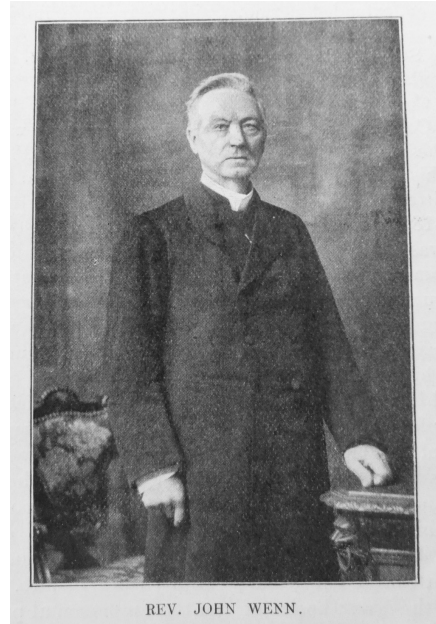


Rev. John Wenn

Transcription of Obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by G.P. Maynard

REV. JOHN WENN was born in the village of Great Ellingham, in the Rockland Circuit, in Norwich District, on December 27th, 1829. His parents were poor, but held in good repute in the village. They attended the Established Church, and, of course, he was taken to the services there. But no deep religious Impressions seem to have been made upon him as a lad. He was, however, the subject of religious impressions that were not to be traced to other people or to the events of his life. He was concerned about his probable destiny, and felt the burden of his guilt growing heavier.

When he was eighteen years of age, and was in the midst of personal wrestling with himself and his destiny he listened to the sermon of an earnest local preacher, that deepened his conviction of sin; and in a cottage prayer-meeting he obtained the light and peace he had been desiring and seeking. From the moment of his conversion he became a convinced and consistent follower of Christ. The great work was done in him "once for all."



The new convert and the Church to which he joined himself were of one mind about his starting on his Master's business without delay. He was soon at work, and in a very short time became a local preacher. In this sphere he acquitted himself with so much ability and zeal, that within two years of his conversion he was invited to enter the ministry. Here his native caution asserted itself, and unfortunately was allowed to decide the matter. At least he declined the call and came to feel that he had disobeyed the call of God. He started in business and married. That seemed to quite bar the way into the ministry, but "man proposes and God disposes." For two years he had much prosperity and unbroken domestic bliss. Then he was plunged into suffering and sorrow. First his wife was stricken with fever and taken from his side. Then he was prostrated with the same malady and hung between life and death. After some weeks he rallied, only to find that his shop had been shunned and his business was ruined. But he could not be daunted, and started afresh. He obtained a situation in London, and was thus brought once more to the door that God still held open. It happened that he preached on one occasion when the Rev. John Petty was in the congregation. Mr. Petty had a shrewd eye for a promising preacher, and decided that here he had an embryo minister.

On Mr. Petty's recommendation he was called into the ministry by the General Committee and set to work on the London Third Circuit. Going thence to Gloucester he did hard pioneer work and began his career of chapel building at Cheltenham. After working in Motherwell and Edinburgh, he was called to fill an accidental vacancy in Ilkeston Circuit, and thus became a Nottingham District man. And in what was then the Nottingham District the rest of his ministry was spent, with the exception of five years spent in London as General Committee Secretary.

He had marked aptitude for business, and was given his full share in District and Connexional departments. He served as District Building Secretary for an extended period. He became, by appointment of his brethren, secretary of the Friendly Society. For twenty years he acted in a similar capacity for the Candidates' Examining Committee. He was secretary of the Derby Conference in 1886, and president of the Chester Conference in 1894, at the expiry of his term as secretary of the General Committee. In the latter position his

term, 1889-1894, was an exceptionally busy one. He was deputy treasurer to the Missionary Committee when the Jubilee Fund was inaugurated, and took no small share in the heavy work it involved. All this meant a strenuous life, but that was natural and congenial to him. He was strong in constitution and loved hard work.

With all this, he never forgot that he was, first of all, a preacher of the Gospel. His educational opportunities in early life were meagre in the extreme, but he set himself to overtake the demands of his position by diligence and unremitting labour. He read deeply, concentrating attention not exclusively, but mainly, upon the great books of the masters. He was slow to accept new theories, but never prejudiced, and never narrow. He clung tenaciously to the old ways, because they were well tried, and he believed them to be safe. His preaching was a fine blending of the doctrinal and the practical. And his close reading and wide observation of men and things made him always instructive. He was both a lover and a student of nature, and brought a rich store of illustration to the exposition of the Word. He fed his own mind, and so was ready with food for others. He had profited by his long experience and became a sage in counsel, to whom all were ready to listen. In his later years of retirement he lived in a little village, just without the bounds of Derby borough, and here he gained the influence of a patriarch over his tribe. Because they knew him so well they had high regard for him, and a large measure of affection. Here he served his Church to the last, planning to increase its usefulness by the erection of new buildings just before his death. He was our leader and inspirer and we shall miss him more than we can say.

And greater than the service was the man who served. As Rev. S.S. Henshaw said at the funeral service, "He had great natural gifts and intellectual force, moral might and spiritual genius. His mind was logical, it worked along clear, definite lines of thought. He had a message for the men of his day, and he delivered that message with faithfulness and power. The points were marshalled with skill, and they were driven home with an earnestness and passion that spelt success. He had deep convictions and those deep convictions moved him to noble, one might say, heroic deeds. Take his attitude on the education question for instance. To see the venerable citizen and minister enter the police-court and submit to the spoiling of his goods in defence of the faith he loved so much was surely a sight to impress and inspire. He had a firm grasp of the fundamental principles of religion and liberty. He had broad, human sympathies. Every good cause found in him a ready champion. His heart was young and buoyant to the last. And now the life so precious and useful is ended, the journey is finished, the day closed; the pilgrim has passed through the gates into the everlasting city; the servant has received his Master's welcome; the warrior has obtained his crown."

References

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