

## Rev Robert Robinson

### Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by W. Shaw

With the decease of the late Rev. R. Robinson, of Derby, the Connexion lost a loyal adherent and a successful minister, whilst those of his acquaintances who were the most intimate with him, parted with a firm and faithful friend. He was a son of Yorkshire soil, and always retained a strong regard for his native county. His parents carried him to the Methley Parish Church, near Leeds, to be baptised before the fateful field of Waterloo had been lost and won, and whilst Primitive Methodism was only as yet in its birth-throes.

His connection with the Primitive Methodist Church dates back into the early "thirties." Standing near the walls of Pontefract Castle with the writer in 1895, and looking at the old Primitive Methodist Chapel (now cottages) in the Booths, Mr. Robinson remarked, "I came here from East Hardwick one Sunday morning to hear the circuit superintendent preach. I was then barely in my youth. Being there before time for service, he came to me and said, 'Robert, the Quarterly Board decided that if you preached a satisfactory sermon your name was to appear on the full plan. Somehow the name has got there, but the sermon has not yet been preached. You had better come into the pulpit now and let me hear you.' I obeyed my super," said Mr. Robinson, "went into the pulpit, preached as best I could, and was allowed to retain my position on the plan."

The ready utterance which in after years became such a source of power and popularity, marked the earliest efforts of our friend. In those days "examinations" in scholastic attainments were not of "first importance." Personal conversion and regeneration, holiness of heart and life, evangelical fervour, burning sympathy with the world's Redeemer in His soul-reclaiming work, and yearning compassion for perishing sinners, were the grand requisites of a Primitive Methodist minister, and in these our friend was not "found wanting." So earnestly and acceptably did he labour that in a few years he was called into the ranks of the "regular ministry." Nearly the whole of his subsequent career was spent in what was once the Nottingham District. The towns of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, and Sheffield in particular were the scenes favoured with his valuable ministry, and there he was signally successful. For several generations his name has been "a household word," and will continue to be cherished for years to come by scores of families in these places.

In the home he often paid marked attention to "a little child," and up to the time immediately preceding his "departure hence," delighted to be the centre of a group of young lives, who familiarly but affectionately addressed him as "dear Father Robinson." In the best sense of the word he never became old. When more than fourscore years had passed over him he retained a spirit "fresh with immortal youth." His sympathy with the young, life around him was often most beautifully displayed. He was wont to say, "I never had a child of my own, but I have always been blessed with some belonging to other folks," and a blessing indeed he considered these children to be. The little folks who knew him best were amongst his greatest admirers and friends.

As a circuit superintendent he was "diligent in business." Exceptional punctuality in attending to all his engagements, and promptitude in the discharge of all duties and obligations resting upon him were amongst his most prominent characteristics. Indeed, he was severely prompt. Public religious worship conducted by him commenced on the very stroke of the clock. He was always *before-hand* when urgency was requisite. But the business department of a circuit minister's life did not see him at his best. He had no ambition for chairmanships and secretariates. Posts of honour were thrust upon him rather than sought by him. It was as a pastor, and more particularly as a preacher and platform orator, that he shone most brightly. As a pastor, wherever there was affliction and sorrow in the home, he was there to speak a word in

season, and to solace the bleeding heart. His pastoral work was no mere formal formal and irksome duty, but a delightful privilege of obtaining a fuller knowledge of his "people's spiritual requirements." And who that had the opportunity of accompanying him on "a round of visiting" can forget the pleasant but dignified conversation, and the earnest and powerful prayers in the homes they entered? He never descended to frivolity in those homes, nor yet did he simply pay a formal call, but the visit was that of "a man of God," and such was the impression left behind. His kindness to the suffering poor and needy around him distinguished especially the latest years of his life; indeed, it was whilst his attendant had gone at his bidding to prepare food for an afflicted neighbour that our friend laid himself down and fell asleep. Thus his dying request was made in behalf of another. His latest years were the richest and best of his life, and more fully given to brightening and blessing the lives of his suffering fellows.

It was as a preacher and lecturer, however, that he was best known. For a long way on to half a century his popularity never waned. Four Sundays every quarter when in the active ministry were reserved for special engagements, and during the early period of his superannuation he was in demand for almost every Sunday of the year. He was "a born preacher." Even in boyhood he was the recognised speaker for his brothers and sisters in the home. But in the prime of life his oratory was sometimes irresistible. In the pulpit he was a striking personality. His stalwart and dignified appearance, his flashing eye, his magnificent voice, "like the sound of a deep-toned bell," his energetic and vigorous action, all proclaimed him to be "a veritable Boanerges." "He opened his mouth and taught." His terse and telling sentences, his ready utterance in the language of every-day life, his humorous home-thrusts at the faults of his hearers, his merciless exposure of sin and his powerful setting forth of its consequences, his faithful warnings of the impenitent and his tender and pathetic pleadings with them, often produced acute awakenings of conscience and subsequent conversions from sin to righteousness. In the-pulpit and in street-preaching he was indeed "a mighty man of valour." His energy was that of the whole man, "body, soul, and spirit."

