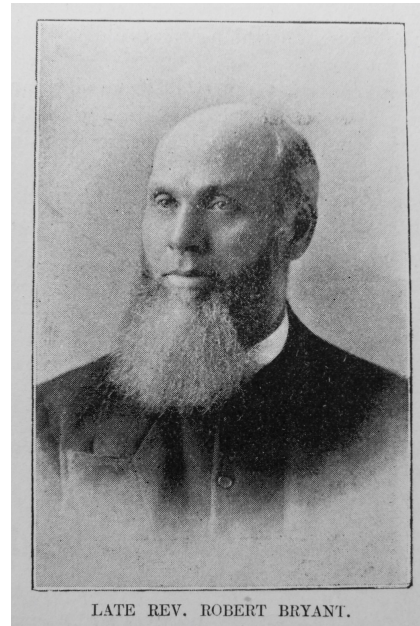


## Rev. Robert Bryant

### Transcription of an Appreciation in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by James Pickett

PRIMITIVE METHODISM can truly count itself rich in the multitude of its possessions, and in the variety and value of its manifold exploits; but probably it has been richest of all in the massive, virile, noble men it has produced, and whose abundant work it has given to the world. What a noble line of heroic souls it can contemplate as its ranks are reviewed! And amongst the foremost of the figures of our own generation stood the fine form of our brother beloved, the late Robert Bryant. Now that he has gone we begin to more adequately and clearly realise his spacious character, his exceptional gifts, his unstinted consecration, his unwearying work, his value to our Church, and the immensity of the loss which his translation has entailed. His towering physique had become so familiar that we find it difficult to realise that he has gone. And that fine physical form was symptomatic; and it accorded well with his intellectual and moral conformation. How erect he was in behaviour and spirit, how stately in soul, how sturdy in brain, how circumspect in all things! What he was, he was because the core of him was right and sound, and that made him gigantic.



Like many of the outstanding figures of our Church, indeed, of all the Churches, he was of humble origin, and was another distinguished product of one of the remote parts of rural England. And though he had familiarised himself with the finest literature of our time and had severely trained himself, his speech betrayed him and indicated his native location; and the Norfolk aroma clung to him to the end. His early training was partly Episcopalian, partly Methodistic; for in the days of his boyhood, attendance, by the same persons, at the Parish Church and School morning and afternoon, and at the Methodist Chapel at night, was quite a common practice; and this was his custom. In his early youth he was soundly converted amongst the Wesleyan Methodists, and soon showed signs of aptitude for informing and influencing his fellows. While yet in his teens he removed to Sheffield, and for some reason, not quite apparent to us, he transferred his membership to our Church, coming on our Preachers' Plan. He soon exhibited such gifts as induced our friends of those days to employ him as a Hired Local Preacher, and a little later he was called into the separated ministry by a brother, happily, still amongst us, the Rev. John Wenn. Says one who was his yoke-fellow in those early days - the Rev. George Cook:- "Sterling integrity, intense zeal, splendid gifts, most studious habits, untiring industry, and unswerving devotion to God and His work were always strikingly characteristic of him." All this was as prophetic as it was commendatory, and go far to explain some of the striking features of his full and strenuous ministry which won the admiration of multitudes amongst us who, sometimes, sharply differed from his views.

And how varied were his qualities, and how symmetric! What a man he was, considered simply as a man! To the superficial observer, he occasionally appeared to be harsh, austere, severe; but that view of him was extremely partial, and therefore, incorrect. His sympathies were quick and abounding; his brotherliness to those who knew him well, was amongst his finest characteristics; his loyalty, his tenderness, his anxiety to help, all unceasingly manifested themselves to those who

pierced beneath the surface. He guarded well his conscience, and lived the life of a noble man. He was not a diplomat, and cared little for some of the things which help to smooth the track in difficult times, but he was conscientious, straightforward, upright.

Then, what a saint he was! His religion was more than a part of him; it was his very soul. And a very full and varied officialdom did not dim the lustre of it. He kept his face towards God and by a communion that was not fitful but persistent, he maintained the fine bloom of godliness to the end. How he could pray, only those who have heard him know. His supplications, and especially his intercessions, were those of a practised hand. The power he wielded in his intercourse with God in public, infallibly indicated long vigils in secret communion, and told unmistakably "where his treasure was supplied." This left its mark upon everything he did, and made him effective with God and with men.

