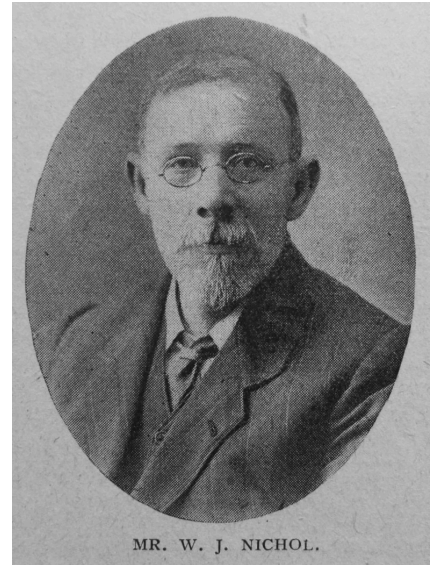


William James Nichol

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Arthur Jubb

IF at any time, within the past thirty years, you had asked a Leeds Primitive Methodist who was the best-known local preacher in the city, you would almost certainly have received as answer: "W.J. Nichol." During those years he has exercised in the Leeds District and in churches beyond a popular and a vitalising ministry. At different times all the Free Churches have shared in his labours, which have brought untold good to multitudes. In some churches, where the lay preacher was not always highly esteemed for his work's sake, his powerful preaching has stirred men's souls, and started many on the upward way. Some ministers I know have envied his gift of rousing appeal, and few ministers have the gift of preaching in more marked degree than he.



MR. W. J. NICHOL.

The story of his outward life is soon told. He was born at Seghill Cottage on September 8th, 1855. When he was a child, his parents removed to Leamington-on-Tyne. At ten years of age he decided to serve and follow Christ, and made public confession of his resolve. When seventeen years of age he began to preach, and so marked were his gifts that four years later he was urged to enter the ministry. A sense of unfitness led him to resist the entreaties of his friends. In 1878 he went to reside at Gateshead, and after a few happy months in membership and service at Prince Consort Road Church, he moved to Teams, in the same circuit. Here for seven years he laboured enthusiastically in the interests of our Church, and had joy in the erection of Victoria Road Church and School. In this period he was urged again—this time by the sainted John Hallam—to enter our ministry, but once more he decided not to do so, on the ground of uncertain health. By this refusal our Church lost a minister who would have been a great power in the land, but it retained a layman whose pulpit ministry has been more effective than the majority of ordained ministers. He has for a generation been proof sufficient that the people would listen to a layman with as much pleasure as to a minister, if he knew how to prepare and deliver his message. In the year 1885, Mr. Nichol went to reside in Leeds, where seven years later I was privileged to become one of his friends. To me, since then, and to hosts of others, he has been a man greatly beloved.

He has a richly sympathetic nature. Early in his manhood he had to drain the cup of a great sorrow, and perhaps this gave him the key to unlock and enter other hearts. The cafés—where he has been manager through the years—have been visited by hundreds of people, who have been drawn there because they would have not good food only, but an opportunity to see and speak with him. There they found sustenance for their soul, as well as for their body, counsel and guidance and inspiration being given freely by our friend. Both in public and private he knew how to speak home to the heart and be a son of consolation.

Honours of various kinds have come to him, which he knew how to appraise and appreciate. But his ambitions and tastes did not run in the ways of secretaryships, and the business routine of churches, though he filled with distinction the office of President of the Leeds Primitive Methodist Council. His

one strong passion was preaching, and it is as a preacher that he has excelled. His tall strongly-built body has been a great asset. When he announced his first hymn, a stranger would feel he was in the presence of a strong man. He was dowered with a magnificent voice, deep, resonant, strong. In singing he always took his full share, and in earlier years was a member of choirs, and played with skill the violin. His preaching had many characteristics, and like all true preaching, was determined largely by the convictions which experience had planted deep in his soul. As a speaker to young men he excelled. Always he appealed to the heroic qualities. He, knew what some preachers seem at times to forget—that a war is on, that evil contends with good for mastery, and that souls must be loyal to Christ, and brave, if righteousness and truth are to win the day. He must have addressed hundreds of P.S.A. meetings, but nobody expected that he would waste his breath—as some did—in trying to amuse the audience. One has heard of a negro preacher, who, after announcing his text, said that first of all he would “splainify,” then he would “argify,” and after that he would come to the “rousification.” W.J. Nichol was often great at the “rousification.” I have seen him rouse audiences, stirring their souls to the depths, as he pleaded with power and passion for the things he saw to be right and true. Character-building was often his theme, and he knew the power of God to save.

From all parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire he received requests to preach. Two or three services nearly every Sunday have been the rule during thirty and more years. Few ministers drew bigger audiences, and he was equally popular in his own circuit and city. He never let a service down. His sermons were thoroughly prepared beforehand, and his own soul was aglow when he stood up to preach. Often, much of the prepared sermon was left unspoken, when the preacher was carried along by a mighty rush of emotion. During all the years the Bible has been, his chief book, and the love of God his chief theme. Owing to physical weakness he has not preached for some months, and this is a sore trial to him, to whom the joy of preaching was the very best wine of life. But he and thousands of others hope and pray that this cup of joy will again be his to drink.

The later years have brought other sorrows to him and his wife. They had three boys, who grew up to be splendid young men. One of them—Andrew—was a bank manager in West Africa, and fell a victim to the deadly fever. Jack was organist at our Belle Vue Church, Leeds, and gave promise of a great musical career, but was killed in France during the War. But with fortitude and calm courage, our brother pursues his way, living the things he has preached for so many years, and hoping yet again to serve the Church and his Lord by speaking of the love which holds, and saves, and abides.

References

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