

Rev. William Clayton

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by William Robinson

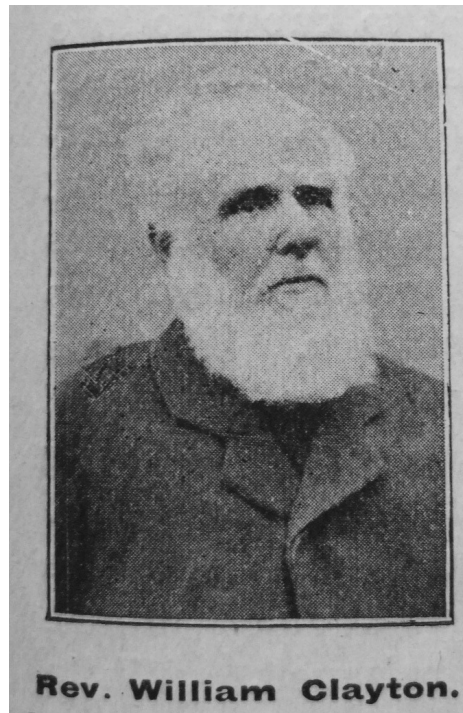
In the death of the Rev. William Clayton, which took place at Retford, November 26th. 1903, at good and faithful servant has entered into the joy of his Lord. His life star, serene and bright for so many years, has not gone down, but has merged and melted into the light of heaven. Mortality is swallowed up of life. The brave Pilgrim of long journeyings has entered the home city to be for ever with the Lord. In this hope we rejoice and for this assurance we bless our God.

“Alas! if thou wert all, and nought beyond, O earth.”

But Jesus our Lord hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. His resurrection is our resurrection, and because he lives we shall live also. Therefore “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”

In writing a few words concerning those who have “passed thro’ death triumphant home,” we think not of them but of ourselves; it is not to laud the dead, but to instruct and inspire the living. And if, as we are told, “Biography is the most universally pleasing, and universally profitable of all reading,” — if the biographies of great, but especially of good men, are most instructive and useful, little gospels teaching plain living, high thinking, and energetic action for the good of others, and bright examples of patient purpose, resolute courage, steadfast integrity, and noble character, it is surely a duty at once practical and sacred, to take note as our friends depart, of the things that go to make great and noble the lives of men on this earth.

With this view, and for this purpose, would we write a few words concerning our brother, the late Rev. William Clayton. And it is not inappropriate to remark that like most of those who have served well their age and generation, he began the great work of life’s day early in life’s morning, and that mainly through the influence of godly home training. His parents were members of the Wesleyan Church. His father was converted under the preaching of some of our early missionaries, but as we had at that time no society in the town, he united with the Wesleyans. However, William and Lucy Clayton were a godly couple. Their home was a Christian home, of gracious influence, and divine blessing, and they had the joy of seeing their children growing up in the good ways of the Lord. Three of them, Benjamin, Alfred, and William, became ministers of our Church. The Rev. Benjamin Clayton was a young man of deep piety and much promise, and died at the early age of twenty-six. The Rev. Alfred Clayton, “an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures,” was undoubtedly in the front rank of our ablest preachers and died in the very noon of his noble life. The Rev. William Clayton, of whom we write, was the eldest and longest lived of the three, and of him we may say that “he feared God from his youth.” It was in his early teens that he publicly professed the faith and discipleship of Christ, joining the Church of his parents, where he remained until the year 1849, the



year of the Reform agitation, when he joined himself to the people amongst whom he lived and died. It speaks well for this young man, and shows the impression that his gifts and graces made on those of his new communion, that in less than two years he was recommended for the ministry of our Connexion. Accordingly, in April, 1851, at the age of twenty-two, this vigorous minded, and earnest souled man was ordained by Christ to the great work of the ministry. His employer called him a fool to leave a calling so unusually full of promise, but William Clayton believed in the royalty of conscience, the majesty of duty, and thro' all the years of his life dared to follow God fully. And, therefore, leaving his cabinet-making profession, and counting not his life dear unto him, he went forth to gather gems for the cabinet of the King of Kings. That he was successful, and had no cause to regret the call he had accepted we are abundantly certified. Milford, now a part of Belper Circuit, was his first sphere of labour, and by his zeal and devotion, as well as by his thoughtful and practical preaching, he won the love and esteem of those among whom he laboured. The following are the fields of his subsequent years. — Burton-on-Trent, Derby, Sleaford, Grantham, Claycross, Sheffield, Barton-on-Humber, Horncastle, Wellow, Belper, Ilkeston, and Winterton, and on four or five of these he returned for a second term of ministry. When this man of earnest, grave soul went away from a station, many felt, and some said, that a prophet, had indeed been among them.

