

Rev. M.H. Barron

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by T Stones

It is not often that our church has to chronicle the sad news that one of its missionaries has fallen on the foreign field. Our first missionaries went to Africa over thirty years ago, but so far only three names are in the list of men who have died at their post. True, we have had missionaries who have done splendid service for God in Africa such as Revs. R.W. Burnett and W.B. Luddington - but they have come home to die, and the church has given them an honoured place among its heroes and martyrs. The Rev. H. Buckenham passed to a hero's reward from Central Africa just as he was settling down to work, and after the weary months of wandering were over. A visit to that good man's grave should nerve others for the most stupendous tasks. In the little cemetery at Santa Isabel, Fernando Po, within a few feet from each other, are the graves of two young men whose ministries were brought to an early close by the ravages of a West African climate. They both sacrificed what, in the opinion



of

some of our best men, would have been splendid careers, had they remained at home, for they both possessed ability much above the average; but they heard the cry of Africa's millions, they went out in obedience to a Divine command – and who shall say that the church would have been richer to-day if these young men had refused to answer the call? In their death they give rise to thoughts and inspirations which the life could not have called forth. Their graves are living witnesses to those people out yonder, and speak with a grander eloquence of the love of man for man than any living voice could utter. The Rev. R. Blackburn I did not know except by report, but the report of the people on the spot, among whom he laboured, counts for *much*. The Rev. M H. Barron I did know intimately; we laboured side by side, and I noted above all else the remarkable influence he exerted over those people. Perhaps he is a little too near for one to form a correct judgment of his work and worth, but after taking all things into consideration and without making any invidious distinction, I have come to this conclusion, that no missionary succeeded in getting so near the hearts of the Fernandians as did our friend Barron. Quiet and undemonstrative in his manner, he yet succeeded in uniting those people together and drawing each Sabbath a congregation that filled the church to its utmost capacity. If he had one failing, it was in attempting too much. He would expose himself unnecessarily to the fierce rays of the sun. He would start out to visit some sick member when he should have been in bed. He would conduct a funeral service with a temperature over 100°. One instance comes vividly before me as I write. The Rev. G.E. Wiles was down with a bad attack of fever at Bottle Nose. News was sent by messenger to Santa Isabel and San Carlos Bay. Mr. Stones and I arrived at Bottle Nose after a good passage on Saturday afternoon, but no news came from town that day. on the Sabbath, whilst; service was being held, Mr. Barron struggled up to the mission-house in an exhausted condition. He had been down himself with fever, but on receiving the news of the sickness of a brother missionary, he instructed the boys to get the boat in readiness and started off. At Longstone Rock the sea was so rough that no boat could make any headway; they struggled for hours in attempting to pass it, and then put back into a cove and anchored for the night. Another attempt was made the following morning, but with no better result, and the

intrepid missionary landed and started on foot through the bush. Only those who had been out to Fernando Po know what such a step involves; he waded through rivers up to his waist, for it was the rainy season, and no hoy could carry him across and retain his foothold. This act may not seem much to some, on paper, but to those who received him at the mission house that Sunday afternoon and gave him a change of clothing, it will ever rank as one of the noblest acts of self-sacrifice recorded in missionary literature. Can we wonder that the people loved him, and loved him with a love amounting almost to a passion. For a few months Bottle Nose mission was without a missionary and the bulk of the responsibility fell on Bro. Barron. He went there oftener perhaps than he should have gone, considering he was in an enfeebled state of health; the long sea journey and the constant exposures to sun and rain were too much for the strongest constitution, but he struggled on and struggled bravely to the last. The Rev. M. Holmes was sent out to take charge as successor to Rev. G.E. Wiles, and Mr. Barron accompanied him to his new sphere of labour. It was his last voyage, for he was nearing home - nearer home than any of us anticipated. He wrote me the last letter he ever penned, from Bottle Nose mission house; there was no indication in it that he was so near the end. He spoke hopefully of his work and of the success that had attended the Santa Isabel Missionary Anniversary, he was looking forward to his visit to San Carlos Bay as deputation, but it was not to be. A hasty message was despatched by land to say that our friend was seriously ill, - would I go at once? In the darkness of the early morning I left San Caries Bay, but only to find on my arrival at Bottle Nose that it was too late; he had ascended on January 22nd, 1901, in the thirty-third year of his age. We took his body by boat to town, and on the Thursday followed his remains to the grave. The older inhabitants said the funeral was the largest on record. A funeral service was held, in which Revs. W.M. Barleycorn, M. Holmes and the writer took part, also an "In Memoriam" service in the church on the Sabbath; and some idea of the esteem in which he was held may be gathered from the fact that many people could not gain admittance. English traders and Spanish officials attended in full force to pay a last tribute of affection to the memory of one who died as he had lived, a man, a gentleman, a Christian hero. Words fail to describe the touching scenes that transpired between the Thursday and Saturday. The mission-house was continuously besieged by sympathisers, - and if we want to see sympathy in its noblest form, we find it in a really converted African. Little paper packages were left with the few words written on "For the dear Baby." Mrs. Barron afterwards found that she had received in this way over £20 to bring home to the orphan boy.

The homeward-bound steamer that was to convey Mrs. Barron back to England put into port on Saturday morning. It was a terrible experience for any lady to pass through. Only a week from that day she had seen her husband off to Bottle Nose in comparatively good health, and now she was on the steamer returning home a widow. The blow has fallen, we will not complain. Many more scars will be made in Africa's soil before the Cross is finally triumphant. We bow in humble submission to the Divine Will,

"And deem that Higher Will, not ours, the best."

Of such men as Mr. Barron the poet has said:-

"These are the moral conquerors,
And belong to them
The palm branch, and the triumphant. song:
Conquerors, and yet the harbingers of peace."

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1904/64