

Rev. William White

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

“It matters not at what hour of the day
The righteous fall asleep; Death cannot come
To him untimely who is fit to die;
The less of this cold world, the more of heaven ;
The briefer life, the earlier immortality.”—MILMAN.

It is a pleasing yet painful duty to record the virtues and embalm the memory of the sainted dead; but the interests of the church of God demand that a faithful record of the lives of her sons, who have shown deep experience in her heavenly truths, who have excelled in holiness, who have been in labours more abundant, and who have borne dying testimony to her living power be preserved. Men of unswerving righteousness, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and who have laid themselves out in wise, continuous, and energetic efforts to instruct, reprove, invite, and save others from sin, and have been blessed with much success, the church cannot afford to allow to be forgotten. Such men are her wealth. They show her heavenly principles translated into action. By the faithful delineation of such characters, the record of their burning zeal and praiseworthy diligence in the cause of God, we present examples worthy of imitation, present incentives to holiness of life, and magnify that grace which rendered them worthy of a memorial— and such were the life and labours of our departed brother.

WILLIAM WHITE was the son of William Frederick and Jane White, and was born at South Cave, Yorkshire, August 6th, 1833. In early life he was convinced by the Holy Spirit of the need of a change of heart, and in the fourteenth year of his age, May 4th, 1847, in the Sabbath school connected with our Mason-street chapel, Hull, he passed from death to life. Four years after this auspicious event he wrote in his diary: “It is four years to-day since God for Christ’s sake pardoned all my sins, adopted me into his family, made me an heir of a crown and a kingdom. Bless Him! I feel I can raise my Ebenezer, and say, ‘Hitherto hath the Lord helped me!’ ” Now the sunshine of heaven beamed brightly on his spirit, nor sank until his race was run. There is satisfactory evidence that from the hour of his conversion to the hour of his death by prayer and watchfulness he preserved the direct and immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost, bearing witness with his spirit that he was a child of God.

At the time of his conversion his mind began to open to new impressions and larger views. He now seemed high in hope, full of fire, and delighted to join in the pursuit of knowledge. The writer remembers with what avidity he sought to increase his knowledge at a young men’s mental improvement meeting. The church was not likely to lose sight of one of such vigorous religious life and intellectual power. Hence the Hull West Circuit, in September, 1853, put his name on the plan; and on Sunday, October 2nd, 1853, he began his career as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. In June, 1856, he was taken into the regular ministry by the Swinefleet Circuit, and with great credit to himself and great profit to the people, he travelled at Swinefleet, Howden, Louth, Retford, Winterton, and Pocklington, and by the last district meeting he was stationed for the Doncaster Circuit. Rich religious principles touched all his natural gifts, quickened them, and gave them immortal beauty. By the grace of God he became a partaker of the Divine nature. Hence his soul was the temple of the Holy Ghost. He believed in entire sanctification; he lived in the enjoyment of it; and from the pulpit, in society meetings, in family visiting, and in his general intercourse with pious individuals, he urged it upon others. He walked with God. He continuously felt that God was with him and in him. Having obtained such a oneness with God, it need occasion no surprise that he put forth zealous and untiring efforts in seeking to carry out what he believed to be the Divine purposes and plans.

Intellectually his abilities were never of a showy character, but they were above the average, and in some departments of mental labour his powers of mind seemed to be remarkable. He possessed a strong memory and a sound judgment. In dealing with abstruse subjects he sometimes displayed a keen analytical and synthetical power, which proved that what was required in order that he might excel in the treatment of critical subjects was sedulous application. He delighted in a well stated and well sustained argument; indeed this bias of his mind might easily be ascertained from the class of books in which he took special delight. For next to works of a deeply pious and intensely earnest character, such as the lives of Bramwell, Smith, Stoner, and the works of Rutherford, Payson, &c., his favourite works were "Whateley's Logic," "Thompson's Outlines of the Laws of Thought," "Butler's Anthology," "Locke on the Human Understanding," "Brown on the Philosophy of the Human Mind," &c. We have seldom met with a mind where the intensely devotional and the logical, and even the metaphysical, so combined. His type of mind was similar to that of the American Finney. And had his useful life been spared, he might have given to the world something as heart-stirring as Finney's Lectures on the "Revival of Religion," and as argumentative as that author's "Systematic Theology."

