

# William Trotter

by John Bjorlie

---

*William Trotter was a pivotal figure in the Methodist movement, known for his evangelistic zeal, writings, and commitment to financial independence in ministry.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:58, Colossians 3:23, 1 Timothy 4:12, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Methodist History", "Christian Ministry"

---

## Description

William Trotter, a dedicated Methodist preacher, served as an evangelist, pastor, and teacher, embodying a life of triple duty in his 47 years of ministry. He was saved during a spiritual harvest in the north of England and actively worked in various locations, including Halifax and York, witnessing God's transformative power. Trotter faced challenges within the Methodist New Connexion, leading to his discontinuation from the ministry due to his convictions on financial dependence. Despite controversies and separations from Methodism, Trotter's writings on prophecy and worship reflected his deep intimacy with Christ and his unwavering commitment to truth.

---

## Transcript

William Trotter (1818-1865) was born again in 1830 under the gospel preaching of Methodist preacher, Billy Dawson. In the book, *Chief Men Among the Brethren*, Henry Pickering claims that Trotter had "done the work of three lives" in his 47-year race through life. The statement seems true enough. He did triple duty as evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

There in the north of England, he was saved during a spiritual harvesttime. At the age of 14, he was already testifying and exhorting in the Methodist class meetings, and when 19, Trotter was officially recognized as a preacher in the Methodist New Connexion. The Methodists had been quite strong in that part of England. We get an idea of the scope of the work from Hudson Taylor's biography.

The Taylors lived not far from Trotter's hometown. Hudson Taylor was a fourth generation Methodist from the town of Barnsley in Yorkshire. Hudson's great grandfather was an early convert (he was privileged to house John Wesley when he came to preach). When the older Taylor first began preaching in that mining town, "drunkenness, licentiousness, and gambling" were rife. William Bramwell said, "Scarcely any people raged against the Methodists or persecuted them with such ferocity as the people of Barnsley." Mrs. Geraldine Taylor tells us that the church buildings were deserted and "the ale-houses overflowing, with what results may be judged from notices such as . . . "Drunk--a penny: dead-drunk--two-pence: clean straw for nothing."

But Yorkshire did not stay that way. The gospel came "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Perhaps you can better appreciate the force and vastness of the work of God in those days when you realize that by the time of John Wesley's death in 1791, in methodical fashion he had organized one hundred circuits in Great Britain alone, which were traveled by three hundred itinerant preachers and more than a thousand local "exhorters."

It was very likely that Wesley was in the Taylor home when he made the entry in his journal, dated Friday, June 30, 1786: "I turned aside to Barnsley, formerly famous for all manner of wickedness. They were then ready to tear any Methodist preacher to pieces. Now, not a dog wagged its tongue. I preached near the Market Place to a very large congregation, and I believe the truth sank into many hearts. They seemed to drink in every word. Surely God will have a people in this place."

Wesley's words were prophetic. But what he did not know is that God's people would not always go under the banner of Methodism. After Wesley's death, a leadership vacuum occurred, resulting in splinters such as the New Connexion, Primitive Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, Free Methodists, Methodist Protestant Church, etc. Of course, these factions did not occur all at once, and the movement was still quite vigorous well into the 1800s. But an autocratic style was Wesley's ghost to haunt the movement.

William Trotter was active in a revival at Halifax at the same time when Hudson Taylor's father, James, was seeing remarkable fruit in the nearby town of Barnsley. I do not have a record of it, but I imagine that the two knew each other since they were both active itinerant evangelists. This was one of the happiest periods of Trotter's career. From Halifax, the young Trotter was assigned to work in metropolitan York, an industrial center of that time. God was again at work converting the lost. It was just at this time that Trotter's eyes were opened to the mischief of being controlled by the New Connexion's yearly conference. There he was surrounded by the eager young converts in York in 1841, when he received the shocking news that the conference had decided to transfer him south to work with a sickly congregation in London, with, as Pickering put it, "the result that his mouth was virtually closed in his ministry."