After preaching the opening sermons of Boylestone, in Burton-on-Trent Circuit, with the venerable Hugh Bourne as a hearer, Mr. Robinson ventured to invite Mr. Bourne to conduct the prayer meeting, who in reply said, "No, I shall not. It is not my duty, and it is not yours. When you've preached twice like you've preached to-day, you've done enough for once." The late Dr. Samuel Antliff paid even a higher tribute to the preaching power of our friend. "When I hear some men preach," said Dr. Antliff, "I feel comfortable and can sleep; but I never sleep whilst Mr. Robinson preaches. He always makes me listen, and sends me home resolved to be a more earnest and devout Christian." Here lay the secret of Mr. Robinson's power. He preached to win men to a godly life, not to please them; and when we recall some of his powerful discourses, and think of the impressions they made, we are led to say, "Shall we ever listen to his like again?"

He was not a profound scholar, nor did he lean toward the school of "the higher criticism." He was conservative in his "old-fashioned Methodist Theology," and regarded very cautiously new statements of Biblical truth. At the same time he delighted in the striking originality of such fearless preachers as Dr. Joseph Parker and the late H. Ward Beecher, and was always ready to respect the religious opinions of others. W. Jay and T. Parsons were the models he closely followed in his style of preaching, and as Rev. T.H. Richards says in an appreciative note, "Perhaps that which does him most honour, and which gave him greatest joy was that, like his great Master, 'the common people heard him gladly.'"

His sermons may sometimes have lacked literary polish, but they were full of piercing points, and men "were pricked to the heart" by them. They may not often have been poetical, but, what is infinitely better, they were often powerful. His style of delivery may not have been always graceful, but it was energetic and effective, and through his preaching hundreds were brought to Jesus' feet.

As a superintendent he exercised a remarkable influence upon his junior colleagues, all of whom speak of him as having taken quite a fatherly interest in them. "He was the most genial and delightful of companions," says one. "He was a brother and a father whose sympathy and counsel we always prized," says another. "I came to him a stranger; he took me in, and I loved him," adds a third. "Had it not been for Rev. R. Robinson," continues a fourth, "I should have resigned my ministry whilst on probation." "I owe my success very largely as a Primitive Methodist minister," says a fifth, "to the influence, the prayers, and unflagging zeal of Mr. Robinson." These are but a few cases out of many that might be cited.

During the twenty years of his superannuation he resided in Derby, and was a member of Mr. Charles Wain's class at Kedleston Street. During those years "no man," says Mr. Wain, "was more alive to the interests of the Connexion than he was. He loved his Church and people, and showed his love by doing all his health would permit. He felt it ever a privilege to preach the Gospel, and his preaching to the last was 'with power.' To him the private means of grace were as important as the public means. And what a centre of light and power he was in the class-meeting only those who have been favoured with such a presence can tell."

Revs. W. Suttle, G. Jones, and T. Richards, all unite in expressing their great appreciation of Mr. Robinson as a hearer and a helper in their services at Kedleston Street. His tender consideration, his kindly appreciation of their efforts, his earnest prayers for their success, his readiness at all times to assist as far as able, endeared him to these, as well as to the Church to which he belonged. In harmony with a resolution formed at the time of superannuating, he took no part in the government of the circuit, but in all possible ways helped on the work of the Church. He was a man mighty with God. Like the grand old men of early Methodism, he also had "power with God, and prevailed." How often, when the spirit of prayer possessed and inflamed his soul, has he pleaded until "the power" was felt, and strong-willed men and women were bowed and broken "as by a mighty wind from the Lord."

To the last he was alive with interest in the Connexion's progress. Every item of "Connexional news" was eagerly sought after and appreciated by him. His chief joy was to know that Zion prospered, and that sinners were being converted, and his great fear was that the soul-saving power might be neglected. When we think of his varied gifts, the long and efficient services he rendered to the cause of Christ, and of his constant loyalty to the Connexion, we gladly recognise that the present generation is all the richer and better because of the work he did, of the life he lived, and of the untarnished name he has bequeathed to it.

His mortal remains were carried to his grave in Derby Cemetery, on April 22nd, 1899, and, with every tribute of respect and honour that an affectionate and numerous company of ministers, relatives and friends could pay, were "laid there to sleep and rest" until the everlasting day shall break, and the shadows shall flee away.

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1900/866