

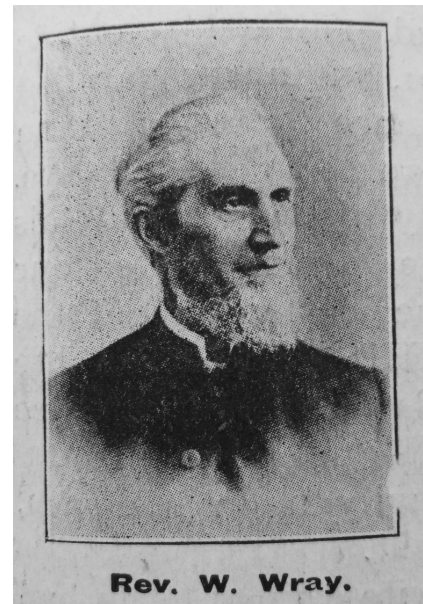
Rev. W. Wray

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Henry G. Button

William Wray ranks amongst the many saintly and successful ministers which the Methodist Churches have had from the county of Lincoln.

He was the son of Thomas and Jane Wray, and was born at Kirmington on the 8th of June, 1836. He was brought up by his grandparents, Richard and Elizabeth Spalding, who lived in the same village, and in whose house Primitive Methodists held services until a chapel was erected. Their residence was a home for the preachers,

From childhood he was the subject of pious impressions. These were fostered and deepened by the religious training of his grandparents, and the salutary influence exerted on his mind by the spiritual conversation and earnest prayers of the godly ministers entertained at his home. Though convinced of sin and the necessity of being born again, yet for years he quenched the Spirit, until hearing a sermon preached by Rev. H. Clark on Isaiah 53-1, he fully resolved to give himself to the Lord. He did not obtain the joy of pardon then, but shortly after. One Sunday in April, 1856, when pleading with God in the open-air, he realised the assurance of his acceptance with God, and was made unspeakably happy by faith in Jesus. He united with our Church at Laceby, in Grimsby Circuit. Shortly after he was removed to Burringham to act as clerk of the works on the erection of a new church. He was placed on the Scotter Circuit plan as a prayer leader. The work of public speaking was commenced with fear and trembling, but with strong confidence in God. In the work of faith and labour of love he succeeded in leading souls to the Saviour. A young man who wished to get home one Saturday afternoon missed the boat. Mr. Wray invited him to the Band Meeting in the evening. He attended and became greatly distressed; a few remained and prayed with him until nearly 2 am, when he obtained peace by believing. On Sunday afternoon when visited he stated that his intention for going home was to shoot his father. He gave up the pistol which he had procured for that purpose. This was sold soon afterwards at a Missionary Meeting for ten shillings. The young man went to Africa, and was useful in Christian service there. Some years afterwards, when Mr. Wray was attending a missionary round in a country circuit, he gave an account of this remarkable conversion. It was much talked about in the villages. Some time after a miserable farmer went into his cowshed to commit suicide. He put a rope over the beam, and round his neck, when he suddenly thought of what he had heard, and said, "if there was mercy for the man who meant to shoot his father, is there not mercy for me?" He removed the rope, fell upon his knees, cried to God for pardon, and obtained salvation. He went some miles to meet Mr. Wray, and gave him the rope, thinking he might like to keep it, and tell to others how Christ was able to save to the uttermost.



When Mr. Wray had been over a year at Burringham, he removed into the Barton Circuit and was placed on the preacher's plan. He met with the Rev. J. Petty, who strongly recommended him for the

ministry; subsequent events showed the wisdom of this course. He was accepted and appointed by the General Missionary Committee to South Molton in Devon, where he commenced in March, 1859. With fear and trembling he entered on his work. He met with much kindness and cheering success. One chapel was built and there was an increase of twenty-two members.

In 1860 he was appointed to Plymouth, and in the following years at Lutterworth, Ryde, I.W., Bagshot and Lancaster. He laboured in the Home Missions seven years and was then transferred to the Manchester district with the Lancaster Mission which became a circuit while he was there. He was sixteen years in this district and travelled in the following circuits - Knowlwood, Southport, Manchester first and second, and Bolton. He was then invited to London and successfully superintended on the following stations - Walworth (twice), Forest Hill, Canning Town (twice). The total membership of his stations when he entered was 3,862, when he left 4,090, after filling up all lapses which averaged fifty per year for forty years.

He had a good theoretical and practical knowledge of architecture, which he used to the great advantage of the stations and districts in which he laboured. He was secretary of the Building Committee of the Manchester District for nine years, and for some years after held a similar office in the London Second District. He rendered most valuable service by his careful and wise suggestions. He attended to the erection of more than fifty chapels and schools, and to the alterations of others, involving expenditure of many thousands of pounds; for most of the work he prepared the necessary plans and specifications. He acted as clerk of the works during the building of Manchester College, giving his services. He designed the Soldiers' Home at Aldershot and superintended its erection. His valuable services were given in the arrangements for building the new Surrey Chapel. He felt deeply interested in the Orphan's Home at Alresford and was on the Management Committee. It gave him special pleasure to assist in providing the Home of Rest at Southend. He was very generous, his gifts to our Connexion amounted to more than £2,000.

He has been appointed G.C.D. twice, upon three occasions elected President at the District Meetings, and chosen to deliver the ordination charge. He obtained these positions not because he sought for office, but through the confidence and esteem in which he was held by his brethren. The duties were performed most efficiently and satisfactorily. He was a good business man, well acquainted with Connexional rules and usages, and was repeatedly requested to serve on deputation work, where good judgment and impartial decision would be required. In debate his words were few and forcible. In dealing with men and things he was very discreet and self-possessed.

