

Rev. J.B. Wilson

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

J. Bastow Wilson was born almost under the shadow of Dudley Castle on February 26th, 1864, and finished his earthly ministry at Great Yarmouth on October 15th, 1921.

He was a Primitive Methodist of the fourth generation, and loved his Church with growing intensity throughout the years. In childhood he was taken to Spennymoor, and so nurtured in the fervid Primitive Methodism of the North. In his fourteenth year he made the great decision, and his sixteenth found him on "full plan." He entered the teaching profession, and bore the marks of his training and his adaptability for the work to the end of his days. His life's work seemed settled, but there sprang up in his heart a master passion that that work could not content. His powers, whatever they were, must be fully engaged in preaching the everlasting gospel. His fervour, passion and preaching ability made him acceptable in many pulpits, and led to the conversion of many souls.

The Thornley Circuit recommended him as a candidate for the ministry, and the North Cave Circuit, where he was serving as hired local preacher supported the recommendation. This harmonised with his growing conviction that God willed him to enter the ministry. Though twenty-seven years of age, and married with children, when the late Rev. James Travis "wired" him to go to Aldershot as hired local preacher, he immediately obeyed what he believed to be (and never afterwards doubted) the leading of God. He successfully passed the candidates' examination, and was stationed on the Gravesend Circuit in 1892. Northfleet and Galley Hill were allotted to his special care and made splendid progress. Interesting himself in public matters, he exerted considerable influence on the social life of these growing communities during his four years of service. At the Conference of 1896 he was received into the "full ministry" and sent to Glasgow Ill. as its first superintendent. Here, again, success attended his many-sided ministry, fifty-two were added to the membership, and the income increased by fifty per cent.

A serious, almost fatal, illness compelled him to decline an invitation for a fourth year, and he moved to Barrow-in-Furness in 1899. Lowick, Seaton Delaval (four years), Plumstead (four years), Canning Town (six years), and Great Yarmouth followed in due course, and in all numbers increased, the spiritual life was deepened, and debts specially reduced.

Going to Plumstead after the disastrous fire, he had much to do with the erection of the present church on the blackened ruins. The next six years he spent on the Canning Town Circuit— a big chapel in a slum area, crowded with the very poorest, sodden with drink and reeking with vice, and with few workers and straightened resources. Add to these the additional facts that his superintendency covered the entire war period save for a few months, that the church was depleted of young men, and that air raids were frequent, and you have a terrifying situation. Mr. Albert Shaw, J.P., after a visit, wrote: 'The sight both fascinated and appalled me. I felt that it would kill me to live in such surroundings.' Mr. Wilson lived there, and poured forth the energies of body, brain and soul in a Christly endeavour to build the Kingdom of God in that foul area. To all the other burdens and terrors was added the grief of bereavement, for a second daughter, a brilliant young woman and a gracious helper in the work, was taken from them. He weathered the storm of those six tremendous years, but the terrible buffetings had weakened his powers of recovery, and he bore the marks for the brief remainder of life.

He was not fully himself during the short time he was at Great Yarmouth, but he fully maintained the high traditions of the Temple pulpit. Contributors to our Connexional literature, as well as the general Press, bore generous tribute to the high character of his pulpit efforts.

The above is a most imperfect outline of his ardent career. It must be said of him that he loved work. To be usefully busy was a joy to him. He cheerfully shouldered burdens from which many men of stronger physique would have shrunk. To him work was laborious, exacting, wearying, but not drudgery. It was a dignity and a glory, and he went forth to meet it as a man goes to meet his love.

His interests were wide. There was nothing of narrowness in his "make-up." Politics, temperance, Free Churchism, education, Christian Endeavourism, and other agencies to promote moral and physical well-being strongly appealed to him, and hours that ought to have been devoted to rest and recuperation were freely given to their advocacy.

His sympathies were quick. When at Northfleet, whilst still a married probationer, a severe winter, during which the Thames was frozen, threw many out of work, causing wide-spread distress. Without funds, but with plenty of faith, and a good wife to help, he opened a soup kitchen and daily fed hundreds of children. On other circuits he undertook similar work, but greatly widened the scope at Canning Town.

He had great moral courage. He was ever ready to champion any good cause. A good debater, well supplied with and able readily to marshal his facts, always fair and free from bitterness, he was a warrior without reproach. His opinions were convictions strongly, but generously held. Often unaccompanied, he stood in the open-air to proclaim the message of redeeming love. He met secularists, spiritualists, supporters of the drink, in open debate, and all found him thoroughly prepared.

He was, above all, an evangelist. The Gospel of Divine Peace on his lips was no uncertain sound. He regularly "preached for souls," but on almost every circuit he organised and conducted special missions with marked success. Undoubtedly he had special fitness for this work, and it is to be regretted that he should so often have been serving tables when he should have been on an embassy for the King. Years ago he wrote a pamphlet for those "Just Through the Strait Gate," so simple, concise, sane, and suitable, that if available to-day would meet a felt need better than some more pretentious works.

He had a ready pen and knew its value. He was a frequent contributor to the Press, and got a full share of secretarial work. In this capacity he served several Free Church Councils, he was assistant secretary of our Conference at Derby, five times secretary of the Synod, and for five years a very proficient secretary of the S.M.W. and O. Fund. Twice he was G.C.D., and thrice delegate to Conference. His business ability, geniality and knowledge of Connexional rules quickly established him in the Norwich District, and last May he was appointed chairman of the Synod. At all kinds of work, and in every sphere his spirit glowed. He was a *burning* and a shining light.

Very suddenly he was called to the splendour of another sphere, but he has left lighted lamps and kindled fires to light and warm other pilgrims of the night.

His brave, modest, resourceful comrade through the years, the mother of his children, and the one who enabled him — who was never physically robust — to do so much, mourns his departure, but waits in hope of a glorious re-union. Three sons, one in our ministry, one training for the teaching profession, and the other studying dentistry, are all engaged in Christian work.

On October 20th, 1991, his remains were laid to rest in Ilford Cemetery, where one daughter is buried. An impressive service was held in the Cemetery Chapel, which was largely attended by many ministerial acquaintances and friends from circuits on which he had travelled. The address was given by the Rev. J.G. Bowran, and the Revs. J. Johnson, G. Armitage, S.L. George and H. Bennett and others took part in the service. The committal service was read by the Rev. J.G. Bowran, and prayer offered by the Rev. T.H. Bickerton.

Simultaneously, a largely attended memorial service was conducted in the Temple at Yarmouth by the Rev. H.W. Marsh and the Rev. W.J. Hemp, representing the General Committee, gave an address.

J.T. CLARKE

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1922/286