

## **Rev William Baitey**

### **Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine**

ON the twentieth day of March, 1900, after a somewhat protracted illness, the Rev. William Baitey passed into the higher service of the better country. He was in many respects a remarkable man, whose life and work produced a profound impression on Primitive Methodist circles in the North of England, and in certain ways on considerable sections outside the Church of which he was so able and devoted a minister. He began life in what must be regarded as unfortunate circumstances, being left when an infant without father or mother or friend to care for him. To those days he seldom referred in later life. Not that there was any false note in his nature regarding it. He was too true to attempt to hide it away. But he was also too manly to trade upon that chapter in his history. On rare occasions, when he could do it with confidence and with advantage to his people, he would speak of the goodness of the great Father, and confidently assert the truth of the promise of the Word, "When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, God will take thee up." By strange byways God brings some at least of those He has chosen into their inheritance. But though he did not refer much to those early days, it is clear both from his spoken words and from the all too scant personal references in his literary remains that he felt keenly the lonesomeness of his position. And yet both then and to the end he maintained a beautiful sweetness of disposition, keeping all bitterness out of his heart, hiding his sorrow out of sight, and turning a smiling face to all the world.

At twelve years of age William Baitey was apprenticed to a Primitive Methodist class-leader, and at once became connected, first with our Stafford Street Sunday School and afterwards with that at Malins Rigg. In those days Sunderland Primitive Methodists were distinguished for the success of their aggressive work, and revivals of religion were of frequent occurrence. When our friend was sixteen, a gracious Divine visitation came to the Malins Rigg Society, and he and a number of other young people who were destined to render good service to the cause of God were led to enter the Kingdom. From that moment it became evident that he meant to give evidence of the grace that was in him in practical work, and having considerable talents, his work proved exceedingly valuable. As a Sunday scholar he had been recognised as an effective reciter on anniversary and similar occasions, and as his gifts ripened it became clear to observant men that he would probably be able to serve the Church in high and honourable positions. It was at this time that he first manifested that love of reading which continued to characterise him throughout his career. His library was neither large nor varied, and his education previously had been of the poorest, but he must be deemed fortunate in having had in it so excellent a work as Dwight's "Theology." Another circumstance connected with those days should be mentioned, inasmuch as it was the promise of some striking events that were to occur in his mature manhood. The Latter Day Saints were then busy with their propaganda in various parts of the country, and were specially active in Sunderland. By this time Mr. Baitey was a local preacher, and had revealed considerable ability and readiness as a public speaker. Young as he was he had courage enough to challenge these people, and frequently, after their lectures, entered into public discussion with them. These appearances on their platforms were greatly appreciated by the public of the town, and brought the young man considerable fame.

At eighteen years of age he was called to fill a vacancy in the Barnard Castle Circuit, and from thence went to Carlisle as a regular minister, continuing in the active work, exclusive of his first term in

Barnard Castle, thirty-seven years. The whole of his life was spent in the North of England, and no minister has been more heartily welcomed into the homes of the people; few, indeed, could claim: more effective pulpit power, and fewer still will have their memory more tenderly cherished by those to whom; they have ministered. It is worthy of note that including his term as a hired local preacher at Barnard Castle, he travelled twice on four of his stations. Those are rare spirits indeed who never arouse opposition, and there may have been a solitary occasion or two when Mr. Baitey's policy and methods were not approved. But as he passed from station to station he seemed to-awaken less of antagonistic feeling than most, whilst, on the other hand, he always succeeded in endearing himself to the multitude of his brethren. Few men in the Primitive Methodist ministry have had the chance of travelling two terms on four of their stations, and fewer still could have done it with acceptance, but this honour among many others was conferred on our brother.

