

Rev. George Wood

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Parkinson Milson

Another soldier of Christ has fallen—fallen in armour—fallen into his Captain's arms.

Our beloved brother, GEORGE WOOD, late travelling preacher, died at Grimsby, Lincolnshire, August 3rd, 1859. Though an invalid, he came full of hope as to future usefulness in the circuit; but in a fortnight he was attacked by the "last enemy." He died victorious, and his corpse was conveyed into his native county for burial.

He was the son of John and Harriet Wood, and was born at Knottingley, Yorkshire, January 23rd, 1821. From a child he was subject to Divine impressions, but his will, the citadel of the soul, withstood the gracious operations of God until 1842. For some time previously, he gave the reins to his unholy tendencies, but the Lord mercifully strove with him, and eventually George yielded to the claims of the Saviour. During six weeks he sought the Lord with tremblings and tears, until one day, at noon, when wrestling in his father's workshop, the glories of spiritual day burst on his soul; darkness fled away, and he could rejoice in the light of the Divine countenance. He attributed his conversion instrumentally to the prayers and religious training of his pious mother.

He commenced a practical confession of Christ by uniting with the Wesleyans. Early in 1844, he united with the Primitive Methodists at Castleford, and was a local preacher about two years. Brother Bootland says of him in this capacity, "His piety was genuine and undoubted; his manners kind; his preaching pointed and practical; and his disposition amiable. He was well received, and devoted no mean share of his time and energies to the work of saving souls."

In 1846, he was taken out to travel by Driffield Circuit. He travelled in the home branch one year, Bridlington Branch one, London two, Hull West one, Brigg two, Hull West two, Hull East two, and Louth two years. His father was unfavourable to his being a Primitive Methodist preacher, and would rather have had him educated for the ministry in the Established Church; but George loved Primitive Methodism, and chose to labour in the ranks of its toiling ministers.

As a preacher his abilities were very respectable, and he was well received. He was not barbarous in the use of language; no unlettered person needed to enquire whether he spoke plain English or not. He did not preach in such a style as to mystify or render difficult of conception to common minds the truths he published, but he used "sound speech" intelligible to his hearers. Specimens of his preaching abilities we have in the "Primitive Pulpit," Vol. I., page 128, and in the PRIMITIVE METHODIST LARGE MAGAZINE for August, 1859.

In reference to preparation for his pulpit duties, he was not a lazy or a presuming drone, but a busy bee. Brother Worsnop, one of his superintendents, says, "He took it for granted that he could not excel without great labour, therefore he strictly adhered to the instructions of St. Paul, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." Brother Wood attached great importance to prayer in preparing for the pulpit." He wrestled in private for copious baptisms of the Holy Spirit. He knew that "communion with God gives power to our words, and persuasiveness to our arguments; making them either as the balm of Gilead to the wounded spirit, or as sharp arrows of the mighty to the consciences of stout-hearted rebels; that from them that walk with God in holy happy

intercourse a virtue seems to go forth, a blessed fragrance compasses them whithersoever they go. That intimacy with God and assimilation to his character, are the elements of a ministry of power and efficiency."

Brother Newsome, with whom he travelled in Hull Circuit, says, "He gave evidence of deep piety. I have reason to believe he prayed much in secret, and held close communion with God. In his public devotions he often had great power with God, and brought an unusual degree of Divine influence upon his congregations."

Brother Worsnop says, "It appeared that he 'grew in grace,' and 'increased with the increase of God.' He lived in communion with Him, so that in his public devotional exercises he had freedom of access." He, however, knew that study as well as prayer must be attended to, and he combined head-work with heart-work and knee-work.

