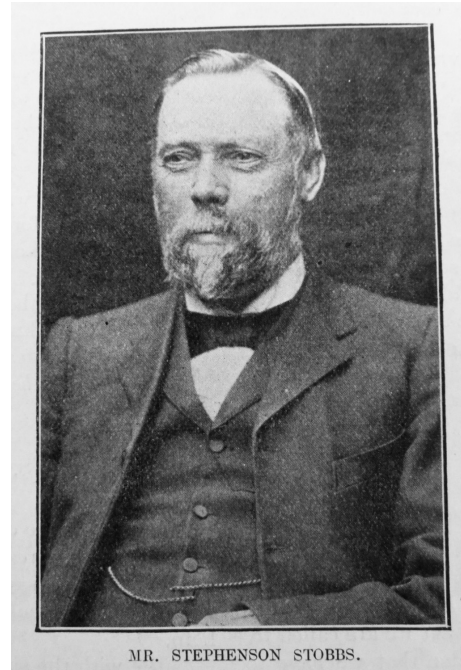


Links to the Fathers Mr Stephenson Stobbs

Transcription of Sketch in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Richard Heppenstall

“Now I am going to consecrate you all to the service of Jesus Christ,” said Hugh Bourne, to a group of boys (among whom was the subject of this sketch) as he came down from the pulpit of the quaint little chapel at Allenheads, in the Allendale circuit, long ago. It is a remarkable fact that all these boys became local preachers. Mr. Stephenson Stobbs has a distinct remembrance of the incident, and, therefore, is one of the links with the Fathers of the Connexion. For nearly fifty years he has been in close touch with the life of our Church. His parents were devoted and loyal members with us at Allenheads, and he recalls visits to his home not only of Hugh Bourne, but of William Harland, William Sanderson, Robert Key, and Dr. William, and Dr. Samuel Antliff. A dalesman, Mr. Stobbs is a splendid type in many ways of a remarkably fine class of men, many of whom are to be found rendering most valuable service to our churches all over the North of England and in the Colonies. Of these few have laboured over a wider area than Mr. Stephenson Stobbs. He was converted in the great Revival which transformed the Allendale Circuit in 1860, the story of which has been told by the Connexional Editor in one of the Centenary booklets, in which reference is made to the memorable scene that was witnessed the night Mr. Stobbs was brought to the Saviour.



It soon became evident that the youth possessed exceptional gifts, and his name was proposed for the Local Preachers' Plan. It was usual to arrange for a young man to accompany an experienced local preacher, but Rev. Colin Campbell McKechnie objected to this course in the case of Mr. Stobbs. “He will only learn their faults,” he said, “I would suggest that he should go by himself and sink or swim.” It may be shrewdly suspected that Mr. McKechnie was pretty certain that it would prove a case of swimming with ease and unusual grace.

He was acceptable from the beginning as a local preacher, and no layman in the North of England has been in greater demand for special services. For twenty-seven years he has conducted the anniversary services in his native village, the congregations being as large as ever. He has been exceedingly popular with other churches, notably the Baptists and Presbyterians who are good sermon tasters.

Mrs. Spurgeon presented to him a book endorsed with her own hand for help rendered to the Baptist Church in Spennymoor, in which circuit he resided twenty-three years. He has visited all our circuits in the north (with one or two exceptions), Williamson Street, Sunderland, for twelve years, Stanhope in Westgate circuit for sixteen years, and the great gatherings at Chester-le-Street for thirteen years. When in the height of his activity he has received as many as thirty-seven

applications for his services on Easter Sunday. In the mountainous districts and moors in Allendale, Weardale, and Alston Moor he has walked nearly 10,000 miles and preached 1,320 ordinary sermons, and 1,300 special and anniversary sermons.

Some years ago he had a unique experience. He was preaching in the open air in Cleveland. The day was fine, and a man one-and-a-half miles away heard distinctly and attributed his conversion to the sermon. The day following as Mr. Stobbs was going with the manager to the mine the man came to the preacher's friend and said, "I am coming to your class to-morrow. I've got converted;" and he told of having heard in the open air a preacher, and the message had brought peace and pardon to his soul. Great was the man's astonishment to find that Mr. Stobbs was the preacher. He grasped his hand with great joy. Hundreds have been converted under his ministry, and some of these are now ministers and many local preachers.

The Rev. Joseph Ritson has described the preaching of our friend, whom he frequently heard when a boy. After referring to the preaching of Joseph Reed, of the Allendale Circuit, he goes on to say: "He was followed by a tall and slender youth, whose refined speech betokened a superior education. He, too, came from the roots of the heather, but whereas his colleague was a lead miner, he was a clerk in an office, and accustomed to wield not a pick but a pen. On the whole his discourse did not make as good an impression as the sonorous message of young Reed, and I have no remembrance of the text. And yet the slender youth was destined to become the most popular local preacher on the plan. Before long his visits were anticipated quite as eagerly as those of the travelling preachers, and he was in constant request for anniversary services. His fluency and eloquence made a wonderful impression. He has probably preached more anniversary sermons than any local preacher in the Connexion. His style of preaching, the declamatory and rhetorical, is less in vogue than it was thirty years ago but it still has a charm for multitudes."

He has twice represented the old Sunderland District at Conference, and has been lay delegate to many district meetings. Along with the Rev. John Atkinson he was on the special committee for the North of England, appointed by the Manchester Conference of 1878 to consider the question of "breaking down the barriers."

In the Spennymoor circuit he was instrumental in obtaining a chapel from the Colliery Company free of cost. Mr. Stobbs has had a close association with many of our best known ministers. Of those who are gone the Revs. Colin Campbell McKechnie, Moses Lupton, John Day, Joseph Spoor, Hugh Gilmour; of those who are still with us, Dr. Watson, John Hallam, H.B. Kendall, Principal Johnson, Robert Hind, and Joseph Ritson. Mr. George Charlton and William Leighton, of Newcastle, and Mr. George Race, of Westgate, were close friends.

Mr. Stobbs' business occupation is Chief Surveyor for Sir Hugh Bell and Co.'s mines in Durham and Cleveland. Our friend has not been without his sorrows. A few years ago he lost his wife, a devout and saintly woman, and since then a son of great promise.

He has been less active for two years owing to an accident to his foot. He is a regular worshipper in our Gilkes Street Church, Middlesbrough. His services are still in great demand, but he cannot

comply with all the requests. He hopes to be present at Mow Cop on Sunday, May 31st, and we pray that he may be spared to his beloved church for many years.

We rejoice in his long life of useful service and the memory of it makes us “thank God and take courage.”

References

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