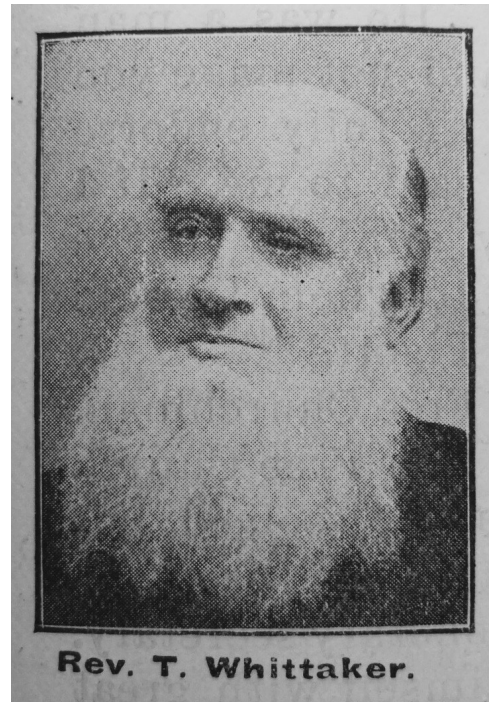


Thomas Whittaker D.D.

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Jos. Ferguson

The Rev. Thomas Whittaker, D.D., has gone from us when some of us were thinking of him as being present at the Commemoration of our Connexional Centenary linking the fathers of early years to the young men and maidens of the present. At the Conference in Hull (1902) he privately talked much of our church, its purposes and prospects and our living institutions. He lived for it and loved it. In July the *grippe* seized him, and after six weeks of suffering, his "earthly house of this tabernacle was dissolved," and his released spirit passed into the "house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." Our friend seventy-one years ago was born at Carlton near Selby, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, some twenty miles east of Leeds. Here he watched the Ouse as it travelled to the sea, and saw the Abbey church, founded in the twelfth century. His father was a farmer, who industriously coaxed the land to yield its fruit. Thomas, the son, like some of the prophets, was trained in the field. It was while at the plough, with the sickle in hand, he saw the picture of God above and about and was often touched into joy and song by the falling melody of happy birds in hedgerow and tree. Thomas early began to master what the Scotch would call his "*initiatives*," and in comparative childhood his soul-hunger began practically to crave. He was sent to the *Snaith Grammar School*, which had some literary repute; it was here he first saw into the wider world of thought and felt the fire that burned to know. Books were his companions, and the daily sight of this strange fellowship excited the wonder of the villagers. He now became thoughtful and careful of the records of time. He soon became a local preacher, and was wise to win souls for the Kingdom of God. His whole being consciously became God's. He felt he was not his own, Christ his eternal Master demanded all, and all he gave. Our friend was a Primitive Methodist until his ascension. Thomas Whittaker was a modern Puritan in whose heart dwelt the divine courage of life.



His call to the ministry of the Word in 1849, was apostolic, and the numerous souls saved during its fifty-two years are the evidences of his valid ordination. He began his public work in Bridlington, Yorkshire, some twenty-three miles north of Hull. Our dear friend never doubted his conversion, nor his call to the ministry of the gospel of God's grace. He travelled in Hornsea, Driffield, Hull I., Patrington, (a branch of Hull II.) Louth, Spilsby, Market Rasen, Doncaster, Hull III. (Holderness road), Scarborough (twice) and then went to Leeds as the General Secretary of the Connexional Sunday School Union. In this office for five years he travelled thousands of miles, laboured abundantly for the guidance of Sunday school teachers, and for the salvation of the thousands of children committed to their trust. Our friend subsequently ministered in Higher Ardwick Church, Manchester, in Bridlington, (for a second time), and in Anlaby Road Church (Hull V). In this capital city of Primitive Methodism he served three terms, and did a work not likely to be forgotten. He then went to Stretford (Manchester V.), full of hope and godly purpose, and for a few months did his work with

profit to others. Then he “finished his course with joy, and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” He ascended October 8, 1902, aged 71 years.

Dr. Whittaker was not a hireling in God’s vineyard, his ministry began when ministerial business men were much needed to build churches for our own people, fast increasing in numbers and wealth. His aptitude for this work and the energy he put into it are his abiding record. Few men, if any, have done so much and so well in this department of our church work. His last effort was the church opened in Selby Street, Hull, at the close of last year. During his long ministry he was instrumentally the means of raising nearly *twenty-thousand pounds* for the building of churches, some spacious, elegant, and well-situated - a standing memorial of benevolent sacrifice, and of unselfish labour.

