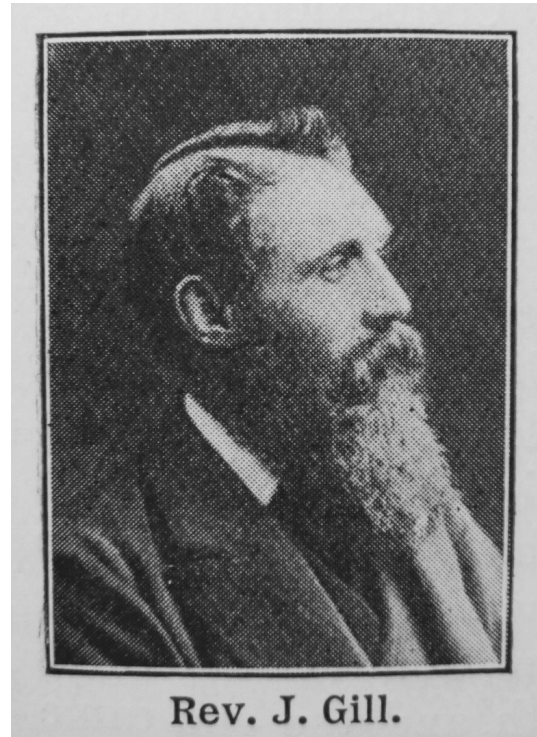


Rev John Gill

Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.S. White

The late John Gill was one of the many fine dalesmen who have done so much to make Primitive Methodism illustrious in the north of England. He was born at a small village near to Allendale Town in the year 1835. His parents were good religious people; they were members of our Church, and highly esteemed in the locality. "His mother," says the venerable Barnabas Wild, "was cleanly, industrious, and thrifty; one who attended well to the affairs of her house. His father had an aptitude for quiet humour." And this, we may add, was transmitted in full measure to his son, who as a boy was playful and prankish to a degree. Says the Rev. B. Clemitson, who was then one of his companions, "He was a droll lad, full of playfulness and tricks, and made one laugh whether one would or not." His elementary education was obtained in a day school conducted in the old Primitive Methodist Chapel, Allendale Town, by a Mr.



J. Bell, under whose skilful tuition Master Gill became an expert penman. In due time the lad passed into the larger world of trade, and served an apprenticeship as a joiner and carpenter, an experience which proved of the utmost value to him in supervising the erection of several chapels during his ministry. Mr. Gill was converted in a great revival which took place early in the year 1853 in Allendale Town. This powerful movement was preceded and made possible by special prayer meetings which extended over several weeks. The meetings were held by the members in each other's houses at six o'clock in the morning, and at noon. In the evening, at six o'clock, they had preaching services in the chapel. Scores of young people were converted, many of whom became teachers or class leaders, or local preachers. And two of them, viz., Robert Clemitson and John Gill, entered the ministry and have rendered long and distinguished service therein. Immediately after his conversion Mr. Gill joined the society at Sinderhope, of which his parents were members. Here the needs of the church constrained him to undertake duties of various kinds. He became a Sabbath school teacher, then secretary, and ultimately superintendent. Indeed, the school was dependent on him for its success for several years. His earnestness and general usefulness commended him to the circuit authorities as being suitable for a still larger sphere, and consequently in 1854 he was put on the plan as a local preacher.

After completing his apprenticeship as a joiner our friend removed to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and thence to Sunderland, where he came under the penetrating observation of the late Rev. C. C. McKechnie, who speedily recognised his superior powers, and called him into the ministry. His first station was Berwick-on-Tweed, where he had for his superintendent the late Rev. John Atkinson, and for colleagues the Revs. W. Bowe and W. Sudlow. Forty years ago Berwick circuit was a wide and trying field, and the pasturage was bare. Yet, "in those early days," says Mr. Bowe, "Mr. Gill was a

lovable fellow, and notwithstanding the hardships he was always cheerful, and did his work in a noble fashion. He was a good companion and a true friend." Unhappily, in that same circuit he had the huge misfortune to be put in a damp bed, which brought on a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs, and laid the foundation of much physical weakness in afterlife.

