently hear him spoken of in terms of high respect both as a preacher and pastor; his death took me by surprise, seeing that he presided over the business of our last district meeting with his usual calm and discerning ability."

His body was interred in the Wesleyan Chapel Yard, Kingswood, not far from the tomb of the late Rev. S. West, a little before noon, July 6th, the thirtieth anniversary of his wedding, and the day that connexional rule freed him from his old station. All the Dissenting ministers of Kingswood, most of the local preachers and members of the station. All the Dissenting ministers of Kingswood, most of the local preachers and members of the station, with a large concourse of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and the Rev. J.H. Best, of Bristol, attended the funeral, and followed with the relatives of the deceased. The Rev. J. Hibbs conducted the solemn service on the mournful occasion, which seemed to say to each one present, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." The deceased leaves a widow, two sons, and two daughters, to mourn their irreparable loss. But their loss of a faithful and affectionate husband and father is his eternal gain. "The memory of the just is blessed."

References

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