It might be inferred that in the life of one of such deep piety and strong mental powers, we should have a masculine type of Christianity. For neither favour, ease, nor profit, would he swerve from what he believed was truth and justice. He thought for himself and formed his own opinions; and when he had fully investigated a case and made up his mind on any important matter, he would hold to what he conscientiously considered was right, and would willingly accept the consequences of the position he had taken. Men who were more time-serving and who acted less on principle might think him sometimes stiff, but those who know the force of opinions so formed will not be surprised at such firmness, but will applaud and honour the man that had to act in such a manly and Christian-like manner. Indeed it is not too much to say of him that in all his transactions he studiously endeavoured to act on enlightened Christian principles. He was scrupulous in his family visits that they should be strictly such as rule indicates. We question whether he ever knowingly recorded one that was not, out and out, all that the rule requires. We mention this as an evidence of the thorough consistency of our dear brother. And as he was in this matter so he was in all his transactions in life, so that one who had ample opportunity of observing him once remarked to the writer, "We believe Mr. White incapable of an unworthy act."

He was a devout Christian. Having travelled with him in three stations during his brief career, we had ample opportunities of knowing his manner of life. Reading the Scriptures for devotional purposes, closely examining his heart and life, and private prayer, all were exercises in which he took great delight. His custom was to spend, in addition to other stated times, one hour each day continuously in private prayer. To this heavenly exercise we attribute much of the influence and success that attended his life and labours.

In his public ministry he was very successful. In each of the stations in which he travelled many souls, through his labours, were turned to God. He had no rest to his soul unless the work of God was prospering, and sinners were being saved. He travailed in birth for souls. The zeal of the Lord's house ate him up. And God graciously granted him what he so ardently desired, and so earnestly laboured to accomplish.

What we have said of him could be substantiated from his diary. We will give a few, and but a few, quotations, "On examining myself," says he, "I feel grateful for the measure of light and love I have obtained. I feel greater desires than ever to live the Christian's life. I solemnly dedicate myself afresh to God this day. In his strength I resolve to be more devoted to him, and more zealous in his sacred cause." "To-day felt much Divine power in my soul. Glory to God for the assurance of a full salvation." "To-day I examined myself and felt my nothingness. I consecrate every power and faculty afresh to the Triune God." "To-day engaged in earnest prayer for souls, attended fasting. I feel soul saving to be my business and delight."

Visited at families, preached at night, two or three souls obtained the blessing of pardon." "This morning preached on Christian perfection and held a prayer-meeting. One backslider reclaimed. Spoke in the afternoon at —, and at night at —: a glorious meeting at the latter place; six or seven professed to obtain salvation." "Had a good time in private devotion early this morning. Received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Preached four times. Tired in the work, but not, tired of it. I trust while I have breath it will be my delight to point sinners to the Saviour." "Preached at — this morning; gave tickets in the afternoon. Had a good time while encouraging the enters to seek a complete salvation. In the evening felt the presence of my Master. Two backsliders were reclaimed." "To-day felt the burden on my soul for perishing sinners. Was led to throw them by faith on the great atonement. At night we had a most powerful meeting. Five souls professed to obtain pardon through the blood of the Lamb." "A blessed day to my own soul. Felt much of the spirit of prayer. A good time in preaching. In the prayer meeting ten or eleven sought and found Him of whom Moses in the law and the » prophets did write, Jesus, the friend of sinners. Bless thy holy name." These passages will serve to show the deep earnestness that was in his soul, its yearnings and aspirations, its sorrows and delights.

How mysterious are the ways of God, that one so pious and so successful in winning souls to Christ, and one apparently so physically strong, should be so suddenly removed in the midst of his usefulness. It was so with Stephen - so with John Williams, John Smith, David Stoner, John Hunt, others, and with many in our own denomination. Our brother was a hearer at the last Conference in York. He returned from it in good spirits, and apparently in good health, This was on the Thursday. On the Saturday following he was attacked with a very positive form of *peritonitis*, or inflammation of the peritoneum. The best medical aid was obtained, and all that skill and care could do was done for him; but all proved unavailing, and on the following Wednesday he died. The stroke which was so sudden and fatal found him quite ready. There was indubitable truth in the remark of one of his brethren in the ministry, when the intelligence of brother White's death reached him: "Perhaps no brother in this district was, a few days ago, so like living as brother White; and, perhaps, no brother was better prepared for dying than he." Yes; he appeared strong and robust, but stood fully ready for dying. He had oil in his vessel with his lamp and when the Bridegroom came, he "went in with him to the marriage."

