

Rev. John N Wheeler

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

The Rev. J. N. WHEELER was born at Durham, on the 20th of March, 1854. From his earliest years he was surrounded with holy and helpful influences at home, and he frequently expressed his conviction that the example and instruction of Christian parents were, under God, the most powerful factors in leading to his conversion. As an illustration of the beneficial tendency of the lessons he received in childhood, in fixing his principles, I quote the following incident from a speech he delivered on 'Christian Home Training,' not long before his death.

After showing that the endeavour to impress moral and religious truth upon the minds and hearts of the young, by Christian parents, may by habit become a familiar, easy, and pleasing exercise, he says, 'I have a distinct recollection of the first time I saw a red-coated man, such a man as I afterwards learned to designate a soldier, I would then not be more than five years old. I remember also that I was terrified by the sight of him, and somehow received the impression that he had come to kill me. I ran home to my father, and describing the man told him all my fears. He immediately took me upon his knee and said, "Do you know that the man of whom you are so much afraid is your brother?" He then told me that the whole human race was a great family, sprung from the same first parents, and bound together by many ties; that red-skinned Indians, whom I had never seen, as well as the people who lived around us, were our brothers and sisters; and that that soldier, though it was his work to fight, was my brother still, and apart from his calling might be a good and kind-hearted man. Now, never since that day have I received a lesson that impressed me more with the brotherhood of man and the value of personal character apart from social circumstances and official position.'

Early in life he was taken to the Sabbath-school, and there received religious impressions which were never afterwards erased from his mind; and even in his boyhood days he evinced the possession of those qualities of pureness, gentleness, unselfishness, and plodding perseverance, which found so grand a development in his later life. He was converted to God at a watch-night service held in the New Connexion chapel on New Year's eve, 1871. He at once demonstrated the thoroughness of the change by breaking away from old associates and pursuits, and by seeking preparation for a life of usefulness in the service of God.

Shortly after his conversion he joined the Primitive Methodist Connexion, of which denomination his parents were members. His paternal grandmother, too, had for many years been a well-known member, and one of the earliest class-leaders in the Primitive Methodist Communion in the ancient city of Durham. It was not long before his brethren discovered in him qualities which fitted him for becoming a local preacher, and his name in due time appeared on the plan. From the first he was most careful and methodical in his preparation for the pulpit. The word thoroughness exactly describes his spirit and manner. That which he undertook he endeavoured to do well.

He was recommended for the ministry by the March Quarterly Meeting, 1877, and having passed the preliminary examination, he entered the Theological Institute, Sunderland, where he spent a most enjoyable and profitable year. The Conference of 1878 stationed him at Canterbury, where he spent two years, the latter of which was rendered very laborious and responsible by the prolonged illness of his colleague. So successfully did he manage the various interests of his circuit at this time that he received a letter of congratulation and thanks from the district committee.

His next sphere of labour was Croydon, where, in conjunction with Rev. W.E. Crombie, he spent three years of happy and successful labour. In the May before leaving this circuit, he was called upon to experience the most crushing sorrow of his life in the loss of his pious and affectionate wife, after only nine months of married happiness. He never seemed quite the same after the severe shock he sustained at this time.

Leaving Croydon he undertook the superintendency of Gravesend Circuit, and entered upon his labours in July, 1883. It was not long before his little motherless daughter died, and he was called upon to perform the melancholy duty of laying her body with the remains of her mother in Croydon Cemetery. His duties at Gravesend were discharged with the same conscientiousness

and diligence which marked the whole of his career, and during his three years' labour he won the esteem and confidence of all with whom he was associated. The illness which terminated in his death, was brought on by a cold which he caught in returning from an appointment in the country. He passed away from the service of earth to the fellowship of the skies on Monday morning, June 18, 1886, aged thirty-two years.

As an indication of the esteem in which he was held, it need only be stated that the local paper published his portrait, and devoted nearly two columns to his memoir and to the account of his funeral. His body was interred in Gravesend Cemetery, on Friday, June 22, in the presence of several hundreds of persons. The funeral services in the chapel and at the grave were conducted by Rev. W.E. Crombie, assisted by Revs. B. Senior, W. Scafe, J. P. Langham, J. Phillips, F.R. Andrews, W. Dunham, T. Parsons, and F. Tuck, Congregationalist. Wreaths of flowers from three Good Templar lodges, and Shorne Band of Hope, as well as several from private individuals, were placed upon the coffin.

His diligence, prudence, and increasing interest in the work of the circuit secured for him the utmost confidence, the highest respect, and the warmest affection of all the officials and members under his charge. Moreover, his labours were by no means confined within the limits of his own church, for all good objects found in him a willing response and ready assistance. He was closely identified with the temperance movement, and he rejoiced greatly in the good work done by all kindred associations. Though he died suddenly his friends have the utmost confidence that he died safely; 'he now rests from his labours, and his works do follow him.' He has left the rich heritage of a godly life and a character fragrant with pureness, and he lives still in a thousand actions, endearing him to his friends. W. W.

References

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