

Thomas Bateman and the Marquis

Transcription of an Article in the Christian Messenger

A most interesting book with a fine literary flavour has just been issued under the title of 'Threads from the Life of John Mills, Banker (author of 'Vox Humana') interwoven with some early Century Recollections by his wife' (Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes.) The book abounds with eminently quotable bits; but we here confine ourselves to a sympathetic and appreciative reference to the late Thomas Bateman so intimately associated with Primitive Methodism throughout his long and useful life. For some years Mr. Mills resided in Nantwich in the capacity of a Bank Manager. His biographer is referring to the annual meetings of the Bible Society at Nantwich, presided over by the Marquis of Cholmondeley and at which Mr. Bateman was a speaker:—

'Next to the Marquis sat one who, when he rose to speak, riveted attention, and dwarfed all other speakers - Thomas Bateman, farmer and Primitive Methodist local preacher, who was born at Wrenbury, but lived from boyhood at Chorley, where his father settled. Of ruddy complexion, keen-eyed, spare, yet broad-shouldered and well-knit, he gave an impression of square power. Swaying at first slightly to and fro, after a certain country fashion, he, without apology or preamble plunged at once into his subject, and went steadily on, flashes of humour relieving the deep earnestness, to his climax, and then quickly and unexpectedly sat down, looking fidgeted only till the applause was over.

'When Mr. Bateman happened to be preaching in cottage or 'conventicle' near Cholmondeley, he had no more devout hearer than the Marquis, who loved to slip out to his service, and if he could not persuade him to go home with him, would walk along with him to the house of his host, some farmer whom he had promised to stay with; and not all the marquises or nobilities in the world could tempt Thomas to break his word.

'It was a beautiful friendship, free from any element of condescension or patronage on the one side, or servility on the other. Seeing them standing together on that platform, one felt sure those two had often met on equal ground, battling with the Powers of Darkness.

'One Sunday morning we went to hear Mr. Bateman preach a special sermon, in aid of the much-needed renovation and decorating of the Wesleyan Chapel in Hospital Street. That is over forty years ago; yet that sermon lives in the memory, especially the strong, mellow voice, as he gave out the text, 'Oh ye that dwell in ceiled houses.' Mr. Mills was delighted and surprised, and I have heard him in later years allude appreciatively to that discourse. When we went to Nantwich in 1852, Mr. Bateman had been nearly twenty years on the Board of Guardians there. He was in the prime of life, equally at home in cottage or castle, and as heartily welcomed; yet he lived and worked for over forty years longer – dying in 1897, aged ninety-eight, in full possession of his faculties.

'His life, when it appears, cannot fail to be full of interest, in telling the story of a man who, conjointly with John Wedgwood, Hugh Bourne, and William Clowes, founded the Primitive Methodist Society; who refused liberal offers from his church friends to pay all University expenses if he would take Orders; yet who, considering the income of his parish (Chorley) vicar to be very inadequate, collected over a thousand pounds, and bought a farm, the rental of which to this day

goes to augment the incumbent's income; a man who, when he found that a very prosperous business he had formed, in partnership with a friend, was interfering with the religious work to which he had devoted his life, gave it up, and in so doing sacrificed a large fortune - his remaining partner dying with over half a million. He was such a delicate, shy, quiet lad, that some people thought him anything but sharp; but an old man, named Capper, used to say to him, 'Thou'll be a mon, and open somebody's een, when I'm dead and forgotten.'

'To forestall, however, his biographer, would not be fair. I will only recount an anecdote given to me by his son, to whom I am also indebted for information concerning his father's later years:—

"My father was often at Cholmondeley Castle. He was there one day, and having finished his business, his Lordship was called away. Father said, 'I must go now.' The Marchioness said, 'Mr. Bateman, I never saw such a man! You are always busy, and off in a minute, and have no time for prayer or anything!'

"Oh! your Ladyship, I am busy, but have always time for prayer!'

"Then,' said she, 'Let us have prayer.' And she summoned about a dozen ladies who were staying at the Castle, and they had a time of prayer, in which one or two of the ladies took part.'

References

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