

Rev. William James White

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Robert Harrison

There is no death, what seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath—
Is but the suburbs of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call Death.”

The Rev. WILLIAM JAMES WHITE was born at Cockermouth, a small borough town in Cumberland, on August 14th, 1845. His parents were religious, and members of our society in the above place. They sought to bring up their son in the fear and admonition of the Lord; hence, at an early age he was sent to the Sabbath School, and was also taught the duty of attending the service of the Sanctuary. In his subsequent life, it was evident that their diligent attention to his spiritual welfare was according to the Divine will, and had secured his enriching blessing. The seed then scattered in his tender mind yielded the peaceable fruits of righteousness and joy.

In the year 1851 Mr. White lost his father by death. The family now being deprived of its head, removed to Glasson, in the Carlisle Circuit, where William was brought into close contact with religious influence through the visits of the itinerant and local preachers to his parent’s dwelling. It was while sharing the hospitality of his widowed mother’s home that we became acquainted with him. Though he was then unconverted, and seemed somewhat disinclined for any direct conversation on the necessity of salvation (more attributed to his natural shyness than to any dislike to it), yet we seldom knew him absent from the house of God.

It was not until the year 1861 that he made a public profession of religion. For years he was “near the kingdom,” now he was within it, enjoying the protection and blessings of its glorious King. Convinced that for some time he had been subject to very deep spiritual impressions, his mother asked him if he had any objection to attend the class meeting. Replying in the negative, she then requested him to begin at once, which he did. His conversion was such as we always expect in such persons as himself. His mind had for many years been imbued with divine truths, and while yet undecided for Christ, they had preserved him from many of the grosser vices of the world, and they eventually drew him into Christ. The manner of his becoming the Lord’s was like Timothy’s, rather than like Paul’s.

Being thus fully decided for God, he sought to manifest his faith by his works. His first sphere of Christian labour was the Sabbath School, into which he entered with that earnestness of manner and singleness of motive so characteristic of him through life. As a teacher of the young, he was diligent, spiritual, and successful. In this work he felt himself at home. Nor did he ever forget the field of his former toil; the thought of it lingered about him when Providence placed him in other circumstances, as one sentence from a letter he sent us when at York, preparing for the Ministry, will show. Speaking of Cecil Street Sunday School, Carlisle, he says— “How I love that school! I think about it with tears; in it I have spent my happiest hours.”

Subsequently he sustained several offices in connection with our cause in Carlisle, such as secretary of the Sunday School, its representative to the Sunday School Union, chapel steward, and seat-letter. As a local preacher, he was well received, and regarded as an earnest servant of the Lord Jesus. Never do we remember hearing of a complaint about any appointment being neglected by him from the time his name

appeared on the plan in 1863, to the period when he left home. Long journeys did not deter him from fulfilling his duty, though he was at times quite unfit for much walking.

In 1866 he went to Elmfield College, York, where, for fifteen months he studied for our ministry under the late Rev. J. Petty, to whose memory he paid a most graceful tribute of respect in the first number of the PRIMITIVE METHODIST, signed "An Old Student."

Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, was his first station. At Crawford, where he resided, and which he called his parish—the fruit of his labours remains. Besides conducting a prosperous Bible class, he toiled hard and successfully for the improvement of the chapel. Failing health prevented him from complying with the circuit's request to remain a third year.

In 1869 Mr. White removed to Oakham, in the Melton Mowbray Circuit. Being still the subject of bodily weakness, and believing he could work a less extensive field with more advantage, he requested the September quarterly meeting to make Oakham the head of a branch, which was done. This he superintended up to the time of his death, with his usual foresight and business tact. Here, as in his last station, he had a flourishing Theological class, composed of young men from the various sections of the church. Believing that there is a grand reflex influence realised in doing good, even on the smallest scale, he was frequently engaged in doing those things which a mistaken judgment pronounces "little."

For a long time he anticipated a visit to us at Hull. Providence granted him his wish. He came the mere shadow of his former self, on the 23rd of last December. We had sad thoughts about the sad state of his health, and were constrained to make them known to him. He confessed himself unwell, but hoped soon to recover, Alas! his hope was not realised, for within a month of the day he left us he was no more. His work was done. He preached his last sermon at Stamford, on Sunday, January, 9th, and during its delivery he enjoyed great liberty of speech, and felt an unwonted degree of earnestness. On the Monday following, though unwell, he took the chair for the Rev. J. A. Bastow, who delivered a lecture on the Bible. On Tuesday evening, the 25th, he became seriously ill, so that his friends thought that the eventide of life was falling fast. His sun was evidently setting while it was yet day. He had entered on life's last conflict, and it was hastening to its close. When Wednesday came he was—

"Nearer the vale of death,
To lay his burden down,
To bear the palm, and wear the crown,
And stand before the throne."

So conscious was he of this, that he made known his desire to be buried at Oakham, the last scene of his labours. A few hours ere he reached heaven he exclaimed, "God bless my mother." Shortly afterwards he said, "To-day is Wednesday, I suppose you would not wish to see me suffer much longer in this way?" His mother replied, "Oh! no, she could not." He then said, "Kiss me, mother, and bid me good bye." Not long after this he asked for a little medicine to ease his intense pain and help him to sleep. Fearing he might never again awake in this world were he to take it, his mother hesitated for awhile. Knowing this, he smiled and said, "Mother, I shall go sometime to-day, but I pray you don't fret; I am perfectly happy." After more than an hour's sleep he awoke, and having looked upon the friends assembled, he fixed his eyes on his mother, and with a slight shudder, his soul freed from its load, escaped to the mansions of light, to be for ever with the Lord. Thus died the friend and companion of our youth on Wednesday, January 26th, 1870, in the twenty-fifth year of his age, and in the third of his ministry. On the following Monday "devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him."

Suffer me one word more, to say that Mr. White was a good minister of Jesus Christ, a genial friend, and a diligent student. Of him the Rev. R. Parks says, "I valued him greatly as a colleague. He was mature beyond his years; a devout Christian, and an able minister of the New Testament." Our esteemed friend, the Rev. J.A. Bastow, testifies that "He was a young man of superior excellence. His mind was richly furnished with the knowledge of holy things. He lived for his holy work and he did it well. His Master saw, approved, and called him home."

Thus parting with him we loved so well, and hope to meet again, we find relief in saying, "Oh, man, greatly beloved, go thy way till the end be; for thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

References

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