At this time, Trotter delivered two messages that were afterward published, that demonstrate the man's personal devotedness and willingness to stand by his convictions. As any worldling knows, "He that pays the fiddler calls the tune." Trotter saw that to whatever degree men of God entrust their welfare to financial institutions, to that degree they will be tempted to allow their message to be trimmed, clipped, and shaven. To pass from being the Lord's freeman to being man's hireling is a step too easily taken. In a Lecture on the Use of Money, he argued against hoarding resources, and in a second pamphlet entitled The Foolishness of God Wiser than the Wisdom of Men, he answered objections to the first pamphlet, and explained the positive side of how our money should be used for the legitimate needs of our family and to supply the needs of the saints and to help the poor. But in this second pamphlet, he made forceful statements against benefit societies and all other forms of insurance. It wasn't hard for his fellow Methodists to see how his words applied to the Minister's Benevolent Fund. Shortly thereafter, a brief report was issued saying that Trotter had been "discontinued from the ministry."

Trotter was not alone in his concerns. An estimated 29 congregations, with a total of more than 4,300 members, withdrew their membership from the New Connexion. The unique feature of this exodus is that the principle leaders had no intention and made no attempt to form a new sect.

Once on the outside of the New Connexion, Trotter went back to Halifax and joined fellowship with a congregation of saints there. He also came into contact with J. N. Darby.

There were others, such as George Brealey and W. H. Dorman, who came out of Methodism and were remarkably used of God at that time. Not far from Halifax, in south Yorkshire, William and Thomas Neatby also left their Methodist memberships, as did J. Hudson Taylor, and began to meet in a more scriptural way. Sad, but so often true, that the very movement that had carried the torch of testimony in a previous generation, would become "the system" from which devoted souls would have to separate.

For a few years, Trotter edited the paper, The Christian Brethren's Journal and Investigator, which recorded the "little companies of earnest men who began to meet in the early part of the nineteenth century in various parts of the country, unknown to each other, and under no human leadership . . . the inception of this movement arising from a new illumination of the Personality of Jesus Christ, and of the essential unity of all who believe in Him, under whatever name they were differentiated."

His close friend, J. N. Darby, advised him that: "The secret of peace within, and of power without, is to be occupied with good; ever and always to be occupied with good." Trotter would quote Darby's advice and claim that he had made this his aim. This is curious, considering that the one who said it was so often engaged in critical and controversial debate, and Trotter was also no stranger to literary combat.

He wrote about the difficulty in 1848 between J. N. Darby and George Mueller in The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda. His account carried considerable weight when it was published in 1849, but the pamphlet has since been both scrutinized and castigated. For those aware of the conflicts of that time, I can only submit that men like Darby and Trotter had legitimate concerns. And by comparison to other controversies (not that we are justified by comparing ourselves to others) at least Darby did not murder his opponents, in the way the Reformers had hunted down and persecuted the Anabaptists. All said, this period was not Darby's or Trotter's finest hour.

But when we look at the whole of Trotter's writings, perhaps he had found the secret of how to face off with an enemy and still keep his eye on Christ. He did not become jaded. There is a freshness in his writing that reflects a high level of intimacy with Christ. Eight Lectures on Prophecy and Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects dealt heavy body blows to the post-millennialists. For sane, clear teaching on prophecy, Trotter has never been excelled. And his Five Letters on Worship and his paper called Heaven were the sort of cheering, other worldly writing that disarmed his assailants. His opponents so admired the man that their opposition sounded very hesitant. J. Grant wrote an expose of the dangerous tendencies of those people called Plymouth Brethren, and admitted that Trotter was, "one of the very ablest and best in every respect." W. B. Neatby said he was "highly spoken of by everyone who knew him." And again, when describing another eminent saint--G. V. Wigram--Neatby says, "Perhaps no leading member of the community left behind him a higher reputation for personal sanctity, unless it were William Trotter."

One final note: Trotter could sing. Two of his hymns are in the Little Flock Hymnal: "Behold the Lamb Whose Precious Blood," and "Farewell to This World's Fleeting Joys," to which the following lines belong:

Farewell to this world's fleeting joys,

Our home is not below;

There was no home for Jesus here,

And 'tis to Him we go.

And has this world a charm for us,

Where Jesus suffered thus?

No! we have died to all its charms

Through Jesus' wondrous cross.

Farewell, farewell, poor faithless world,

With all thy boasted store;

We'd not have joy where He had woe--

Be rich where He was poor.

His promotion to higher service came when he was only 47 years of age. It was a heavy loss that the saints felt they could scarcely afford.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-bjorlie/william-trotter/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**