Brother William Garner says, "During the time he travelled with me in Hull First Circuit, I ever found him to be a valuable colleague. He was constitutionally cheerful, but he never suffered his natural vivacity to degenerate into froth and levity. The solemn realities of eternity had a firm and steady hold on his soul, and exerted a salutary influence on his ardent mind. In the discharge of his professional duties he did not presumptuously trust to the extemporaneous effusions of his active and fearless spirit. In obedience to the dictates of the Bible he gave 'attention to reading,' &c. Many of his manuscripts were submitted by him to my inspection, and, what is much to say, all of them were characterized by an unusual tone of fidelity and earnestness. From these productions of his pen, I am perfectly satisfied that he was not so anxious to be regarded as a great man, as a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ. At the same time he possessed more appropriate knowledge than many who enjoy the reputation of being highly-gifted and intellectual preachers."

It appears that he always laboured to "save some," and obtain the "well done" of his gracious master. His journals evince great anxiety for the salvation of souls. Casting the net into the sea seems to have been regarded by him almost in the light of a failure if he did not see fish brought to land. Hence, he writes, at Brigg, one Sabbath in 1851, "Good day to my soul; but I have to lament that no sinners have been visibly converted. Lord, send us help, and save!" When health permitted, he did not leave the prayer-meetings in the hands of others as if he were not "at home" in them, but he happily and laboriously attended to the hauling in of the net, and thereby gave evidence of his faith in the Spirit's operations, his love for souls, and his concern for present success. He was mighty in a prayer-meeting. He possessed the happy art of conducting the penitent the nearest road to the cross, and helping him into the liberty of the children of God ;—*very important this*. From an entry in his journal I transcribe the following: —"The work of soul-saving will roll on—neither men nor devils can prevent it if we are faithful." Possessing such views, and labouring in faith as he did, we are not surprised that his labours were extensively owned of God. It was no unusual thing for him to see *ou's (original text not clear here)* converted to God after preaching the word. His journals record the conversion of hundreds of sinners; and many we judge will be the crown of his rejoicing when his mortal shall have "put on immortality."

Brother Newsome states that "he was useful in the conversion of sinners." Brother Worsnop writes :—"He evidently kept the great end in view, to "turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God." To accomplish this, he fearlessly and faithfully made known the terrors of the Lord, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom. This kind of preaching seemed to be natural and easy to him, and had a telling effect on his audiences, so that he did not labour in vain, nor spend his strength for nought.

The propriety and singleness of his aim made circumstances subserve his mighty purpose. Hence, if God thundered in the natural word, he would be a “son of thunder” in the pulpit, believing, no doubt, that, in the language of a celebrated commentator, “Fear, combined with the power of conscience, is the most powerful motive in reforming the wicked.” He would wrestle for hours in a house with a soul in distress, or preach Jesus in a carrier's cart.

The following illustrations are copied from his journals:—“June 13th, 1851. Preached at Snitterby. The night was awful. Lightnings blazed, and terrific peals of thunder were almost continuous. This did not pass unimproved. I took hold of the solemn event, and preached a sermon on the day of judgment, and not, I trust, without effect.”

“Dec. 8th, 1853.—A woman came to my lodging at B—— in deep distress. She said she had committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and there was no mercy for her. I tried to encourage her by referring to the Divine promises. We then knelt and wrestled at the throne of grace for two hours, when she was enabled to testify that she had found peace.”

“Dec. 7th, 1857.—To day I have received, from a friend, a report which has pleased me much. About ten weeks ago I travelled from Grainthorpe to Louth in a carrier's cart. A young woman riding with us was a very zealous advocate for the Established Church. She said it was the true church, and talked as if she regarded Dissenters as the refuse of society. As she appeared to know nothing about experimental piety, I thought I must be faithful with her. Accordingly, I gave up arguing about the Established Church being the true Church, and made some searching appeals to herself respecting religion. I also told her that neither Church clergymen nor dissenting ministers, nor church-going people or chapel attenders, would get to heaven if they were not born of the Spirit of God; and I urged her to seek Bible religion, and never rest until God pardoned her sins. When we arrived at Louth, I shook her by the hand and said, ‘Now young woman, I may never see you again in this world: I am for heaven, mind and meet me there! I then walked away, The arrow lodged in her heart! She has written to the friend whose house she was leaving on the day we met in the carrier's Cart, stating that she has got converted, and her friend was requested to tell me that what I had said to her had never left her. Praise the Lord!’”