In appraising his character, the first quality that would occur to those who knew him was his tenderness of heart and his unfailing good humour. He was always gentle, possibly too gentle at times for the rough, stern work that must be done by men of affairs in the Primitive Methodist Church. But, at least, this outstanding quality of his mind won for him the affection of the children of the Sunday Schools, the admiration of the young people in his churches, and the attachment of the kindlier spirits among the members. Nor was it wholly disadvantageous to him in the management of circuit business, for if there were those who could have desired a stronger hand on the reins, his urbanity went far to disarm opposition and suppress angry feeling, and thus enabled him to succeed where sterner men at times would have failed. And certainly, this quality, springing as it did from genuine kindness of heart, made him welcome to sorrowing homes, and enabled him to minister consolation to- stricken hearts.

He was a gifted preacher and platform speaker. There was a real genius in him as an expounder of the Word which set him apart from all his brethren. No man could say that his sermons were not his own, for they were unlike those of my other preacher living or dead. It is difficult to explain to those who have never heard him what was their exact character. But, although his best and most effective efforts had all the force of spontaneous utterances, it should be said that they were the outcome of much reading and careful study and extensive writing. The present writer had considerable acquaintance with his pulpit style, having been privileged to sit as a regular hearer in his congregations for two years, besides having heard him occasionally for a period stretching over a quarter of a century, and among other things noticeable was that in order to rise to the very height of his powers it was necessary for him to have a great and picturesque theme. Texts like, "And He hath on his vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords," and, "Ye are not come to the Mount that might be touched," etc., always brought forth the best that was in him. On these occasions he waxed eloquent, and carried his audiences out of themselves, as he did when he lectured on such subjects as Music, or spoke at public meetings, either religious or political. Probably none who heard him speak at District Meeting and Conference on "Effete Christianity," will ever forget the feeling he awakened. But, although he was so impassioned on such occasions, it is not to be thought that he was a mere rhetorician. Mr. Baitey was extensively read. His reading had not been done systematically, and it could not be said that he had gone far in any special branch of study. His strength in this regard lay in the fact that he knew something about almost everything, and knew it sufficiently well to bring it readily into his service. And this made his sermons not only impressive, but often very informing.

Reference has been made to his early ventures upon the stormy waters of public debate, but in his very prime as a minister he braved further excursions of this kind at Blackhill, Bishop Auckland, and we believe Ashington, in Northumberland. The subjects were varied, not infrequently the prevailing Agnosticism offered the necessary ground for combat. The debates that took place at Bishop Auckland will not be forgotten during this generation. The spiritualists brought down their ablest exponent from, London, and for some two or three nights the contest was listened to by crowded houses. But from the first it was seen that the champion of the spiritualists had no chance of holding his own against an antagonist at once so well informed, so ready of speech, so good-natured, and so accomplished as a debater in all respects. Many years have passed away since that event, but it is said that spiritualism, which had become very rampant, has never since lifted its head in the neighbourhood.

In other ways he served his generation and the Church. More than once he spoke at the great annual gathering of Durham miners; he was a strong supporter of working-men members of Parliament, and the highly esteemed friend of the late Mr. W. Crawford, M.P., and of Mr. John Wilson, the present member for Mid-Durham, and he showed a practical interest in every movement calculated to promote the interests of the working classes. His interest in young men will be gratefully remembered by large numbers who, having now attained to positions of influence and usefulness, are fully aware of the fact that it was he who first gave them noble ambitions, and helped them in their first feeble efforts at self-improvement. Many proofs of the esteem in which he was held were accorded him in his later years. Nothing could have exceeded the kindness of the Thornley Circuit to him during his term of service there, when his strength was failing. And when on leaving that station he went to South Shields as a superannuated minister, although he had never travelled there, he received continued marks of the good will and thoughtfulness of the friends there. His brethren in the ministry kept up their connection with him by frequent visits, for which he was ever grateful, and when, after three years of rest from circuit work, his spirit entered into the rest above, his mortal remains were followed to the grave by a large concourse of mourners, including ministers and laymen belonging to South Shields, both Primitive Methodists and others, and from other circuits in the Sunderland and Newcastle, and the Darlington and Stockton Districts. Mr. Baitey was twice married, and has left a widow and a son and daughter to mourn their loss.

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## References

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