

Rev. William Whitefield

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.G. Wright

“The deathbed of the just is yet undrawn
By mortal hand—it merits a divine,
Angels should paint it—angels ever there,
There on a post of honour and of joy,”

The subject of this brief memoir was born in the county of Somerset, England, August 30th, 1805. Of his early history we know but little. He was of a meek and unassuming turn of mind, and did not care for the society of the gay and frivolous. He remained irreligious until about the age of twenty-four, when through hearing a sermon preached in the open air by a Primitive Methodist minister, he saw his need of Christ, wept his way to the cross, where he, through faith in Calvary's bleeding Prince, obtained pardon and peace.

The authorities of the Church seeing in him the elements of usefulness, soon engaged him in the capacity of a local preacher. After being useful in this sphere, the conference of 1838 called him into the regular ministry. After labouring in the home stations for about three years, the Home Missionary Society wished him to come to South Australia. He landed on our shores in December, 1851. His first station in this colony was at Kooringa. He had not long begun his work of love in that station when the gold-fields of Victoria began to excite the population of Kooringa, and there was a large exodus, and the various chapels were left without congregations. At this time the minister stationed in Adelaide left the city and made his way to the gold-fields. Our good brother Whitefield seeing the church in the city was without a minister, left Kooringa, and took charge of the city societies. This act was highly commended by the Home Missionary committee.

He subsequently laboured in Nairne, Mount Barker, North Adelaide, and Willunga. At each place he worked with some success and acceptability. Through failing health in 1861, he made a request to the English conference for superannuation. which was freely granted. Although set at liberty from the onerous duties of a minister, he did not cease to work for his Master. When the minister at Kapunda left the Connexion, our brother left his family, and took charge of the Kapunda church for nine months. For the last few years he has worked in the Willunga circuit.

A few weeks before his death, when returning from M'Laren Flat, after preaching on a Thursday night, he fell into a deep creek. This fall, it is thought, considerably shortened his life. The affliction that finished his career was short. He quickly passed through the furnace, and entered the palace of the King. Death found him ready to depart, with staff in hand, lamp burning, and hope blooming, When in the midst of life's peril, Mrs Whitefield said to him, “Have you any doubt of your acceptance?” Knowing he stood on the Rock which could never fail, he joyfully exclaimed, “No, I die trusting in Jesus!” Again she asked, “Do you feel the gospel you have recommended to others is supporting you now?” Strong in faith and consolation, he again replied, “I do!” Then kissing his daughter, he said, “Meet me in heaven.” He next said, “Give my dying message to my dear son (who was absent), tell him to be a good boy, serve the Lord, and meet me in heaven.” Just as life's lamp was going out, and the angel of death spreading his wide, white wings meekly over him, serenely he looked upon her who had shared in his Joys and sorrows, exclaiming, “I am passing through the valley.” His weeping wife said, “Is there light in the valley?” To which he replied, “Yes, yes!” To his soul, filled with heaven-bore love, death had no sting, eternity no dread—

“The chamber where the good man meets his fate,
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven.”

His death was not only serene, but triumphant.

“As sweetly as a child,
Whom neither thought disturbs, nor care encumbers,
Tired with long play, at the close of summer's day,
Lies down and slumbers.”

He left earth November 2nd, 1871, in the sixty-sixth year of his age. The obsequies were performed by Mr. Bassett (Wesleyan), who had often visited him in his affliction. His body was interred in the M'Laren Flat cemetery. His death was improved by the Rev. S. Gray to large congregations in the Wesleyan chapel, Willunga, and in the Primitive Methodist chapel, M'Laren Flat.

References

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