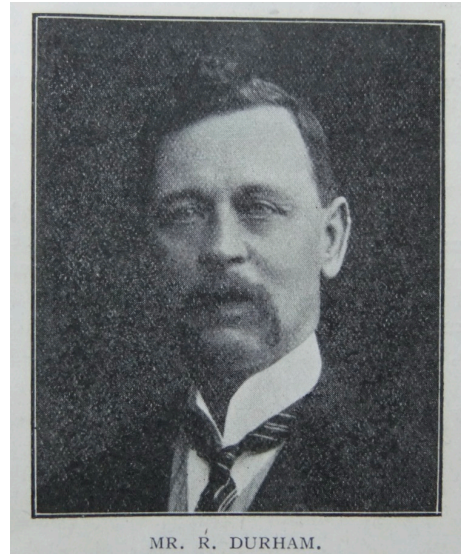


Councillor Richard Durham of Preston

Transcription of article in the series "Some of our Stalwarts" by W.B. Streonshalh

PRESTON is one of the most important towns in the north-west of England. It is the centre of administration for the County Palatine of Lancashire, and it is one of the largest cotton manufacturing towns in the United Kingdom. The chief peculiarity, of the town, however, is to be found in the fact that it is not merely the only gateway to the beautiful district of the Fylde country, but it is also the strongest centre in the kingdom of English Catholicism. When England became a Protestant country the Reformation never reached Preston. To-day more than one-third of the people belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and the remarkable point is that these people are not importations from Ireland or the Continent, as is the case largely in Liverpool, but they consist of the oldest local families, and, in many instances, they are very wealthy and powerful. The Anglican Church has captured the municipality, and no Mayor has ever been elected who will not first pledge that he will pay his official visit to the Established Church on Mayoral Sunday. This drastic enactment has ruled out both Free Church and Catholic aldermen and councillors, who have in every way been eligible to fill the office and discharge the duties of the Chief Magistracy. With local conditions of this sort we do not wonder when we find that Preston has been a very difficult field for Nonconformity to till. With a population of nearly one hundred and thirty thousand there are probably not more than twenty thousand people who own any kind of allegiance to the Free Churches of the town.



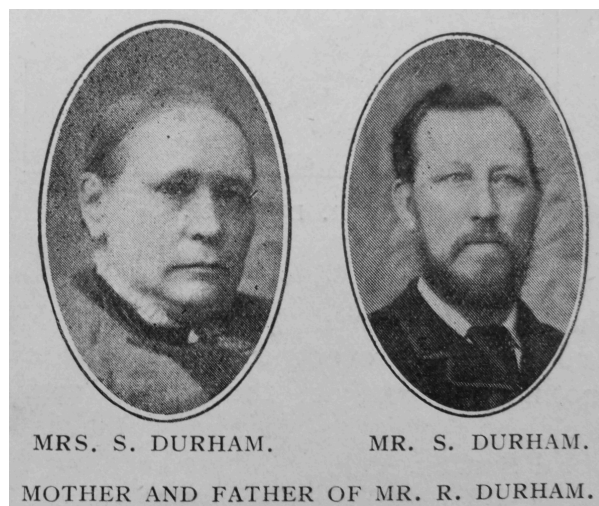
Methodism was introduced into Preston by John Wesley himself, and several of his early preachers; and yet, after years of toil, they placed on record that "Preston is hard ground." Primitive Methodism reached the town in 1821, and the Rev. T. Batty was our first missionary. Very few people responded to the earnest evangelical appeal. Persecution broke out, but when the Rev. J. Harrison was hauled before the magistrates as a "suspicious character" we have the curious record that "the Mayor treated him courteously, and dismissed him with a glass of wine." In the early days intoxicants were, freely taken by church officials and members. It is, therefore, good to remember that the modern temperance movement was commenced in the old Lawson Street Primitive Methodist Chapel, Preston, in 1832. Of the "seven men of Preston" four were leading officials of the local Primitive Methodist Church. Even in the early days stalwarts were reared in this trying atmosphere. The Rev. George Lamb, who was twice elected to the Presidency of our Conference, was converted at a Preston camp-meeting held in 1826, and he was but one of the first-fruits of many who were gathered in. Some of the most eminent of our early preachers laboured on this soil. Ministers like J.A. Bastow, John Verity, J. Garner, J.