Though he had many cares and much toil, his pulpit ministrations were well maintained; his sermons were carefully prepared and delivered with spiritual power and profit; very few could excel him in clearness, correctness and conciseness.

He was a good visitor; avoiding idle gossip he made his pastoral work a means of grace. He was a reliable friend and adviser, and in varied circumstances would be calm, cautious and conclusive. He possessed a good knowledge of social, political, scientific and theological subjects, but never paraded his knowledge; was more practical than critical, more utilitarian than speculative. We appreciate not only his work, but his worth; not only what he did has gained our admiration, but

what he was as one of the excellent of the earth. His standard of life was high and holy. His faith and patience were severely tried, but he nobly endured.

The shadows fell heavily upon his path, but the Lord was his light.

In 1887, the beloved wife, to whom he had been married in January, 1864, after years of painful affliction, borne with Christian fortitude and resignation, was taken from him. While in this deep sorrow, his son, a young man of great promise, R.S. Wray, B.Sc., was stricken down by a serious illness which terminated fatally in 1889. Before that year closed, Miss Wray, his only daughter, a pious young person, fell asleep in Jesus. In the midst of the domestic desolation which death had caused, the faith of our brother did not fail, his genuine character was manifested in bearing, as well as doing, the will of God. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." After the season of prolonged and profound grief, our brother was united in marriage to Miss Seal, of Forest Hill (in October, 1896), who was an estimable Christian lady with our people, and had rendered good service as Sunday school teacher and catechumen class leader. She was well qualified to be a minister's wife, and greatly brightened the home.

Having been in labours more abundant, in 1899, on account of enfeebled health, he reluctantly sought superannuation, but did not cease working. He occasionally preached, attended committees, manifested deep interest in the affairs of the Church, and aided in the erection or alterations of buildings, retaining the office of District Equalisation Fund Secretary. In the closing part of the year 1902 it was found that an internal affliction must soon prove fatal. He became quite resigned. When visited by the Rev. G. C. Normandale, he said to him, "Now everything is in order, I am not afraid to die, though I should like to live a little longer. You will not expect me to say much about my own spiritual condition; you know I am not subject to much change. I have no doubts; I am calmly resting on the Rock." To his beloved wife he exclaimed, "I do love you intensely, and we shall meet again. I have no fear; I am firmly fixed upon that Rock which has never failed." To the writer he remarked, "I can say what my son said when he was dying, 'God is with me, and He is lighting up all the Way.' " He departed to be with Christ on the 3rd of January, 1903. On the 10th his mortal remains were interred in West Norwood Cemetery after an impressive service in West Ham Chapel, when the Rev. H. Clark offered prayer, and an appropriate address was delivered by Rev. T. Mitchell, President of Conference; the service at the grave being performed by the Rev. J. Slater, General Missionary Secretary. Revs. W.E. Crombie, T. Saunders, R.R. Connell, G.C. Normandale, J.F. Porter, H.G. Button, J. Dinnick, and Mr. Councillor T. Waite, of Reading, with many other friends were present.

The Memorial Service was conducted in West Ham Chapel on the 18th by the writer, who had been requested by the deceased to do this, as he had been an intimate friend over forty-one years, and on two stations had harmoniously worked with him.

The following unsolicited testimonies to his worth and work have been given:- Rev. J. Travis says, "I have known him for more than thirty years. The good opinion I formed of him during the days we spent together a generation ago, I have retained ever since. He was a man of sterling Christian character, and unostentatiously yet steadily and unswervingly pursued the path of duty, in the faith and fear of God. A more genuine and consistent Christian I have not often seen. He put conscience into his preparation for the pulpit, and did not give to the people that which had cost him nothing,

but that which had cost him much, and that which was calculated to edify. He was deservedly loved in his stations for his character and works' sake. I have always felt great satisfaction in being able to reckon him amongst my most esteemed friends. No Christian who knew him can doubt whither he has gone."

Rev. J. Slater wrote, "I became acquainted with W. Wray more than thirty years ago, and the friendship then formed continued unto the end without a jarring string. I have found him very helpful in the erection of chapels and schools; as a circuit minister, district or other official he was useful, punctual, orderly and reliable. His was a blameless life and his works praise him."

Rev. B. S. Blair states:- "For several years past we have lived in the closest friendship. I, therefore, had the best opportunity of forming a correct estimate of his character, worth, and work. It, too, has been my privilege during the last few weeks to spend many happy hours with him, I have every reason to believe, to our mutual edification and to his comfort. His life was that of an exemplary Christian, his ministry one of great blessing and helpfulness. It was a great joy to me to see him during the last weeks of his life in the possession of perfect trust; nay more, of full assurance of faith and hope. While loving life and even clinging to it, he was perfectly submissive to the Divine will, and realised to the fullest extent the force of the words, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.' I never heard a murmur escape his lips, or a word which would not accord with the highest and truest Christian character. He expressed his thankfulness that he had been spared to labour for forty years in the ministry, and intimated that if he had life to begin over again the same Church should have his best services."

Space will not permit us to give here more testimonies which were sent by Revs. H. Yooll, R. Hind, G.B. Gleghorn, T.G. Dyke, W. Suttle, T. Price, W.T.C. Hallam, G. Seaman, J. Yearsley, and others. Praise God for such a useful life. We pray that the widow and dear little boy may be guarded and guided, comforted and sustained until they reach the home above.

References

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