

Rev. William Reuben Widdowson

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J.T. Horne

The death of the Rev. William Reuben Widdowson has deprived Primitive Methodism of an interesting personality, and removed one of its senior ministers to the higher service. He was born at Hardstoft, August 28th, 1826, and joined the Wesleyan Church in his thirteenth year. He very soon engaged in the various forms of Christian service which that Church offered.

Shortly after his conversion the celebrated "Billy Dawson" visited that district for the purpose of conducting "specials." At the tea meeting held between the services, Mr. Dawson approached the lad who was standing near him, and asked, "Have you given your heart to Jesus?" On his replying "Yes," the preacher placed his hands upon his head and said solemnly, "God bless thee, lad." In describing this incident Mr. Widdowson writes: "The action and prayer seemed to thrill me through every fibre of my body, and when I recall the event there always comes to me something of the old feeling."

During the ministry in that district of the Revs. W. Carthy and J. Eckersley he joined the Primitive Methodist Church, and Mr. Carthy invited him to enter the ministry. It was in 1849 that he commenced his labours in our Church, and during his term on the Belper Circuit he saw much of Hugh Bourne, and became closely associated with him in conducting religious services. He describes him as "a plain looking man, but shrewd and well-informed, and his company was very enjoyable."

While at Belper he saw the funeral of Dinah Morris, the Dinah of "Adam Bede," whom he knew as a female local preacher.

In succession his ministry took him to the following Circuits:—Leicester, Lincoln, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Nottingham, Holbeach, Coningsby, Jersey, Ramsey (Hunts), Haltwhistle, Penrith, Buckingham, Watford, Berkhamstead, Richmond, Prittlewell, Redhill, Glastonbury, Chelmsford, and Walthamstow. In 1891, after forty-two years' strenuous service, he superannuated, and shortly afterwards returned to Watford, where he spent the remaining days of his long life.

Probably no minister amongst us had a better knowledge of the official life of our Church than Mr. Widdowson. Being an expert penman, he was for many years constantly employed in the office of the General Missionary Secretary, in which he rendered very valuable help in the multifarious work connected with the Home and Foreign Departments. Many of the missionaries gratefully recall his contributions to their comfort, and his ministrations to their peculiar needs as they were going to or returning from their foreign stations. When the Home Missions District was formed in 1870, he was appointed a member of the General Committee; and from that time to the day of his death his membership was unbroken, for the long term of forty years.

His love for Primitive Methodism became a ruling passion, and his highest delight was found in its manifold forms of service. No work was too menial, and nothing was allowed to hinder him when called to do anything that would contribute to her prosperity. It will never be known in how many forms he served his Church, whom he loved even more than his own life. He undertook the collection of photographs of all the Presidents of the Conference from the earliest available date, and at the time of his death about seventy had been gathered. This collection is kept at Holborn Hall, in

the name of the General Committee, and as an acknowledgment of his success in this unique service he was presented by the Committee with a beautiful illuminated address. In 1908 he was elected by the London Conference one of its permanent members.

Politically, he was a keen and enthusiastic Radical, and took an active interest in the work of his party.

At his funeral the Committees of the Church were largely represented.

References

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