

William Goodrich

Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Robert Parks

MR. WILLIAM Goodrich was born in Leicester on the 16th of November, 1792, and died in the same town on the 27th of November, 1871. His father was a respectable hosier, and an influential Wesleyan local preacher. He was converted to God in his early youth, and commenced his local ministry in the thirteenth year of his age. His first preaching effort was made at Sileby, in the Leicester circuit, in company with his superintendent, who opened the service for him; and his last service was held at Somerby, sixty years after his juvenile commencement. Whilst engaged in this service, he was suddenly seized by the affliction which terminated his useful life, and his unfinished sermon was completed in the same pulpit by the subject of this memoir, thirty years after its commencement by the father. William's mother was a woman of superior ability and enlightened piety, looking well to the ways of her household, and rendering her home the scene of affection and godliness. She died while her son was yet young, and, as the afflictive consequence, he was early deprived of her maternal solicitude and religious teaching. For a long period of years his father's house was the frequented home of Wesleyan ministers, and William was brought into familiar intercourse with a host of distinguished worthies. In his extensive diary he has made honourable mention of the Rev. W. Shelmardine, by whose converse and ministry he was led to the Saviour; as also of the justly celebrated Samuel Bardsley, whom he describes "as the plainest of preachers, upon whose knees I have often sat, and who was the converting preacher of the day," But despite these early and favourable associations, with the hallowing influences which they exercised over him, he wandered widely in his youth from the paths of purity and of peace; for, according to his own testimony, he "was a wild, gambling young fellow" in his early manhood. The liberal education he had received, the monetary resources he had at command, added to the liveliness of his disposition, and the richness of his conversational powers, rendered him an invited and indispensable guest, in the social and convivial gatherings of the fashionable and dissipated. On a Saturday evening in the month of March, 1818, we find him according to his usual custom, at the "Pied Bull" public-house, and whilst there engaged in his favourite pursuits, his attention was suddenly arrested by a violent altercation between two persons who were fiercely discussing the merits and demerits of some absent party. He soon learned that the subjects of debate were some strange and erratic men who had recently visited the villages of Ansty and Ratby, singing lively hymns, preaching open-air sermons, and leading away the people in great numbers, and they were coming to Leicester on the following day. He remarks, "I began to inquire into the lives and doctrines of these men, and I soon learnt enough of them to induce me to interpose a word in their favour. On this the landlady turned and looked at me in a peculiarly striking manner, exclaiming, 'And you, Goodrich, will be a ranter too directly!' This I denied with all my power, but my heart said a different thing."

The next day was the first Sunday in March 1818, and according to report and expectation "John Benton" entered Leicester by the Melton turnpike road, accompanied by a large number of persons from Thurmaston, Syston, and the adjacent villages singing, as only Primitive Methodists could sing, "Turn to the Lord and seek salvation," etc. On arriving at the old Roman Cross in Belgrave Gate, the missionary announced for his text, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," and then with stentorian voice, in unmeasured and rugged strains of startling eloquence, he addressed the attentive and wondering thousands, who had flocked to his standard from all parts of the surprised and excited town. The keen and sensitive mind of our brother Goodrich had been in a

state of bewilderment and unrest during the preceding night from what he had heard and felt at the "Pied Bull," and he had gone with hundreds of others on that Sabbath morning in eager haste to meet this formidable host on their entrance into the town, resolving in his heart that he would break off his sins by repentance, and return home to the God of his fathers. He had followed the preacher and his jubilant friends to the place of meeting, and had become so absorbed in the melting strains of fervent song, and the powerful enunciations of the earnest preacher, that, heedless of the teeming rain and the flowing water, he took and retained his stand in the foaming gutter. As the service proceeded, he wept, believed, and embraced the present salvation preached unto him.

Another young man named Farmer, in the absence of a sycamore tree, had climbed a neighbouring lamp-post to watch the new and strange proceedings; but the all-powerful and well-directed word reached him there, and brought him down to the pavement a widely different man to what he had gone up. This man was a moulder, and shortly after his conversion, a mighty work of God broke out in the foundry, and many of its workmen were brought to the Saviour.