We have intimated that the first symptoms of the disease were experienced on Saturday; but with what rapid strides did death approach! Yet he did not come armed with vengeance, but to take God's beloved child to the place where he longed to be, to lead him from mortality to life, and to lands where brightly bloom immortal flowers. And when he stood on the brink of this world, heaven shed comforts over him, and eternity put on its gentlest, most pleasing, and most winning look. His pain at times was acute; yet even then he found the consolations of the Gospel to smoothe his uneasy bed. When he spoke of recovery he always associated with it the opportunity of preaching Christ. When some one expressed to him the hope that he might be spared to go to his new station, Doncaster; he remarked, "I wish to live to preach Jesus, and I hope to see hundreds of souls converted." But on the Wednesday it became painfully apparent that he was becoming much weaker. Yet he was still happy in the Lord, as he had been from the beginning of his affliction. On this day we had left his room for a short time, when a messenger came for us, saying, that Mr. White desired to see us. When we returned he remarked, "Ah, brother Dawson, I wish to tell you how happy God has made me! Ah, how happy I am! how happy I am!" Neither he, nor any of his friends, at this time thought death was so nigh. We remarked, "Keep yourself as composed as possible; and we who know your manner of life can have no fear of your death, if God should see fit to take you to himself." Raising his hand, with emphasis he remarked, "If I die, I go straight to heaven—straight to heaven." Ah! was this gracious visitation of the Lord the preparation of grace for the conflict, which, although unknown to us, was so near at hand? This was about six o'clock. About half-an-hour after this, we were alone with him, when, with great earnestness, he said, "Brother Dawson, I am dying." Was it so? Yes: from the unfathomed shades

and viewless spheres of eternity, came a sweet voice, unheard by other ears, saying unto him, "I have prepared your mansion-home, and am come to receive you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Yes; his loving Saviour, whose example he had so carefully copied, and in whose cause he had so zealously laboured, was come to lead him through the valley of death, to bid him welcome to heaven, and to say unto him, "Well done good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." With deep affection he committed his wife and infant son to God, and exhorted his partner to love Jesus and to meet him in heaven. It was deeply painful to see the young husband, cut down in his bloom, bidding farewell to his young wife and infant child. Yet he and she bore it with Christian resignation. With bitter tears they said, "It is the Lord, and he cannot do wrong;" and meekly kissed the hand that held the rod. Now he neared his heavenly and everlasting home. "I am in the river," he exclaimed, "and it is very deep." His wife remarked, "There is rock;" and he replied, "I am on it." Now all fear was calmed, his faith was animated; hope and joy filled his soul, until it was wrapt in ecstasy. The peace, the joy, the bliss of dying manifestly surprised him. Full of joy he exclaimed, "What a pleasant thing it is to die! What a pleasant thing it is to die! I never thought dying was so pleasant a thing! I cannot give you to understand what a pleasant thing it is to die! Ah, how soft this bed is! How soft it is!" Now he experienced a severe paroxysm. He appeared to suffer much. When he was partially relieved, he remarked, "It is hard dying, physically I mean; but it is a pleasant thing to die! how soft this bed!" His end was now at hand. The mental and emotional which were so characteristic of him in life were strong in death. Longing to see his dear Redeemer, he said,

"Bring me to see Thee, my precious, sweet King,"

and attempted to say,

"In mansions of glory Thy praises to sing!"

but was unable. His desire was granted, his spirit passed away to be with Jesus, and to sing his praise in mansions of glory. Thus departed William White, June 15 1864, in the thirty-first year of his age, and the eighth of his ministry. He died as he lived, rejoicing in the Lord.

"Calm on the bosom of thy God,
Fair spirit, rest thee now!
E'en while with ours thy footsteps trod,
His seal was on thy brow.
Dust to its narrow house beneath!
Soul to its place on high!
They that have seen thy look in death,
no more may fear to die."

He was buried in Pocklington cemetery. The Rev. Mr. White, Independent minister, read the burial service, and paid a high tribute to the departed. His funeral sermon was preached in our chapel at Pocklington, to an overflowing, congregation, and many in the congregation had been brought to God through his labours. May the widow, the infant child, the sorrowing friends, and the writer meet him in heaven!

References

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