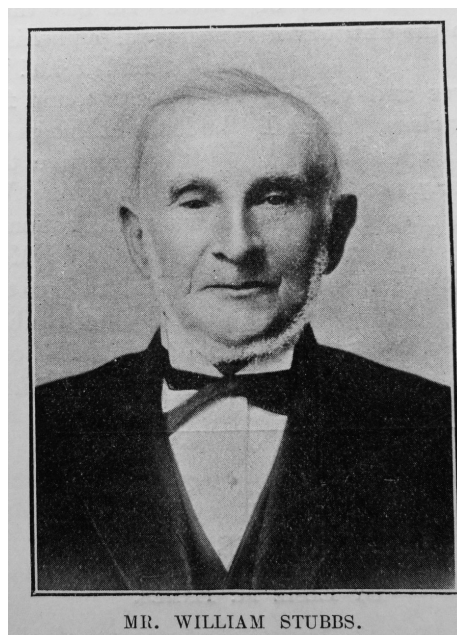


William Stubbs, Crewe Second Circuit

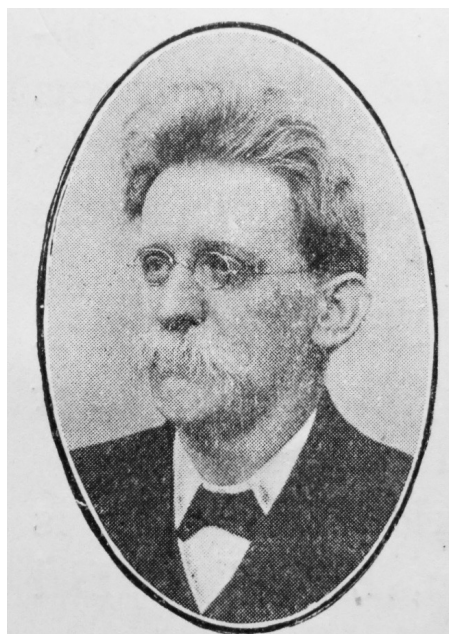
Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine: Part of a series entitled "Chats with Successful Class Leaders" by James Griffin

It was like a breath from the glorious past to have a chat with Brother William Stubbs. The historic imagination took one back to the scenes and fellowship of the early days of our Church. I could almost see some of the old Consolidated Minutes written upon the face and manner of my old friend. The aroma of bygone days filled the cosy sitting room. It is well in this Centenary year that the present should be linked with the past and merged in one sweet fellowship of praise. Before we left (for I took a young friend with me to take notes) two others stepped in. If I had been superstitious I should have said: "These are ghosts of the Primitive Methodist past." Their hair was in "its plain form." Their garb was Primitive antique. Their faces had the expression of old-fashioned Methodist saints. They looked heavenly. But I was soon convinced that while they were ministering spirits, they still acted in the living present.



"Good morning, Brother Stubbs, how are you?"

"Glory," said he, "that's just about me this morning." And turning to me he said, "These two come to pray with me now and then." The moments we had in prayer were like eternities of blessing and peace.



REV. JAMES GRIFFIN.

Opinions may differ as to a successful class-leader. Class-leading, like preaching, is a special gift. You cannot make a class-leader, he is born. He may not have the largest class and yet may produce the best spiritual results. The fruit is the measure of success. What is the soul-expansion of the members? Brother Stubbs has been successful all round, but chiefly in the mystic fellowships of the soul.

He was born April 6th, 1824. He will soon be eighty-three. He is one of the few remaining types of ancient Methodism – a real "saint in society." He was converted at the age of thirteen under Hugh Bourne. A good deal of the Bourne tradition lingers in his spirit and ideal. You can almost see history incarnate. He has been a member sixty-nine years; a local preacher sixty-six.

He had some idea of the object of my visit. "I don't want you to put my name down as a successful class-leader; I am only a poor unworthy creature." It is not always wise to take a man's estimate of himself. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

"When did you first become a class-leader?"

"I first took charge of a class in 1852. My assistant was Mr. James Glover, father of the Rev. William Glover,"

"Had you a large class?"

"Fair; in 1859 we had fifty members. That was at Heath Street. It increased to fifty-seven. But I removed to Mill Street. There I had eighty-four members at one time. But not quite so many now. Class-meetings are not what they used to be?"

The class was all important with Brother Stubbs. He had learned this from Hugh Bourne and William Clowes. "I never miss, hail, rain, frost, or snow." And he has never resigned.

I was very much interested in this living embodiment of Connexional tradition and history. The conversation was, therefore, somewhat varied.

He had met with Revs. Thomas Russell and Robert Key. He spoke of their piety, power, and prayerfulness. His face was lit up with the memories of the past, and the unction came into his voice.

"I had tea with Mr. Russell's mother." That was a grateful memory, equal to a royal banquet; no doubt more so.

"But about your class-leading? What have been your methods?" "Oh, old-fashioned meetings."

I expected that. Our brother lives in the past, and he thinks no lines like the old. He has certainly done well with them.

"Of course, we mix it with prayer meetings and band meetings. But we have kept to the old style of meetings."

"Do you allow long speaking?"

"No: short exercises with a verse or two in between. Hugh Bourne used to say, 'Be short in all your exercises,' and William Clowes would say, 'Let six or seven pray one minute each,' and I can lead a class of fifty members in a very short time."

He said his class was not so large as years ago, partly owing to its being divided into two. But he thought the enthusiasm for class-meetings was declining. That was not a good sign. Still he had had an average attendance of about forty, and the contributions were fairly good. "I mark the attendance, and receive the class-money every week."

On the spiritual side of the question the conversation was rich. It was a real festival of soul. There is a mysticism about some of these old Methodists that fills you with a kind of awe. They are living on the border-land and reflect some of the glory in which they will soon be lost.

To my young friend (who is a candidate for the ministry) it was a great inspiration. It is impossible to record everything. Indeed, some things are too sacred for words. They belong to the mystic fellowship of the heart.

He spoke: of private prayer. The secret place of the Most High is his abiding-place. He lives to pray, and he carries about with him the fragrance of the gardens of God. We may not agree with these grey-headed fathers in theology, method, and out-look, but when we touch the hidden springs of their spiritual life we find the secret of power. This man believes in the unbounded might of prayer.

"I have used private prayer and visiting my members to keep up my class. And I find nothing so helpful in class-leading as a familiar acquaintance with Scripture."

He is not a critic, nor an exegete, but a spiritual interpreter.

"I suppose you used to have some lively times in your meetings?"

"Ah!" he said, laughingly, "especially when Luke Ellison was there. He gave me a clout on the head one night and shouted 'Hallelujah!' One night a drunken man came into the meeting and created some little scene, but he got converted."

Brother Stubbs spends his time in visiting among the people. His visits are always welcome. He is highly esteemed for his saintliness of character, simplicity of life, and long devotion to the Church. He is looking forward to the Centenary Camp Meeting at Mow Cop. He longs to live to take part in that festival of open-air preaching and celebration. I hope God will let him. He has the old Methodist habit of rhetorical embellishment: "Bless the Lord," and "Hallelujah!" His beliefs are simple and positive, and faith is the eye with which he looks at things eternal.

It is men like these that keep the class-meeting alive. We need more men of this spirit and devotion. Fellowship is one of the vital things in Methodism. Whatever the form and method the class-meeting is essential. Brother Stubbs believes this; so do I; so, I trust, do all our members.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1907/180