

## **John Wightman**

### **Transcription of Obituary In the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Charles H. Boden**

MR. JOHN WIGHTMAN was born at Annesley, April 28, 1811, and died at Nottingham, June 4, 1882. He was a man rarely equalled. Humour, earnestness, and decision, under the influence of strong common sense, were marked elements of his nature. There was a primal quality of sunshine and joyfulness about him. The glitter of his eyes was not that of ice, but fire; showing that 'life was strong in him,' and that life robust, downright, and manful to a degree seldom found.

His 'conversion' took place at Quorndon, a quiet little Leicestershire village, in the year 1832. There was a camp-meeting at the place. The singing attracted him. The preaching alarmed him. For the first time he saw that time rested on eternity, and earth was the threshold of heaven or hell. For several weeks the awful idea possessed itself of him, until wearied of life he started one Sabbath to commit suicide in a lonely part of the river Soar, and by an almost miraculous coincidence was prevented. On the Tuesday evening following, he went to the chapel; after service there was a prayer-meeting for about four hours, and at the solemn hour of midnight, the dark whirlwind of despair passed by, and heaven's splendours shone around him. This over, the venerated Prior Richardson took him to his house for the remainder of the night, lest the 'devil should upset him before morning.' The next evening, Mr. Wightman united with the Primitive Methodists, and, whilst no bigot, his denominationalism was very marked, up to the day of death.

His 'life' was that of an energetic Christian worker who felt the eye of the great Taskmaster on him. He was a local preacher for nearly fifty years. His preaching was that of one who felt his message to be of vital concernment to his hearers - you could see death, judgment, and eternity, lying in the background of his efforts. Fifty years ago, local preachingship meant hard work, and such he found it, walking from thirty to forty miles on the Sabbath and preaching three times; and thus he often spent his day of rest and felt ample compensation when sinners were converted. The writer remembers once, twenty years ago, meeting him in the street. He had done a hard day of the Sabbath, but when speaking of it, he fired up and said, 'Bless you! they cried for mercy, and there was such a power down. I feel the glory running about in my bones now.' He worked for the Connexion, and the Connexion honoured him. For several years he was a member of the General Committee, and often a delegate at District Meeting and Conference.

About nineteen years ago, the sphere of his usefulness became considerably enlarged by receiving an appointment as an Evangelistic agent in Nottingham. He had the faculty and the courage for such work, which aptitude evinced, their sphere widened and kept on widening. His work was many-sided. The public knew this. The inquiries at his house were sometimes for Mr. Wightman, the magistrate - sometimes the minister - sometimes the policeman. He laboured as 'a visitor of the neglected.' His district was one of the poorest, but the money supplies of gentlemen enabled him to do good. He would read, pray, give advice, leave a tract to be read against he came again, These visits were greatly blessed. In prayer he was mighty. It was a privilege to go with him, to the Throne of grace. He often overmastered the most resolute opponents of religion. His visits were frequent, both at mid-day and mid-night, in the chambers of the sick and dying. He laboured as a rescuer of the fallen. This work needed courage, and with all his childlike tenderness he had courage in a high

degree. He was one of 'Nature's lion-hearted sons.' He would obtain information relative to unfortunates, from broken-hearted parents or inquiry, and once he held a thread he would never lose it. He would enter the most criminal dens of infamy-dens, the very walls of which would be blue with the brimstone of the pit - dens where life was unsafe. He would enter without trepidation, and fetch the victims out; some he would take home - some to refuges, and thence to service, and often to respectability. He rescued thirty or forty per year, for about nineteen years. His cases were vastly more numerous, and often 'stranger,' than John Ashworth's 'Strange Tales.' He laboured as a reconciler of the divided. For this purpose he regularly attended the magistrate's court, and was often referee. In petty cases where neighbours had quarrelled, or husband and wife had disagreed, the presiding functionary would often say, 'Mr. Wightman, can you be of any use in this case?' He would take the parties aside and seldom failed to compromise the case. In many cases, but for him, innocence would have suffered, and guilt would have found less mercy. Beside these many sections of toil, he laboured at the Ragged-school. Every Sunday, from nine o'clock and from two, he spent his time amongst the street-arabs, and occasionally in the evenings preached at the refuge and the schoolroom. He also did the work of a Primitive Methodist class-leader and local preacher. Surely of him it has been said, 'He hath done what he can.'

His 'end,' This was sudden. The affliction which closed his eyes to earth was heart-disease. The doctor had said to his friends, he may go at any time. Yet, still he did his work, saying to the persons he visited, 'Sudden death would be sudden glory!' On the Sabbath (June 4th), he called at the home of a solicitor in Nottingham, who acted as superintendent of the mission, and whilst engaged in conversation with the lady, he fell from the chair and expired. It was not death, it was translation. He passed from our midst covered with honour. At the next meeting of the magistrates, Alderman Lambert, in an address to the court, spoke of him in the highest terms, and at his funeral the public voice in subdued tones and sobs, spoke of the place he held in the public mind. Gathered round his door was a crowd, consisting of all sorts of persons, which crowd increased as we passed on towards the dormitory of the dead. Hundreds stood around his grave. There were Ragged-school arabs, church members, Sabbath-school teachers, cabmen, policemen, a clergyman; women, whose faces were full of crime, and ladies of most delicate refinement; and when I pronounced the words, 'We commit his body to the grave in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to life everlasting,' there was scarce to be seen eyes that were not filled with tears. Those tears spoke volumes. They echoed the words, 'The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.'

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1884/628