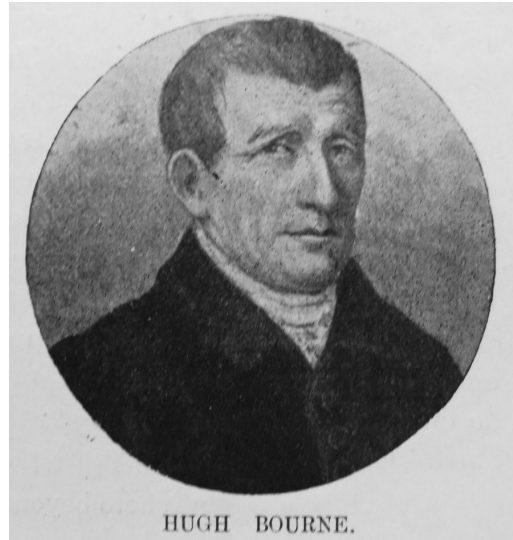


Reminiscences of Hugh Bourne

Transcription of article in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. W.J. Houlgate

To think back to the days of Hugh Bourne, from the year 1909, and write of the old man from a personal knowledge, seems like reckoning oneself among the ancients, and may be accounted a rare privilege of which few can boast. The first ten years of my life were spent in association more or less, with the old man, so that I may be regarded as speaking with a “wee bit” of authority. For a period of about thirty-four years—from 1818 to 1852, when he died,—the old man was in constant communication, and most friendly association with my family. This arose from the fact that in those early years, my grandmother on my father’s side was one of his first converts in Derbyshire, and second to none, as one of his most devotedly attached and enthusiastic followers.



As I recall the home stories of those early and romantic days, I feel as though religion—as we know it,—is a very different affair, in its outward manifestation from what it was in those exciting times.

Mile after mile, would my dear old grandmother walk to hear “her spiritual father Hugh,” as she would call him, preach, or attend a Camp-meeting which he was advertised to conduct.

On these occasions her nervous excitement knew no bounds. Inspired by a holy zeal for Christ, she became as one who would take the kingdom of heaven by force.

Ofttimes, to the somewhat neglect of her family, she would leave home in early morning, so as to be present at some special service when Mr. Bourne was preaching, and to be in time.

She frequently entertained Mr. Bourne, at their farm in Derbyshire,—my grandfather at that time being a farmer in a large way,—one memorable visit being the day on which my father was born—viz., in the year 1820, nine years after the founding of the denomination in the year 1811.

The old man saw my father grow to manhood, marry at the age of twenty-one, and give welcome to me, his firstborn, when I came into the world.

I look back, with great pleasure, to these items of social connection with the founder of a great and progressive people such as the Primitive Methodists are to-day.

Frequently, when Mr. Bourne visited my home, have I sat upon his knee, with his hand upon my head saying, “God bless thee, my son Willie, make thee a good man and a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Nearly forty years as a Congregational minister, may perhaps be an answer to the old man’s prayers.

John Ride, “the apostle of Berkshire,” was also my father’s uncle. Strange were the tales he used to tell by our fireside, of the receptions he met with, from rotten eggs, dead cats, and vile filth of every kind, which covered face and garments, while doing mission work in those benighted Berkshire villages, but, things have changed since then, thank God!

While my father lived, his was an open house for the preachers who went to Lichfield, where he founded a cause.

How well I remember many of the old men who missioned the City,—Wombell, Lawley, S. Saunders, together with others, all remarkable men in their way.

Of women preachers a frequent visitor was the great “Miss Buck,” as masculine a woman as could be made, and yet remain a woman.

These are all memories of the past, a new generation has arisen, who knew them not, and changes have followed each other so quickly, that I question whether Hugh Bourne, William Clowes, or John Ride, would recognize the denomination now, by comparison with its then early condition.

The stories which “Uncle Bourne,” as my father called him, used to tell were very quaint, and some of them dree enough in all reason, and after the old man had “passed into the heavens” they were treasured as things sacred, and to be remembered by us all.

When “Uncle Hugh” died, in 1852, what mourning there was. A standard bearer had fallen, a whole army wept. In my home the memory of “the sainted dead” was a cherished article of my father’s faith, until, after fifty years’ service as a local preacher, he, too, passed into the beyond, to join those saints who were first to pierce the skies.

The pressure of friendship has caused me to pen these resurrected memories of a rapidly fading past, and of one, whose name, people who have been brought into spiritual liberty by his energy, must never let die. The personal links between “Hugh Bourne” and this age are getting fewer every year, and will soon be lost in the vanishing point of human forgetfulness.

My personal association with the old man for the first ten years of my life, is perhaps as intimate as that of any among his people today. For this reason I need offer no apology for contributing these few lines in memory of the honoured founder of the people called “Primitive Methodists.”

References

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