

Rev William Alderson

Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine by R.G. Graham

REV. WILLIAM ALDERSON was one of the many offerings of the villages to the membership and ministry of our Church. He was born at Yarm-on-Tees on May 4, 1816, but soon after his birth his parents, who were farmers, removed to Appleton Wiske, where his early days were spent. He was early brought into contact with the pulpit and with preaching. Three of his uncles were Wesleyan local preachers, and one of them used to take his nephew with him to his preaching appointments. He would not only take the boy into the pulpit, but during the walk home he would ask him to give his impressions of the sermon. Sometimes he would be, asked to preach his uncle's sermon over before the other uncles and family. In that way the boy's interest in the preaching of the Gospel was early stirred.

When quite a youth he was converted, and joined our Church. It was soon apparent that he had a talent for preaching, and he was put upon the plan. When it became evident that the way was opening for him into our ministry, his family did not relish the prospect, and tried to wean him from the Church of his choice. They were anxious for him to join the Wesleyans with a view to the ministry of their Church, or they would bear the cost of his education for the ministry of the Church of England. He was actually sent to Rev. R. Hugill, Rector of Great Smeaton, to undergo a course of training for the Church; but from conviction he was a Primitive Methodist, and preferred to remain with the Church of his choice. He is an illustration of the spirit of devotion that characterised so many of our early preachers. He was called into the ministry by the Stockton-on-Tees Circuit in July, 1837, and he never regretted the step he then took. Writing to his parents soon after he became a minister, he said: "My temporal remuneration is not great (and it certainly was not), but my spiritual enjoyments are substantial, and make up for everything else. The longer I live, and the more I know of religion and religious truth, the more I am convinced that the people of the world are wrong when they expect to find happiness in riches." And towards the close of his days he declared that if he had his life to live over, he would make the same choice, only he would serve his Master with greater devotion.

His early education was good considering his day; and on entering the ministry of our Church he cultivated a taste for reading and sought to improve his mind to the utmost of his opportunities. He collected a good library, specially good when we consider the limited incomes of our early preachers. He had almost a complete set of T. and T. Clark's "Foreign and Theological Library." Not only did he buy books, but he was a close student of them. He was, too, fairly acquainted with German theology and altogether he was regarded as one of the best-read and most intelligent men in our ministry. Evidence of that is furnished in the fact that he was closely associated with one of the earliest, if not the very earliest attempt at the higher education of our ministry.

In 1852 he was appointed by the Ministerial Association of the Sunderland District to communicate with the ministers on probation relative to the improvement of their minds. He drew up a very interesting programme of studies for them, and on looking over it I find he expected them to be at their work by six a.m., and to spend the first hour in private devotion. How far the attempt succeeded we cannot say. Some of the young men certainly did correspond with him, and one thing

is certain, they could not work according to his programme without being immensely the better for it.

Mr. Alderson used his pen freely. He left behind a large number of manuscripts, and they are at once a revelation and a rebuke. They are in wonderful order, and in almost copper-plate neatness. They consist of sermons, addresses, and essays; and there is such a large number of them that he must have written fully out almost every sermon he preached as well as every address he delivered.

As a preacher he was quiet but effective. He was a fine illustration of Vinet's remark, that "perspiration is not inspiration." His voice was never strong, but his enunciation was so distinct that he could be easily heard in our largest chapels. Nor was he possessed of much physical power, but what he lacked in energy was more than compensated for by the high intellectual quality and the rich spiritual tone of his preaching. Neither did he preach in vain. His ministry was rich in spiritual result, especially among the young, for in them he took a special interest. Outside the pulpit, as well as in it, he was an earnest, devoted worker, and his ministry generally was highly successful.

He had quite a fund of quiet humour, and could enjoy a joke; but, needless to say, his humour was not of that kind which irritates and offends. On the contrary, his gift of humour, with his other gifts, was laid at the feet of his Master.

Mr. Alderson had the privilege of travelling in some of the most important circuits in the North of England. Among them we might name Stockton-on-Tees (where he began his ministry, and where he travelled twice), Sunderland (twice), Shotley Bridge, North Shields, Hartlepool. Wherever he travelled he is remembered as a man of quiet, saintly presence carrying with him an atmosphere fragrant of goodness.

Through failure of health he was compelled to superannuate when comparatively young. He retired to West Hartlepool, where he spent many years. During the four years we travelled there we had the advantage of his intimate friendship. We found his conversation highly interesting and instructive. Not only had he a wide knowledge of books, but he was rich in reminiscence of our early history, and that we found particularly interesting. While a good worker, he was no meddler. Rather, he was a man of perfect peace. He was a class-leader, attending his class regularly, and he preached as his health permitted. Always taking an active interest in the highest welfare of the circuit, he lived in perfect peace with his ministerial brethren.

Mr. Alderson was twice married. His first wife was Miss M.A. Lynn, of West Hartlepool, with whom he lived happily for many years. Some years after her death he married Miss Parrott, the daughter of one of our oldest ministers, and on his second marriage he removed to Stockton-on-Tees, where the remainder of his life was spent. In Miss Parrott he found a devoted wife. There seemed a touch of romance in his second marriage, as he was seventy-four years of age when it was solemnised; but the results demonstrated its wisdom. He lived ten years after it, and it is quite safe to say that those ten years knew a peace and a comfort which, but for that step, they could not have known.

For some time before he died, Mr. Alderson's health was slowly, almost imperceptibly failing. He suffered much, but he suffered patiently; and his suffering was greatly relieved by constant devoted

nursing. During the last six months of his life his conversation was much in the past. It was of his mother, his uncles, his early associations. The end came quickly, as was expected. Almost in the act of speaking, there was a look of surprise, a radiant smile as though of glad recognition, and he was gone - ascending to heaven as in a chariot of fire. He died on January 25, 1901, and was buried in Stockton Cemetery.

To the present generation of our ministers and people he was little known; but those who did know him will ever remember him as a close student, a devoted minister, and an earnest, consistent Christian. It is true of him, as Longfellow sings of a friend:

“Were a star quenched on high,
For ages would its light,
Still travelling downward from the sky,
Shine on our mortal sight.
So when a good man dies,
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the path of men.”

A memorial service, conducted by Rev. D. McKinley, was held in Paradise Row Chapel, Stockton-on-Tees, April 21, 1901.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1901/706