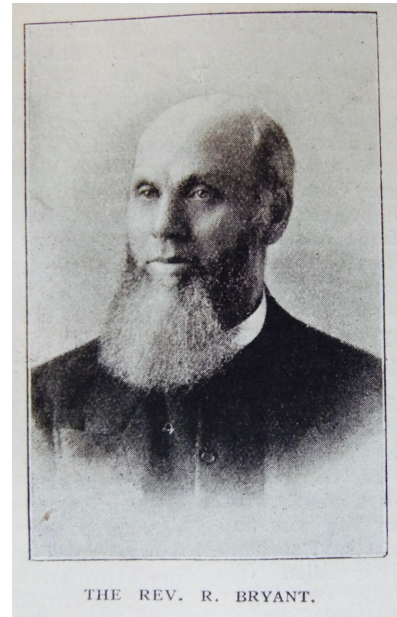


Robert Bryant

Transcription of article in the Christian Messenger by Rev. R.W. Keightley

“THERE were giants in those days” may be truthfully said of the men who were most conspicuous in the great and powerful Nottingham District in the time of Mr. Bryant’s ministry; and in physical, mental and moral stature he was equal to the greatest of his compeers. The district possessed such men as the Revs. S. Antliff, D.D., C.H. Boden, W. Cutts and J. Wenn, and others of commanding ability. The whole of the circuit ministry of Mr. Bryant was spent in what was then the Nottingham District. The writer of his obituary says: “He knew the district, knew every part of it, knew it intimately; and his leadership was gladly and gratefully followed.” Speaking of his ministry as a whole, the same writer says: “He has left his mark on our Church; on its polity, its ministry, and on its life, and traces of his hand will be discernible for many years to come.”



Mr. Bryant was born of godly parents in the village of Northwold, Norfolk, on February 9th, 1842. His opportunities for education were very scanty, but of these he made the best possible use. The love of books sprang up within him. He was led into the Kingdom of God through the ministry of a devoted Wesleyan, the Rev. Richard Tabraham. It is a remarkable coincidence that the writer of these lines, a few years later, and many miles from Norfolk, came under the gracious influence of that same good man. Young Robert gave his first exhortation when he was but fifteen years of age. A few years later he removed to Sheffield, and there became connected with our Church, and he commenced his ministry in 1865 on the Sheffield II. Circuit. His itinerancy took him to Rotherham, Sheffield I., Nottingham I., Leicester I. (as superintendent), Rotherham (second time), Church Gresley, Leicester I. (second time), Grantham, Nottingham III., and thence to London as General Book Steward.

Mr. Bryant’s chief interest outside his circuit work was the education and equipment of the ministry. As secretary of the Candidates’ Examining Committee, he gave long and ungrudging labour to this work. His conception of the ministerial office was very lofty. To him it was a many-sided vocation, and it demanded the best that head and heart and life could be and do. His life was an eloquent enforcement of his teaching. He was absorbed in his work as a minister of the gospel. For many years he took no holiday, which fact proved his burning zeal, if not his wisdom. He was a great preacher, a wise statesman, a diligent and faithful pastor and a true friend. That he was widely read and a profound thinker his sermons supplied ample proof, and of this his Hartley Lecture on “Inspiration and the Bible ” only gave added demonstration.

People who had only a nodding acquaintance with Mr. Bryant might regard him as reserved, and a little stern; but his intimate friends found him the very soul of congeniality, brotherliness and sympathy. The writer has lived among the latter, and heard their glowing tributes to the man as a man, and to his majestic power as a preacher and pastor. On fit occasion he could be as playful as a child. The Manchester Conference of 1897 had to appoint a Vice-Secretary to the Sunday School

Union. Mr. Bryant submitted a nomination, and in doing so he said: "I suppose I am about the tallest member of this Conference, and I am taking under my protection its smallest member. His nominee was the Rev. S.S. Henshaw, who received the appointment. When his own son presented himself for examination as a candidate for the ministry, the father said: "Another year with your mother will do you good, young man." Thus did impartiality clothe itself in the garb of humour.

During Mr. Bryant's second term in Leicester the trustees of a church that was heavily burdened with debt set about raising £1,000. Their minister must needs aid the scheme. After spending a fruitless forenoon in search of donations, he met one of the trustees, and told him of his non-success. The said trustee said: " You go and mind your own business, Mr. Bryant. We created the debt, and we shall deal with it. If we have been foolish we do not want all the town to know." Other ministers have been similarly instructed by those brave and generous trustees. Many boards of trustees might "go and do likewise" with great advantage to ministers and people.

After thirty-five years of strenuous circuit work, Mr. Bryant was appointed General Book Steward, and to the onerous duties of that office he brought ripe wisdom, "business sagacity, and whole-hearted devotion. The Conference of 1905 conveyed to him its best thanks for his great and successful labours, and said: "We bear in mind that right in the heart of his official term, our brother, in the providence of God, was called to pass through a most serious and critical ordeal, which threatened to end at once his ministerial and official work."

By that Conference he was placed on the supernumerary list, and within a fortnight he was exalted to the presence of his Lord.

References

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