As a preacher he was very *earnest*. The “unction from the holy one” imparted keenness to his perceptions, light to his understanding, tender impulses to his heart; and with impassioned emotions he poured the truth of God into the ears of men. He steadfastly believed, deeply felt, and therefore zealously preached the Word of God. He was also one of those men who seem to have been born for a life of earnestness. He could not live slowly. Activity was his genial element. And his naturally ardent temperament, under the baptism of fire, had its full scope in his ministerial life. At the commencement of his ministry, a friend in Driffild Circuit enquired of the late Mr. Atkinson Smith what kind of a preacher Mr. Wood was. “O,” was the metaphorical reply, “he's a match lighted at both ends.” And soon did the “match” of life consume away, and now these two men of God, “rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

“His constitution,” says Mr. William Garner, “was far from being sound and vigorous. But when he ascended the pulpit or the platform, and became warm with his theme, he seemed to quite forget his physical-infirmities, and taxed his energies to the uttermost. He also delighted in singing, and frequently engaged earnestly in this exercise when prudence suggested the propriety of either silence or effort proportionate to his strength. While his indiscreet admirers were enraptured by witnessing these perilous efforts, they produced their natural effects—sudden physical prostration and mental depression. After the arduous labours of a Sabbath-day, I often found him ‘Mondayish,’ to use his own peculiar term to denote the lassitude which he frequently experienced after the sacred toils of the Sabbath. In delivering these

sentiments, I am almost afraid of cooling the ardour of fervent heralds of the Cross, and must admit that it is infinitely better to grind out in excessive and holy activity, than to rust out in stolid indolence. Brother Wood was a devoted, honoured, and useful Primitive Methodist preacher."

Brother Wood's own views of the work of a Primitive Methodist preacher may be seen from the following remarks, written in his journal after reading the memoir of Brother S. Atterby:—"I have been struck more than once when perusing accounts of the labours and success of these self-denying early preachers. Burning zeal for God's glory, yearning love for souls, and laborious efforts to save them, seem to have been the characteristics of these men. I am afraid that we, the junior race, have sadly degenerated from the spirit of our forefathers. The zeal and power which attended their pulpit ministrations seem to a great extent to be wanting. The secret of their success was in their wrestling with God in solitude. This, I fear, is too much neglected among us at the present day; hence our sermons are not so efficient in the conversion of souls to God. Lord, pardon us, and put upon us the mantle of our fathers, for Thy glory!"

If duty, privilege, and responsibility are realities, then surely "burning zeal," "yearning love," and "laborious efforts," become ministers of the Gospel. They are essentials of Divinely-appointed ministerial character. And the keen sensibilities, deep emotions, tears, private wrestlings and groanings, solitudes, toils, and sufferings in the Church, and from earth and hell, which they include, are all exhaustive of nervous power, and productive of nervous debility. Hence many earnest preachers are old in constitution whilst young in years; and some who, after many years of abundant labour, have entered the vale of life, find those "life-strings," the nerves, greatly relaxed, and their whole physical constitution a wreck. Dr. A. Clarke says substantially— "Every minister who does his duty, will sooner or later die a martyr to his work." And when the constitution of a zealous minister is not naturally or otherwise robust, no wonder if by "laborious efforts" to save men, he bring himself to the grave. If a minister be easy without seeing souls converted to God—if he does not wrestle and study in private, and labour in public for visible success and to "turn many to righteousness," he may live a long time, and be unshattered in old age. But if he enters into the work with a zeal and expectancy anything like becoming a man whom God has sent to arouse slumbering souls, it is a very different thing. A soldier who does not enter into battle, or stands aloof from the lines, may live long; his name will not kill him; but valiant fighting might hasten his end, or render him a sufferer for life. Well, if it be so, he assists to win a realm, or to preserve a nation. The mere name of a minister, or the round of ministerial duties coolly performed, without anxiety for visible and daily success, will not soon bring down the strength of an ordinary man; but if he labours to bring souls to God in every sermon, and to get men and women into faith in the sick room, in the house, and in the prayer-meeting, he will sooner or later feel the effects on his constitution. And if he hasten his end by "always abounding in the work of the Lord," he will have been extensively useful, and heaven will be far better to him than earth, however pleasant might have been life's afternoon or evening, and gloriously bestarred will be the crown which Jesus will confer at that day.

