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1882 Cooper Morris Licensing Letters 1944

THE LATE REV. ROBERT BRAITHWAITE.

SIR, — Having seen in the *Westmorland Gazette* of the 11th February a memoir of the late Rev. Robert Braithwaite, which dealt more especially with the early and middle portion of his life, it seemed to me probable that those who were witnesses of his labours in his native county would like also to know something more of him as Vicar of a parish.

On entering upon his duties as Vicar of Chipping Campden it was Mr. Braithwaite's lot to stand before a congregation of somewhat antagonistic principles. There were those who in early life had imbibed the pure doctrines of the Reformation and delighted in the "Story of the Cross," and there were others of a more modern school who favoured more reliance on Sacramental efficacy. Which side would the new Vicar take? Which party would be best pleased with his doctrinal teaching? With a warm heart and loving manner he entered upon his work, and never swerved or deviated from the straightforward path of a faithful minister of Christ. Fervent in spirit, and strictly loyal to the Articles and Creeds of the Church, he laboured in every way to show God's plan of salvation as he found it in the written Word. The Sacraments were never slighted, but were frequently administered with much solemnity and fervour, but Christ and not the Sacraments was ever held up as the ground of the sinner's hope. This was displeasing to that portion of the congregation who were disposed to lean more upon the Sacraments, and much coldness ensued. This was a source of severe trial to the loving heart of the Vicar, and caused him many a secret pang. Though much depressed, he held steadfastly on his way, and was ever supported by an unseen hand. To whoever appeared cold and gloomy, he never missed an opportunity of performing a kind act, even to those whose conduct had not been inviting. So long as his health would permit, he delighted to proclaim from the pulpit, in ever-varying form, the messages of grace and peace which the Gospel so abundantly furnishes. And when strictly forbidden by his medical advisers to preach, he still laboured most assiduously in organizing and arranging various kinds of parish work so that his curates might be free to devote themselves fully to their public ministrations and to visiting the people and the schools. He also felt much interest in meeting classes of young people and Sunday School teachers.

Whilst ever making the spiritual wants of his people the paramount object of his solicitude, he was by no means unmindful of duties and responsibilities of a secular kind. He was not long a resident in Campden before he observed that the beautiful church very much needed repair. After taking counsel with the parishioners, a professional man of some eminence was employed to examine and report upon its condition, who, in doing so, stated that the roofs of two principal aisles were unsafe, and that various other repairs were necessary. As Campden is only an agricultural town without any manufactures to bring wealth, and the principal landowner a Romanist, there was not a great deal to be obtained from the inhabitants however desirous they might be to get their old and beautiful church restored. But nothing daunted, the Vicar with brave heart and active spirit entered upon the work, and with a person of his taste and energy, when the ball was set rolling who was to stop it? One thing being done seemed to cry aloud for another, and as loving friends continued to respond most liberally to his appeals, a sum exceeding 4,000*l.* was spent before any halt was made. But the amount of extra labour and anxiety added to the continual pressure of his ministerial duties told heavily upon him, and his sensitive nature was subjected to a strain which appears to have accelerated incipient disease. Though health was visibly declining, he continued to devise good things for the people of his charge whom he loved so well. He had been enabled to perform much, but there were two other things on his mind to the last which he hoped to accomplish, and for both he was making preparation. One was to complete the restoration of the church by new pewing, the other to provide a coffee tavern for the labouring classes. And if from the verge of that peaceful world into which his spirit has entered he had reviewed for a moment the scene of his labours, he, like the patriarch Job, might have felt that "His purposes were broken off," and have yearned for their accomplishment by other loving hands. But after a lingering and painful illness he is gone to his reward amidst the general regret and most genuine sorrow of his bereaved people. He lived till all felt and acknowledged his worth, and his labours and his example will be not soon forgotten.

ONE OF HIS PARISHIONERS.

Chipping Campden, February 27th, 1882.

IN MEMORIAM.

He suffered long, racked with a pain he knew
Would end in death, yet patiently he bore,
Trusting to Him who trod that path before
With pain and suffering ; and his love now grew
To Him still greater, nearer still the view
Of that dear face ; his faith more fully saw
His beauty, as the pain his body wore
Knowing God chastens who to Him are true.
Until, as the sun's setting rays decrease
To rise more brilliant in another land
Far distant, so his life on earth did cease
Beyond the reach of death's destructive hand
To rise more splendid, and in Heaven to stand
To live for ever in eternal peace.

H. M. B.

Shrewsbury, January 31st, 1882.

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