In a few days after this memorable Sabbath, Messrs. W. Clowes, J. Wedgwood, and J. Heath visited Leicester; thousands were attracted by their ministrations, and vast numbers were turned from darkness unto light. Amongst the foremost of these were John Bennett and his wife, who opened their house in Foundry-square for prayer-meetings; and in this house the first class was formed, brother Goodrich being one of its earliest members. These holy and soul-saving men were followed by Messrs. Thomas King, John Harrison, and Robert Winfield. The appearance of the latter was quite singular, and his preaching peculiar, hence, he drew large audiences night after night, and the fruit of his ministry was abundant. On one occasion when returning from a place of worship in the town, accompanied by several hundreds of people, he suddenly stopped at the upper end of Church Gate, and having formed a circle he laid his hand on our brother's head, saying as he did so, "Billy, the Lord has got something for thee to do; do it." Our friend here observes, "No one had spoken to me before about the ministry, but I knew my duty as well as he did. On the next quarterly plan I found my name placed thereon without having been consulted on the subject, but as I knew it to be the will of the Lord, I gladly accepted my work, and have ever tried to do it to the best of my ability. On my first endeavouring to explain a text at Ansty, I had made some provision by a few notes upon paper, but I had no sooner opened my subject than a sudden gust of wind carried away my notes, my memory went too! I was lost, and for a few moments felt as though I did not know anyone or where I was. But as suddenly did my senses return to me, and I talked hard and fast for more than half-an-hour. One of my earliest printed appointments was at Desford, and at that time I held a strong opinion that if the great Head of the Church sent a man into his vineyard, he intended him to be useful therein. This led me to the determination that if my first labours were not successful, I would decline the work, as having improperly entered upon it. Sunday came, and I went to my appointment heavy enough, but before I came away I had the pleasure of seeing two middle-aged men soundly converted. This greatly encouraged me. They both continued in the Church for years, then finished their course with joy."

Mr. Goodrich now entered on an unusual career of labour and success which continued for more than half a century with undiminished zeal, and only ended with his chequered and valued life. These protracted and varied services were attended by severe persecutions, crushing sorrows, and remarkable interpositions.

Some idea of these labours and successes may be gathered from the following extracts, selected from his lengthy and interesting diary:-

“The earliest classes were formed at Mr. Johnson’s, in Queen-street, Mr. Bennett’s in Foundry-square, and Mr. Pool’s and Mr. Andrew’s in Orchard-street, each of which became very large. Mr. Pool’s health failing him, his class was put into my hands, and increased to 110 members. Its meetings were crowned with great success, for on one occasion twelve or thirteen persons obtained liberty, and united with the class at once. I also formed another class, which soon grew to eighty members; then a third class which reached an honourable status; and ultimately a fourth, which in a short time numbered forty members. It would indeed be difficult to estimate the amount of good done at these classes from time to time, for besides the numbers that have continued in fellowship with us, very many have passed to their eternal inheritance. At that time I was also fully employed as a local preacher, my Sabbaths being almost constantly occupied, and frequently I had labour in Loughborough, Melton, and other circuits, in addition to the numerous duties of my own station. I was whole quarters without any rest; and one period of eight or nine years occurred, in which I had appointments every Sabbath day. Our services were held in almost every part of the town, both week-days and Sundays, and some of the preachers were employed nearly every night in the great and increasing work. One remarkable instance of the power of God, I cannot forget; it occurred in the preaching room in Burley’s-lane. On a certain work evening there were fifteen persons present at the service, all of whom were convinced of their sin and danger, sought and found the Saviour, became members of my class, and made advancement in the divine life. The village of Dadly was visited by us, and a society of eighty persons were gathered in a short time.

“Sept. 22, 1828. Attended my appointment at Wigston. We had a love-feast in the afternoon, and a very full chapel; there was no want of good speaking, and there were many souls in distress, three or four of whom obtained liberty. I preached in the evening, and whilst giving out the second hymn, my wife fell to the floor, and received the blessing of a clean heart. Not less than fifty were awakened during the day, many of whom have promised to join the people.”

We cannot give further extracts here, but these will be sufficient to show that he was in labours more abundant; for during his preaching life he travelled 28,266 miles, and delivered 3,163 sermons. His discourses were heart utterances, rich in evangelical doctrine, clothed in chaste and nervous language, and accompanied with the unction of the Holy Ghost. His congregations felt that he was an ambassador for God, and the numerous seals to his ministry proved it to be divine. It was the great joy of his life to proclaim the message of mercy, and that joy remained with him when the strength and glory of his manhood had departed; for when our missionary company halted before his house only a short time previous to his decease, he requested to be carried to the door, and there for the last time, in feeble and broken accents, he spoke of redeeming mercy, and the blissful hope of everlasting life.

The persecutions to which he was subjected were both varied and painful in their character, as will be seen by the following cases, taken from his journal.

