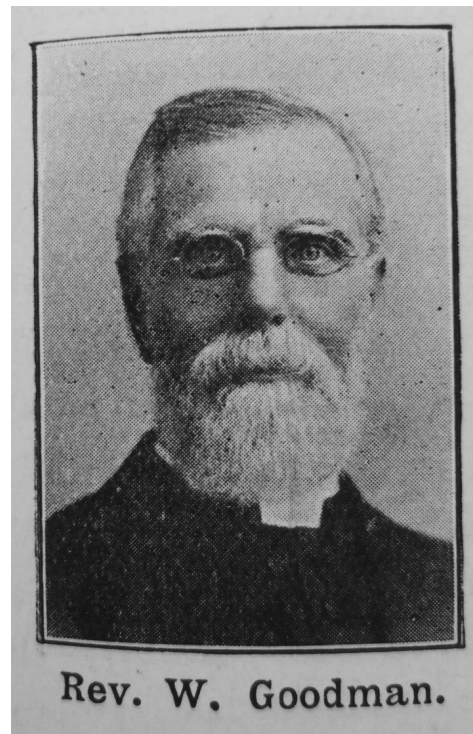


W. Goodman

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by T.H. Hunt

The Rev. W. Goodman, who spent thirty-eight years in our ministry, was no ordinary man, and his services to the Connexion, rendered in so many ways and for so long a time deserve more than brief and formal recognition. In his early life there was nothing particularly distinguishing. His parents were neither rich nor titled, and there was no patrimony upon which he could depend. Born in the last decade of the former half of the last century, there was no Higher Grade School, no Technical College, nor even a Board School; the so-called "National School" was the only place in which a village boy could get instruction, the teacher being only a few grades ahead of his pupil. Removing from Stelling Minnies, where he commenced life, to Spalding when he was four years of age, and later to Peterborough, his educational facilities were but few. But it sometimes happens that a boy with advantages becomes indolent, while a true nature is spurred to diligence by its difficulties. His schooldays ended when he was fourteen years of age, but not his education, for then commenced a series of self efforts, mostly self-directed, that resulted in real culture.



AT that age our friend must needs go to work, and found employment with W.H. Smith & Sons, long before that firm had acquired the influence it now wields in the world of publishers. From Peterborough, where he began his work, he was soon sent to the London house, and before he was out of his teens had command of a bookstall at Birkenhead; with chances distinctly encouraging to one of modest ambitions. But in that town, and under what cannot but be considered fortunate circumstances, several things occurred that were influential and determinative for good. Among these occurrences may be mentioned that he found a home with a godly family - the Thompsons - formed the acquaintance of the lady who afterwards became his wife, came under the directive influence of the late Rev. James Macpherson, and that distinct act and experience we call conversion. In the case of William Goodman it was no formality but a great fact of which he was conscious, and of which a devoted life was the best evidence.

At that time a vacancy occurred on the staff of the Liverpool Young Men's Christian Association, a branch of that organisation which held front rank at that time, and he was successful in securing it. Now he had obtained an appointment, with possible and probable promotion, but the salary it brought and the promotion it might bring were of less account than the opportunity it gave him of doing good to other young men. It is not unlikely, if we may indulge in what "might have been," that he would have developed into a leader of the Y.M.C.A. movement in the country, for his social instinct, organising gifts, and winsome command of youth marked him out as specially adapted to such a vocation.

It is interesting sometimes to follow the openings of life, and scarcely less to follow its diversions. Mr. Goodman in his teens would have accounted an office in the publishing firm a success; his friends presaged for him the Secretariat of a Christian Institution, but the Great Disposer had marked him out for a greater work in a wider sphere. The first step to it, was in his conversion, the next, which immediately followed, was his selection as a local preacher, and not long after his call to the ministry in which subsequently he played such a distinguished part.

