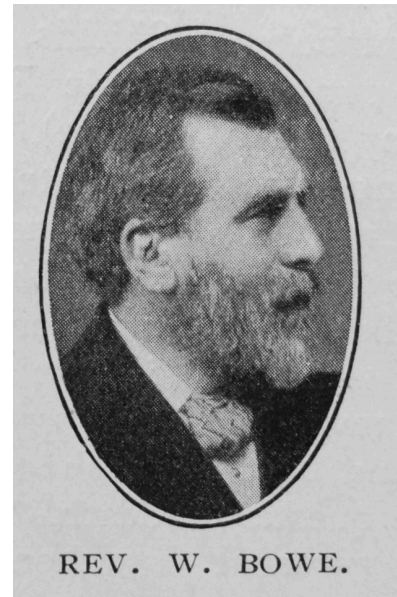


William Bowe

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by C.H.

In the passing of William Bowe the Primitive Methodist ministry has lost a great and impressive personality. He was one of a group of remarkable men who, despite the disadvantages and difficulties of early life, won distinction as preachers, scholars and statesmen. In several written and spoken tributes his name has been linked with those of Colin C. McKechnie, John Atkinson, William Graham, Hugh Gilmore, John Hallam and others. His parents were natives of Allendale, Northumberland, but were resident in Brompton Circuit, Yorkshire, when he was born in 1841. His mother died only a few years ago at the age of ninety-three and was a remarkable woman. When over ninety years of age she attended the services in Consett Chapel twice on Sunday and sat in her pew on the gallery. She was a genuine Primitive Methodist and was an enthusiastic worker for bazaars until the last. Her knitting needles were truly consecrated. From his mother he inherited toughness of body and tenacity of spirit.



The family went to reside at Consett when William was very young. After his conversion he came under the influence of John Atkinson. As a local preacher he was an ardent evangelist, and conducted more than one mission while taking his usual daily employment. He loved specially to tell of one of those missions with its twelve-mile walk after each service. It was exhausting work, but he revelled in it, and was sent on his way rejoicing by a new ingathering of converts night after night. He began the work of the regular ministry with John Atkinson as his superintendent. Wearing a cap and jacket, and with little luggage to encumber him, he walked to Newcastle, en route for Berwick. By some mishap his application form for the ministry had been sent to the General Committee Secretary in London, without the names and addresses of any persons converted in his services. This was sent back to him at Berwick. He sent to Shotley Bridge for the necessary particulars, but on the next day there were several converts at his first services in Berwick. Mr. Atkinson filled in a sufficient supply of these names and addresses, and without waiting for the reply from Shotley Bridge the application form was returned to London and was accepted.

In John Atkinson he had an exacting, but kind, strong and helpful superintendent. He quickly learned to share with Mr. Atkinson a great passion, not only for souls, but for hard work, close study, and stringent accuracy in everything.

Years passed on, and Mr. Bowe became more and more a student of the deep things of God. In his early ministry he bought as he was able to afford, with many serious sacrifices, the "Encyclopedia Britannica." The study of languages had a special attraction for him, and he became a most proficient scholar in Hebrew, Greek and German. His passion was most marked, and was largely attributable to the Jewish Rabbi of North Shields, a debt of gratitude he owed to this great teacher in common with John Hallam, John Watson, and others. Mr. Bowe's frequent joke during his years of superannuation was that he had two hobbies—one was the culture of chrysanthemums; the other was the study of the Hebrew grammar. The fascination of Hebrew study was with him to the end of his days, even in the sick room. Next to his love for study was that of helping others. It is well known

in Darlington that he coached the minister of another Church for his London B.D. examination. There are very many ministers in our own Church who gladly bear testimony to the fact that he was their best student helper and guide. One writes to say that "Mr. Bowe taught me how to take the soul out of a book." Rev. Thomas Elliott was coached for the ministry by him, and was so thoroughly trained in Bible knowledge that the examiners of Sunderland Institute could not ask a single Bible question to which an answer was not given at once. Mr. Elliott declares that educationally he owes more to Mr. Bowe than to any other person, or even to Sunderland Institute.

In his preaching he was thoughtful, suggestive and scholarly. There was no parade of his scholarliness, but it could not be hidden; the most intelligent and well-read hearers appreciated him the most. He was a preacher to preachers, and he invariably suggested to preachers new thoughts for new sermons. He was not only a student of books, but equally so of human nature. He was quick in forming his judgments of men, and seldom did these judgments need revision. He was kind, wise and firm as a manager of men and meetings. His gentleness gave him some of his greatness, but if liberties were taken the lamb became the lion. He had a rich gift of humour, which he could use either to scorch or soothe. He was a strong administrator in circuits and districts. For many years he was an outstanding ruler and leader in the Sunderland District. As a man and minister he was most unconventional. He loved to tilt against certain customs and conventionalities. He discarded the professional ministerial attire as he did the wearing of anything black as a symbol of mourning. In these and other respects he was utterly indifferent as to what other people thought and said of him, and possibly in some ways he carried this to extremes; but it always meant being true to self and conscience.

He continued in the active ministry for forty-three years, and travelled on the following Circuits:— Berwick, Allendale, Westgate, North Shields, Seaton Delaval, Stanley, Newcastle First, Durham, Preston, Whitby (twice), and Darlington, where he superannuated in 1905. During the last two years he was secretary to the Darlington Greenbank Hospital, and this brought him into very close contact with many people outside our own Church, by whom he was greatly esteemed.

He has known much of the bitterness of sorrow and death. Many years ago he was sorely stricken by the death of Mrs. Bowe and of a bright, promising son. Their memories are yet fragrant in many circuits. These losses left upon him their imperishable marks. Then for the last eighteen months he was a great sufferer and several severe operations were necessary. These had to be performed without the help of anaesthetics, so that his life was prolonged at the cost of terrible suffering. Three days after his last operation he died quite suddenly and unexpectedly from heart failure. His mortal remains were interred in Darlington West Cemetery.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1914/153