Macpherson, W. Rowe, G. Stansfield, J. Graham, Hugh Gilmore, and W. Bowe figure very prominently; while laymen like John Webster, George Toulmin, Thomas and Richard Hough, the Edlestons, the Turners, and John Hall left indelible marks on our Church life and work.

A town with peculiar religious difficulties and a church with high traditions of aggressive work will both help to produce genuine stalwarts. In the person of Richard Durham we have a brother who is indissolubly linked with our Church's past, who is exercising a large influence on the present, and who is helping to assure a still greater success for our denomination in the future.

Mr. Durham is fortunate in having a good ancestry, who have bequeathed to him a sturdy, well-knit frame, a clear brain, vigorous health, and a keen enthusiasm for all things that are good. Both his father and mother were staunch members and devoted workers in our Saul Street Church, until they migrated, with many more, to form, the Preston Second Circuit. The father, Samuel Durham, was an active local preacher for many years, and he filled almost all the Circuit offices open to a layman. The mother, Hannah Durham, was a woman of outstanding good sense and a devoted Christian. She belonged to a family that gave a son to our ministry, and her brother, the late Rev. Robert Ayres, laboured in important circuits for nearly fifty years. With such a parentage, and with such surroundings, it would have been strange indeed if Richard Durham had marred his life with failure.



As a boy he received but little schooling. Very early in life he had to turn out to work, but, realising the advantages of education, he made good use of night classes, and by adding to this the teachings of experience, he stands out to-day as a quick, clear-thinking man. Just as the period of youth was merging into manhood Richard Durham deliberately made choice of "the better part"; and with characteristic Lancashire grit and energy he commenced to work for Christ and His Church. As far back as the year 1881 he was appointed secretary of the Sunday school. Two years later Hugh Gilmore commenced a most remarkable ministry in Preston. By his able preaching, keen sympathies, and genial humanitarianism he lifted our cause in the town, won scores of adherents to our Church, and completely captured the affection and devotion of a host of young men. The iron building which had been erected in Fylde Road was soon superseded by the present beautiful and commodious church. Eventually Richard Durham was chosen as secretary to the Fylde Road Trust, and, after many

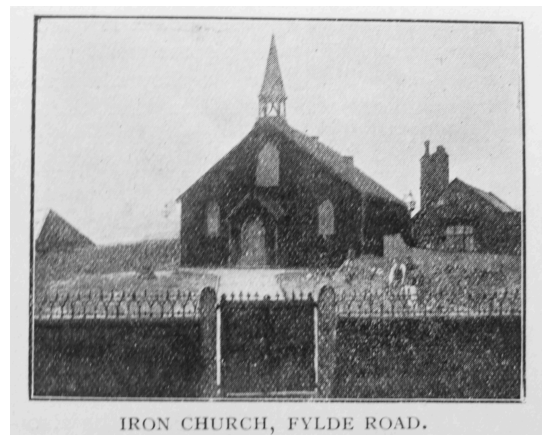
years of strenuous work, he now serves as trust treasurer. The debt on the church building is heavy, and the treasurer's position is no sinecure.

Mr. Durham is the proprietor of a large coal agency, and in his own business he has ample scope for all his ambitions and energy. Nevertheless, he belongs to that class of busy men who find time to render constant service to the town, the Church, and the Sunday school. To-day he fills the high office of senior circuit steward. He is the teacher of the Women's Adult Class in the Sunday school. He is a leading member of the local Free Church Council. He finds a most congenial sphere of service in helping the poor as a member of the Board of Guardians. He is a member of the District Committee, of the Preston Sunday school and Band of Hope Unions, and is on the local committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society.