“When I first began to seek the Lord I was engaged in a school as usher, and my employer told me that unless I desisted from going amongst our people, he must give me notice to leave. This threw

me out of employment for nearly twelve months, and reduced me to the lowest state of poverty. In the first year of the Connexion's operations in this neighbourhood, two large camp meetings were held at Round Hill, about four miles from Leicester. At the first of these Mr. Benton lost his voice, but a great number of souls were converted, and at the second a person sent his man with a load of manure to spread upon the camp ground, but the axle of the cart broke, and let it down on the turnpike-road, not far from the place of meeting. Two other monster camp-meetings were held at Wigston the same summer, at which thousands were present, and great was the ingathering of precious souls. A violent persecution followed, and amongst numerous and unavailing devices employed by the persecutors, was the ringing of the church bells during the time of our services. On one of these occasions, a bell cracked and stopped; this led to the conversion of the man who was ringing it, who ultimately became a local preacher with us, and finished his earthly course in good hope of eternal life. In 1826, I was planned at a camp meeting at Walton. We had a good deal of persecution, but was more particularly annoyed by a man selling nuts on the ground, backed up by a wicked and defiant butcher. The confusion caused by these men was great, and I felt my mind awfully impressed with the conviction that God would punish them for these things. I tried in vain to put it away, for I was inwardly constrained to get up and warn them, that unless they altered their course, God would cut them down in a short time. On the following Wednesday, one of them was taken suddenly ill, on the Thursday he died in an awful manner, and on the Friday he was buried, having burst in his coffin."

It was no unusual thing for Mr. Goodrich to be assailed by the sons of Belial when engaged in his missionary work; for such was the prevailing custom of the times. He was seriously maltreated in Melton Mowbray market-place one Sabbath, and with several of his brethren was rudely driven out of the town. But none of these things moved him, for he loved the souls of his fellow-men, and cherished a quenchless desire for their salvation.

His great and crushing sorrows began with his religious and laborious career, and we will allow him to give expression to a portion of them in his own words. "June 3, 1818. I am as a hunted deer in the forest, there is no peace for me at home; my wife still persecutes, and everything I do is wrong.

"July 5, 1819. Since writing last in my journal, perplexity and trouble have taken hold upon me, but at times, I have enjoyed sweet peace with God through believing. The enjoyments of a restored backslider are often mingled with great bitterness; and when these characters, like myself, look back upon past times, they may well be filled with gloom and sorrow. Happy they who retain their first love! When I have looked back upon my past transgressions, I have been almost driven to despair, and to wish myself as a bird or a beast.

"Oct. 8, 1829. I am in deep waters, and my soul sinks within me. I am afraid of my home being broken up, and my family being plunged into the deepest distress. Oh Lord, save me, and my soul shall sing of thy mercy."

In the latter end of June in the following year, the storm he had so long and greatly dreaded, burst upon his head in relentless fury. Through the defalcations of a fellow clerk, he was brought into financial difficulties; and although ample security was given for the deficiency acknowledged, both were suspended by their employers, and through the influence of jealous and ambitious men, who

subsequently caused a division, our unfortunate brother was suspended by his circuit committee. This led to his temporary separation from us, but not to his departure from the ways of holiness and usefulness. He persevered in his unremitting and soul-saving toil, and in due time returned to the Connexion of his early choice, where he contentedly remained, and where he was greatly esteemed, until in his rich and ripe old age,“ he was not, for God took him.”

The remarkable interpositions we have to record are both personal and Connexional in their character. The chapel in George Street was commenced and completed amidst great difficulties and singular incidents. Order and money were conspicuous by their absence; for when windows were required. the trustees were at a loss to procure them. In their painful dilemma, our brother and another friend went to Thurmaston, and told their mournful tale to a Mr. Day, who offered them an ash-tree lying on his estate, if they would draw it to Leicester, a distance of three miles, by human strength. The offer was accepted, the task accomplished, and the tree sold to one of the builders for £7. This Mr. Day became the mortgagee of the chapel, and his descendants hold that position to the present. When money was required for the galleries some years after the building of the chapel, a very strange circumstance occurred, which operated favourably for the trustees. We will give it in Mr. Goodrich's own words:-