Our brother Whittaker was worthy of honour. He honoured God, and He and our Church honoured him, and more than *twenty* years ago he was called to the office of *General Sunday School Secretary*, in which office he could touch the lives of tens of thousands. In 1874 he was appointed to the Secretariat of Conference; and in 1888, at Liverpool, was elected President of that assembly - the highest honour our Church can give. As a preacher he was evangelical, and whilst not ignorant of the *higher criticism*, which has given much truth and some vagaries, he stood at the centre, always under the Cross in which he gloried; he knew man was lost and that nothing but the precious blood of Christ could save him. This Divine grace he published with intelligent enthusiasm, and many through it found soul-rest in the blessed Christ. His preaching, as the late lamented Dr. Parker would say, was not dental, “from the teeth outward.” His message was from his heart, and he spoke out of the fulness thereof. He was not afraid of saying too much about his Lord; Christ to him “was all in all,” and His great salvation was for every man.

Dr. Whittaker was a Methodist in methods of work and in doctrine. He had not neglected to study the original language of the New Testament, and his knowledge of the various branches of theology made his ministry educative and spiritually helpful. He was too modest to parade, neither would he discuss the critical, either in theology or philosophy except with those who loved him and those whose life and work had taken possession of his heart. It was as a minister of Jesus Christ we admired him, so faithful, so conscientious, so patient, so paternal and ready to help. He was governed in the functions of his ministry, not by merely a sense of duty, nor even by conscience, the *love of Christ constrained* him. His counsel in his circuits was wise, his government constitutional and Christian. If he feared not officialism, he feared God with a recognised potency. His primary question and almost the only one was - “What is God’s will; what course will glorify Him?” His book on *Closet Prayer* is a guide to those who seek to know God in Christ, and a revelation of himself through it. We see into the inner sanctuary of his soul, discern the secret of his power and the source of his spiritual vision. He was to some extent a mystic, to whom sometimes

“As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs and floating echoes that convey
A melancholy into all our day.”

His work as a Methodist minister was recognised by the Gale University, which honoured itself by granting him the honorary degree of D.D. All such degrees are honorary, whether in England, Scotland or America, and are granted to men on account of the work of their public life. We need not refer to his published works; suffice it to say they have encouraged spiritual life in some, and helped young men to form life-habits which are conservative of what is best.

He was a man of good administrative ability, especially in the sacred circle of his sphere of labour. He was President of the Primitive Methodist City Council, Hull, and Chairman of the committee which arranged for Conference in Scarborough, where he spent eight years. He took a prominent part in the election of the School Board, being in favour of national education, not denominational - he held that the schools for which the nation paid should be nationally governed.

Brother Whittaker was full of charity to those from whom he widely differed, and he was as sincere as the springs of life. Our Connexional Committees have passed resolutions in which they appreciate his ability and life-work, and in chosen words wish to the sorrowing survivors all the consolations and guidance of the Eternal Spirit. The Rev. John Hallam, the Connexional Secretary, said at his funeral, "He had lost more than a brother minister, he had lost a personal and life-long friend. No words of his could convey what was in his mind, and he thought at that time silence suited him best, and yet he might be permitted to speak one word. Deceased was of a most kindly, happy nature and exemplified the apostolic maxim, '*Rejoice.*' Could he be with them that day he would say to them, 'Weep not, be of good cheer, it is all right.'" The Connexional Committee not only sent a deputation to the funeral, but passed a resolution stating in fitting terms their appreciation of his character.

His mother district (Hull) in which he spent the greater part of his ministry, passed a similar resolution, thanking God for a life so fruitful of service.

Dr. Whittaker, like Spurgeon and Parker, had no college training, and yet, like them, he rejoiced in the provisions made for others. Our dear friend had mind-powers which training would have evolved and strengthened; but in the absence of these facilities he sought by personal industry to liberate them for public use, and his labours were not in vain in the Lord. He was not a genius, to this he laid no claim; but his intellect was not ordinary, He owed everything to God and hard work - this was his genius, and the ballast and the conservation of his long and eventful 'life.

His end was peace. For weeks before his translation he was wonderfully cheerful and happy. Even when engaged in his much-loved work, the people noticed his face lit up by sweet light and covered with the smile which only the approach of heaven creates. When confined to his bed, and the physician lost hope, the gleams from beyond the gates increased in glory, and led one of the circuit officials visiting him to say to his brethren, "Dr. Whittaker's work is done," and when asked his reason for such a remark added, "No man ever wore that heavenly smile who was not ripe for the kingdom." His complicated malady hastened to its end, and our friend gradually became unconscious as far as outward signs were concerned. "But his life," as his dear wife said, "was his testimony." He had lived in Christ, and dying to him was gain. Nevertheless, he often uttered words that revealed the trend of his mind and heart, such as, "I know," "I shall see," "Oh, Father" - this phrase he repeated many times. We think it would not be impossible to complete these sentences - on earth part of his faith-words were uttered and heard, but in heaven they heard the final notes. He was more than a conqueror through Christ, "who loved him and had washed him from his sins in His most precious blood."

References

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