"HEATHERFIELD," MR. DURHAM'S RESIDENCE.

Possibly, however, Richard Durham finds his greatest joy and interest in Primitive Methodist Missions. Some two years ago his eldest daughter, who was a splendid worker in Fylde Road Church and Schools, married the Rev W. Norcross, who is also a native of Preston Second Circuit. They are now serving on the Oyubia station, in Southern Nigeria. Every week Mr. Durham not only keeps the young missionaries well informed as to what is happening in the old land, but he is constantly helping to make the work of the mission station effective, and by his material gifts he aids in the uplifting of the dark-skinned people across the sea. To some men home life matters very little. If they can find congenial companionship on the football field, or in the picture palace, the theatre, or the political club, the claims and amenities of home life are always a secondary consideration. The subject of this sketch, however, has a different ideal. He is no kill-joy, and he has a firm belief in the beneficence of clean and helpful amusements. As a Liberal politician, he also takes great interest in municipal and national affairs. But, after adequate attention has been given to outside claims, Richard Durham finds his greatest social centre in his own home, and, in all the joys and pleasures and holidays of life, he makes his wife his chief companion.



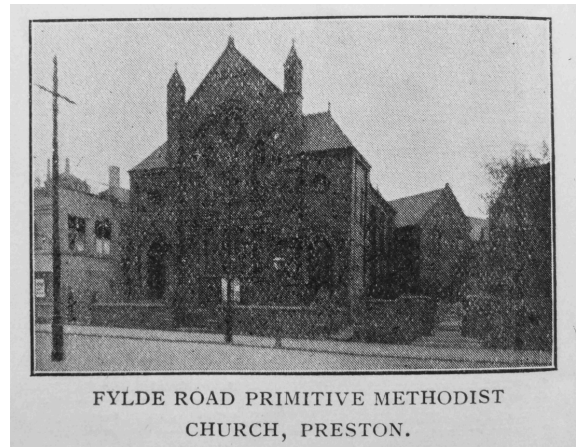
IRON CHURCH, FYLDE ROAD.

"Heatherfield" is a beautiful and commodious house standing on the outskirts of Preston, and the thousands of people who travel by road or rail to Blackpool every day in the summertime pass within hailing distance. Once or twice each year, when the days are long, the sunshine genial, and the flowers gay, Mr. and Mrs. Durham delight to give a missionary garden party on their lawn to a large



MISSIONARY GARDEN PARTY AT "HEATHERFIELD."

assembly of happy guests. Rich and poor receive the most genial welcome. A specially engaged quartette party discourses sweet music. The minister of the circuit, or some other invited speaker, gives a missionary address. Letters are read from the daughter of the house who toils among the negroes of Nigeria. Missionary information is imparted, missionary enthusiasm kindled, and a substantial amount is raised for the African fund.



While "Heatherfield" is the centre of family life, and the Fylde Road Church and School the centre of manifold religious activities, new calls for helpful service constantly come from the outside world. Only a month ago Mr. Durham was nominated to fill a municipal vacancy, and, for the first time in the history of Preston, a Primitive Methodist was elected without opposition to a seat on the Town Council. In his new position Richard Durham will work for civic righteousness, political fairplay, and religious freedom.

In a difficult town Richard Durham has helped to keep the flag of Primitive Methodism flying. The Lord has prospered him in his business, but, above all, He has given him the eye to see and the heart to understand. An excellent wife fosters every good endeavour. A united Circuit warmly appreciates his loyal and devoted labour. The larger Church will some day call to greater honour. In the meanwhile we are certain that our friend will let his light shine, and whatever his hands find to do we are persuaded that he will do it with all his might until the toil of the day is done and the call comes to enter the rest which remaineth for all the people of God.

Judging from appearances, however, that day should still be far distant.

We are sure that to him the happiest thing the future could bring would be a great victory for the cause he will not cease to serve, however long his day may be. As to the realisation of such a blessed consummation we can see no reason to doubt its approach.

References

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