“I was walking up Belgrave Gate, when William Mee, one of our members, overtook me in great haste, and covered with perspiration. He said. ‘Billy, I want you; there's a house in Dover Street that's haunted; the family cannot rest for it, for it comes every night. I want you, with Charles Adams, and John Markham, to go with me and *lay the ghost.*’ I laughed at him, and quite ridiculed the whole affair. But he said, ‘Now Billy, don't do that! You may depend upon it being true, for I've heard it knocking myself; and so we must all go together about it!’ I said ‘Very well,’ and went up at night accordingly. Adams and Mee were both believers in the ghost, and took their station inside the house; Markham and I were unbelievers, and took our place at the back of the premises, determined to find out the cause of disturbance if possible. Before we had watched an hour, Mee ran out to us, exclaiming, ‘*It's come.*’ We replied, ‘Yes, *he's come!*’ Whilst we had been watching, a great pig had risen from slumbers, and rubbed himself against the door-frame of his sty; and this being connected with the back wall of the house, had caused the noise and disturbance which had been heard within. Thus the troublesome ghost was discovered, to the great relief of the good man and his wife, and as they had a hundred pounds to spare they willingly lent it to us in our difficulties, to be paid back in easy instalments. The final sum was repaid in defraying their last earthly expenses, and we have good reason for believing that both of them found a more peaceful and happy home in heaven.” With the decease of Mr. Goodrich, the last of the trustees for this very notable an really venerable sanctuary has passed away to the glorious temple in heaven.

“Oct. 2, 1829. The day before yesterday, I was ‘informed that W. Cayless was extremely ill. Brother Swaine and I went to see him, and found him in agonizing pain. Her requested us to pray with him, and whilst I was pleading with God, I was enabled to believe that he would heal him there and then. But my faith was not so full as I was afterwards able to exercise it. When we got into the street, I told my companion that I knew his pain was gone. He replied, ‘I was afraid you would have told the Lord so, whilst you were praying, but if it is, I shall believe myself more than ever.’ Upon enquiring yesterday morning, I found that his pain had left him at the time I had fully believed, and that he had enjoyed a night's comfortable rest; nor had his pain returned at all, and it is my firm belief that it never will. I have no doubt that my brother's fear and unbelief prevented the healing power from

descending while I was praying; for I felt as if some shackle fettered me, and that I could not attain unto the realising faith which the extremity of the case required. In a season of great distress, when our supplies were exhausted, and our children asked in vain for bread, I was enabled, by faith in the Divine promise, to tell my wife that Providence would provide; and according to my faith, timely and abundant supplies were sent, and in a short time I obtained employment.”

These few selections from the great number of cases recorded in his interesting journal, together with our intimate knowledge of him, extending over a great number of years, enables us to form the following brief estimate of his life and character.

1. *He was a good man.* — This could not be doubted by those who knew him; his diary abounds with scriptural and fervent aspirations after God and holiness. His hearers invariably felt that they were listening to a man who was familiar with the unseen and the spiritual. The vitality of the life Divine sustained him in conflicts great, and bore him in triumph o’er life’s tempestuous sea. The end was in harmony with the way. All was tranquillity assurance, and hope.
2. *He was a devoted labourer.* — He never sought office for the sake of its imaginary honours, or retained it that he might occupy the uppermost seat in the synagogue; nor did his religion consist in attending official meetings. On the contrary, he accepted office with a deep consciousness of its labours and responsibilities, and with a fixed and determined purpose to perform the duties in a right and Christian manner. We have rarely seen him at an official meeting, but have often met him in the prayer-meeting, and the weekly band. His appointments were never too many, or too far away, or in the wrong places; but he always accepted his plan with a great degree of pleasure, and punctually attended to the work assigned him. Few, if any local preachers, have walked more miles, or preached a greater number of sermons than he. Nor were the duties of home and business neglected by his attention to Connexional engagements, but he was diligent in business when he had business to attend unto. His services engaged his entire powers of body and mind; nor was he wont to leave a prayer-meeting whilst a weary wanderer was seeking after rest. Hundreds will be the crown of his rejoicing in the day of the Lord.
3. *His life is a solemn warning to our young men.* — Had he retained his youthful piety he would doubtlessly have found his proper sphere in the public ministry, for which his natural endowments and superior education eminently qualified him. But his early and sinful departure from God caused him to miss his providential track, and involved him in difficulty and sorrow through a long and painful life. Let the youth of our Connexion guard against the rock on which he split, and consecrate their talents and their all to the God of their salvation. He paid a tremendous penalty for his fashionable excesses, but God, in mercy to his soul, delivered him from the pit into which he had so deeply fallen. He sinned and suffered, repented and found forgiveness, laboured hard and diligently for his forgiving Lord, and has now passed from his toils and sorrows, to the glorious rest prepared for those who love and serve their gracious Redeemer. His removal to that land of the pure and the holy, has another attraction to the many it previously possessed. Heaven is all the dearer to me, because my much-loved and greatly revered brother Goodrich has taken possession of an

eternal inheritance there. That I may triumph over all my spiritual and mortal foes, and meet my old friend at the right hand of God, is the earnest prayer of ROBERT PARKS.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1872/774