The writer's acquaintance was neither so long nor so intimate as that which was the privilege of many. But the highest and best type of man is soon known. It was even so with our brother. There was nothing enigmatical or hidden about him. He was no mystery man, neither was he all babble like the shallow brook; he resembled more the deep and silent river. There was an apparent slowness of approach in him. He rushed nothing. He was a man of large reserve, and seeming coldness of disposition, but for all that, you soon got to know, to love and esteem him as one of nature's noblemen, of sound and sober judgment, of transparent honesty, and unbending integrity. He never suspended the great principles of his life. He never wrapt them up in the napkin of base silence. He was not carried away with any wind of doctrine. Atmospheric influences, the shifting opinions of men, the whirl and conflict of life, affected him very little, if at all. He had not followed cunningly-devised fables, he knew whom he had believed. While open to new light and ever loyal to great reasons he held fast by the rule of proved principles. Taken all round a good many of us feel "we shall not soon see his like again." Writing of him as a circuit minister the Claycross Quarterly Meeting says: "Many testimonials were borne by the brethren to the splendid service rendered by Mr. Clayton during his superintendency of this circuit, and to his diligence and faithfulness in the discharge of his duties, and it was felt that much of the good enjoyed by the station to-day is the fruit of seed sown by him: by his death the Church has sustained a great loss." The Rev. William Tingle, writing of "the noble and useful life" of our brother, says: "Much of the work he did was unseen, nevertheless, real and blessed in its results. I never travelled with a super who was more kind and considerate." The testimony of the Rev. Thomas Vaughan is also very beautiful as touching "his deep unselfish kindness," and he adds: "He has been a succourer of many, and of myself also; his ready help at all times during my sojourn in Retford is for ever stamped on my heart." Then to quote the words of the acute though aged Rev. William Cutts, who says: "The Retford Circuit will miss him in its business meetings and in the pulpit, and the town will lose his presence in its counsels. For a long time I have been acquainted with his work, especially in chapel architecture, and have also observed his special knowledge of the rules and customs of the Connexion. His character was above suspicion and reproach. As a minister he preached not himself but the Lord Jesus. It seems strange that all the brothers, Benjamin, Alfred, and last of all, William, are gone; but they rest

from their labours, and their works do follow them." The District Committee passed a resolution "recording its deep sense of the loss sustained in his death by the district, its high appreciation of his ability as a superintendent minister, and especially of his skill in the designing and erection in the circuits where he was stationed, some of the best chapels in the Connexion."

It was at the Conference of 1892 that he sought retirement from the active ministry, and, after forty-one years' absence, returned to his native town to spend the evening of his life. How well he lived and employed his closing years a thousand tongues could testify. In the Church he was a busy man and seemed to find his truest rest in holy service. His work on the School Board and in the Town Council, of both of which he was for many years a member, won for him the esteem of all. The Rev. Canon Ebsworth, of East Retford, in his letter to the family, says: "I hasten to assure you of my very deep sympathy. He and I have been fellow members of the School Board for many years, and I can assure you that I look back with great pleasure to my intercourse with him. He was most zealous and most efficient, and it was a real pleasure to be associated with him in work."

For many years our brother suffered from chronic bronchitis, which was at times very distressing, yet up to within a few weeks of the end he was in his usual health. The writer visited him in his sickness and found him in calm peace and assured hope. The Saviour whom he had preached to others was precious to him. "His God sustained him in the final hour." The words last upon his lips, and whispered again and again through the last night, were, "Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory." And in the great faith thereof, just as the morning broke, just as the day dawned, he passed within the veil. Very imposing and impressive was the funeral. A large congregation gathered in the chapel, where the service was conducted by Rev. W. Robinson, and the address, eloquent and beautiful, was given by the Rev. T.H. Hunt, President of the Conference. The cortege was followed to the place of burial by the Members of the Corporation and the leading men of the town. The greatest sympathy was felt and manifested with the sorrowing family, with the widow especially, the wife of his youth, the faithful keeper and companion of all his years, whom may God richly comfort and sustain, till, "parted ones shall meet again"!

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1904/745