From Berwick he passed in succession to Workington, Alston, Weardale, and Motherwell, in each of which stations he laboured with characteristic zeal and faithfulness. During his term in Motherwell circuit he resided at Mossend, and it was largely owing to his enthusiasm and strenuous endeavours that a chapel was built in that place. His next removal carried him to Haltwhistle-on-Tyne, where he was instrumental in the erection of a nice little chapel at Cowburn. Part of it is used also as a day-school. Indeed, Primitive Methodism is the only Church in that rural area which provides for the secular as well as the religious education of the people. It is a place rich in historic interest, as to reach it visitors from Haltwhistle must cross the site of the ancient Roman wall, built by the Emperor Hadrian, A.D. 121, between the River Tyne and the Solway Frith. This wall, in many parts, is still in a wonderful state of preservation, and is known as the "Picts' Wall."

Barnard Castle was Mr. Gill's next sphere and then Allendale, his native district, where he was truly "at home," in every sense of the word. Here he laboured with eminent success for six years. He took a prominent part in public affairs, and was elected to the School Board, on which he led the Unsectarian Party. He wrote regularly to the Hexham *Courant* under the *nom de plume* of "Hazel Dene." His weekly criticisms were racy of the soil, and read with great avidity. Amongst other good things in circuit work he built an excellent chapel at Catton. The scene of his ministry was afterwards transferred to White-le-head circuit, then to Penrith, and subsequently to Preston II., where he did yeoman service in the erection of a substantial chapel at Leyland, as well as in raising funds for a handsome chapel, which was built a few years later by the Rev. W. Bowe, at Fylde Road, which is the head of the station. From Preston he removed to Gateshead II., thence to Knowlwood, and lastly to Clacton-on-Sea. In all these stations he toiled with all the fervour and strength at his command, and left behind him many evidences of Christian wisdom and Connexional statesmanship.

During the latter years of his ministry, failing health made it necessary for Mr. Gill to husband his strength, but this did not prevent the collapse which occurred on his last station and compelled him to seek superannuation at the Conference of 1901. He retired to Enfield, close to the residence of his daughter, who was his only child, and who is now the wife of the Rev. John Pinchen. Unfortunately, complete exemption from Connexional cares did not restore his health, and the end came all too suddenly on November 18th, only five short months after superannuation. The mournful rites of interment were conducted by the Rev. J. Hallam (a lifelong friend) and the Rev. H. Carden. Many letters, expressive of the deepest sympathy, were received by the sorely bereaved widow and family. Mr. Gill had been blessed for five-and-thirty years with a wife who blended in herself the tenderest affection, and such high intellectual gifts, literary tastes, and spiritual affinities as made her a most fitting helpmeet for the high-souled man to whom she gave her life with such unstinted devotion.

The Rev. R. Clemitson pathetically writes: "Converted in the same revival, we served at the same trade, entered the same ministry, and were superannuated by the same Conference - 1901. Mr. Gill was a man of considerable intellectual power. My old friend Harrison thinks that had he given

himself to the Law, he would have made a powerful advocate, and a dangerous opponent, and so think I." The Rev. T. Elliott, originally of Weardale, says "How kind he was to us lads, and gave us an opening into a life of reading and thinking. Without him and you one does not know what life might have been. He was a man of strong convictions, prepared to suffer for them if only right could be done." The Rev. H.B. Kendall, B.A., states that "Mr. Gill was a man that I had a deep and sincere respect for, on account of his sterling qualities of character. He was thoroughly manly and the soul of honour. He had a fine mind, and if he had but had the push and aggressiveness of some, there is no position in the Connexion he might not have filled. Peace to his ashes. He has left a fragrant memory."

Similar testimony was borne by many of Mr. Gill's old friends in the North, amongst whom, besides those already quoted, are the Revs H. Yooll, J.D. Thompson, J. Ritson, R. Hind, and R. Fairley. One letter of unusual interest we must quote, coming as it does from a clergyman, viz., the Rev. J. Russell Napier, Vicar of Walsden. He wrote to Mrs. Gill: 'My friendship with him - [Mr. Gill] was brief but it is one of the pleasantest memories connected with Walsden, and I had a greater pleasure from our social intercourse than I have enjoyed before or since among the many ministers whose charge has thrown us together. I shall always be glad I knew your husband, and I derived from my intimacy with him during his residence in Walsden an inspiring sense of comradeship which is so helpful to a man in his work, and a good deal more than I can express in words.' In the expressive words of the Rev. J. Ritson, "His work is well done, and his rest well won." We are glad to learn that a memorial tablet to this brother beloved is to be placed in the Allendale Town Chapel. It will be an honour to all concerned.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1902/543