It is believed, and was by himself, that Brother Wood by excessive labour shortened his days; but no regret escaped his lips that he had laboured too earnestly. On the contrary, when dying, he said to Brother Andrews (his son in the Gospel, and who was serving as his supply), "I do not repent that I have laboured for God and souls, I feel He is with me. Glory! glory! I shall soon be with Jesus."

Whilst we believe it to be an important duty sacredly to preserve health as long as we can, and also believe it to be possible by imprudence to sap the foundation of the constitution and shorten mortal life, and contend that there should be no aimless expenditure of strength, yet there are instances when the risking of health and life becomes our first duty, and in none so imperatively as where souls are perishing for whom Christ died.

How often does the sailor leap into the sea to snatch from a watery grave a drowning comrade? And in how many instances has the soldier risked his life to rescue, in the storm of battle, his wounded officer? And who finds fault? Nay, who does not applaud the life-risking sympathy and heroism? A short time ago, two boys were drowning near Hulme, and a person lost his life in attempting to save them, but I never read or heard a sentence of blame that he risked and lost his own life in attempting to save theirs. Immortal souls are hastening towards the lake of fire, and God sends ministers,

“With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,”

and what wonder if, like Epaphroditus, the “fellow-soldier” of the apostle Paul, who regarded not his life, and “for the work of Christ was nigh unto death,” there are some of similar zeal in these days, who are sick, and others have fallen asleep as martyrs to the work?

If Brother Wood, for the work’s sake, regarded not his life, and shortened his years, we dare not find fault. We know of no denunciation in the Book of God against over-working, if such a thing be possible, in the service of the Lord. We are taught to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” And where one dies naturally through “always abounding” and being zealously affected in His work, many, we presume, die spiritually through being lukewarm and slothful. The one enters heaven to receive, we believe, a martyr’s crown; the many, we presume, die spiritually through being lukewarm and slothful. The one enters heaven to receive, we believe, a martyr’s crown; the other becomes fit for an unprofitable servant’s doom.

During his last year in the Louth Circuit, Brother Whitehead says of Brother Wood, “He was generally unequal to his work.” His debility increased until he ceased to live. Within a short time, however, of his death, he expected to preach again. But he was not anxious as to the result of his affliction. He said, “I am in the hands of God.” Once when I said to him, “I think you are going home,” he replied, “Do you? Praise God!” To a question respecting his spiritual state, he once answered, “You know I am resting on the Atonement, and if it fail, I fail.” “But it will not,” was the reply; to which he emphatically responded, “No.” “What do you think of Jesus?” was asked. “He’s a Saviour,” he replied; “He’s a Saviour! He has saved me without any doubt.” “What must I say to the people?” I inquired. “Tell them,” replied he, “God will save them all. Tell them I’ve been on the Rock for sixteen or seventeen years, and it’s as firm as ever.” At one time, when his eyes were closed, he was repeating the glorious testimony, “I am holy.” He might then be using his shield against the attack of an unseen adversary, or he might be rejoicing to feel himself “meet to partake of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” The night before he died, when asked how it was with his soul, he replied, “O, it’s all right.” The next morning “the outward man” fell asleep, and “the inward,” untrammelled by “this corruption,” commenced the rapturous and untiring activities of Paradisaical life.

The memory of Brother Wood, we believe, will be cherished in the hearts of many among whom he ministered, and also by many with whom he laboured, and there are monuments of his spiritual might and heavenly honour in a number of souls brought to Jesus by his life-exhausting toil. May his sorrowing widow and little son meet him “with the Lamb on Mount Zion!”

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1860/8