And what a preacher he was! This was better known by the ordinary hearers on his circuits who listened to him in the daily ministrations incidental to circuit life, than by those who heard him but occasionally and under exceptional conditions.

His hand was not that of a peddler, and his voice was not the voice of a parrot. He delved amongst the deeps and sought the hidden things and found them, and then, to small audiences as well as to large, told the wondrous things he saw, until they too, beheld and were glad, and made better. What magnificent sermons he preached in villages and in unhandsome buildings in out of the way places, as well as in beautiful structures in towns and cities! He was not greatly concerned about the elegancies of speech or careful about the rounding and poising of his phrases until they became rhythmic and delightful to hear, but how massive was his thought and how rich the truth he discoursed! By intuition and by training, it was natural to pierce far beneath the surface, and then for him to bring to the sight of the ordinary man the glorious things he otherwise saw not. His intense love of the studious life all aided to this end. In his youth his love of books soon manifested itself; and the habits of his early days, leading him to lay hands on the best literature, and to sedulously husband the hours for its study, remained with him to the end. As a boy he became an eager book-buyer, and before he reached manhood though his means were circumscribed and books were costly, he became the possessor of a well-selected and extensive library. As years went on, and through all the years he constantly added to it, until his study was as well lined with the best and choicest products of the brains and souls of the noblest of men as that of any man amongst us. And he used it well, especially the parts of it which treated of philosophy and theology. His knowledge of Hebrew and Greek greatly assisted him in discerning and making clear the wondrous wealth of the Book of books.

Nor was the work of the pastor neglected. His tender solicitude for the sick particularly, and his effective supplications in the chambers of the suffering, will long be remembered by those who have passed through the deep waters. Distinguished as he became as a Connexional official, filling various *roles* in our Church life, he was most distinguished and most successful as an ordinary Circuit minister.

And what a denominational devotee he was! How he loved his Church and wrought for it! Not that he was narrow and sectarianly self-contained. He lived in a spacious world; was a keen observer of the doings of other Christian communions, a keen critic of what he believed to be their deficiencies, but a warm and ungrudging admirer of their work, their value, and their prosperity; and in their growing strength and influence, he rejoiced with rare delight. But Primitive Methodism was to him

almost the breath of life, and to the work of its ministry he gave, without stint and with great joy, forty-one strenuous and opulent years. In it he lived and moved and had his being. For it he thought, and prayed, and sacrificed, and existed. From the beginning he was a careful observer of its traditions, its genius, its unfolding life, its varied fruit; and to that life and that success he made a most significant contribution.

In his early days he was associated, in what was then the spacious and influential Nottingham District, with some of the greatest statesmen of our annals, and he drank in their spirit and was influenced by their aims and shared their ideals. Few men have had a longer experience of active and consecutive district administration than he, and the advantage of it was manifest at many times and in many ways.

It was almost inevitable, and certainly most fit, that he should come to high Connexional position. And he was not a small official, petty, or peevish; moving amongst little things and careful alone of the "mint and anise and cummin "; but he was an ecclesiastical statesman, with large view, comprehensive apprehension, fine power of discrimination, sagacious judgment, and strong execution. And his mark is on our Church, on its polity, on its ministry, and on its life; and traces of his hand will be discernible for many years to come.

And, in all, what a worker he was! He lived much in the public view, but he carefully guarded the hours, especially of the very early day, for self-culture and for that training the value of which was evident to the gaze that was more public.

Great spaces were sliced off from sleep and religiously devoted to hard study, so that he wrought well-nigh a full day, by the time many have thought of beginning. He worked hard and worked systematically, worked persistently, and, at many things; and mastering all detail, his work grew to be a joy, and in it he found his recreation. Nor was it with him a question of recognition. He toiled, because he loved his Lord and His Church and kingdom, and because in it all he was devoted to his own denomination. To that denomination he gave himself without reservation, and our Church has been placed under abiding obligation. He lived eagerly, strenuously, and lived for others, but specially he lived for Primitive Methodism and the Kingdom of God. He filled his day well and filled it with unique and affluent service. The fruit of his toil is already here, but the full and obvious harvest is yet to come. He is not dead, though he has departed; for busy, godly, devoted, men never die. Besides

Good deeds immortal are,  
They cannot die, but live and bud and bloom,  
And men partake still of their freshness,  
And are blest thereby.

And the fragrance and impact of the life, and toils of Robert Bryant will remain a gracious memory and a precious possession of our Church for long years to come.

---

## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1905/873