In the earlier years of our Church there was less said of "preparation for the ministry," "studying for the ministry," and "candidates for the ministry," and more said about "the call." The Ministry was not a mere profession, God forbid it should ever become so, but a Divine vocation, and men were "thrust" into the work, under an impulse that led them to say in Pauline phrase, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." From this high office, with a modesty as characteristic of his manhood as of his youth, he naturally shrank, declining one offer though made with pressure, trembling to go "before he was sent." When, however, the circuit in which he was residing, and the church of which he was a member, knowing both his gifts and graces, gave him a call he could no longer refuse. There, and under those circumstances he commenced his ministry in the year 1863.

In thirteen different circuits our deceased friend exercised in this ministry, giving full proof of it in each case. The Circuits that enjoyed his labours were in succession - Birkenhead, Liverpool 2nd, Manchester 1st, Manchester 4th, Wrexham, Haslingden, New Mills, St. Helens, Chester, Stockport 1st, Glossop, Middleton, Watford and Newton, and Hyde. It is true he made no pretence to profound scholarship, and he never attempted brilliant oratory, but he was a diligent and devout biblical student, and had wide knowledge of those subjects that were of first moment to a minister of Jesus Christ. We had not long to listen to him before we discovered that the Word of God was a precious mine in which he had dug for his own enrichment, and that he had the rare faculty of "Opening the Scriptures" to others, thereby confirming the faith of Christian hearers, and wisely winning souls. His thoroughness, his practicalness, his sympathy, and withal his firmness made him a Circuit minister of the first order.

But it was as an administrator that Mr. Goodman mostly excelled. A great church, or a federation of churches as Primitive Methodism is, some in cities, some in villages; some large and many small; with all the liabilities of Churches, we have need of legislators, and administrators, no less than evangelists and pastors. Without them, in large measure, the work of those who labour in what is regarded as the more spiritual sphere would be wasted. By wise laws and the exercise of discipline the fruit of our labour is conserved, effort is prudently diverted, and so provision made for its continuance, its extension and its improvement in the future. It was in this realm that our friend took place in the front rank.

As a member of a Connexional court, whether it was within the jurisdiction of the circuit or the district, he was not content to "sit," but regarded such membership as a responsibility, and so regarding it gave his best thought to the consideration of every question laid before it, never speaking unless he had something to say, never silent when by speaking he could clear a difficult, confirm a wise proposal, or defeat one that was unwise. No one who had acquaintance with him could fail to see that he had a clear insight, firm grasp, and a conscientious motive, in all his dealing with difficult problems affecting church life and work. The recognition of this led to his appointment

as the Secretary of the Manchester District Committee, and never were the affairs of that district in safer custody. It was not without good reason that district recorded in its journal:- "The various committees of the district gratefully recognise the unique advantage that for so many years they derived from having his wise counsels and his able exposition of the rules and regulations provided for their guidance in dealing with the various cases brought before them for consideration."

In those cases so constantly occurring requiring investigation in the presence of the parties concerned, Mr. Goodman rendered invaluable service as a "deputation," or member of a deputation. In such cases, acting upon sound principles, he was able to collect and group the details, and in his remembrance and marshalling of such details greatly help the determination. It is not often that the same person has the powers to analyse and to synthesise, but he had both, and had them to a remarkable degree, and gratefully placed them at the service of the church. Indeed it was his clear thinking, and his equally clear speaking upon legislative and administrative questions, combined with his respectful and tactful treatment of both friends and opponents, that won for him the confidence of leaders in Primitive Methodism, seniors and juniors alike.

Mr. Goodman's influence was felt first and most among his ministerial brethren, and this found fitting expression in his appointment by them as the Secretary of the Preachers' Friendly Society. At the time of his accession to office there was great need of a man with business sagacity, analytical power, and one capable of dealing with financial questions. His quinquennial term more than justified his appointment, and we know not which must to admire, the quantity or the quality of the work he did. In a resolution passed at the Annual Assembly, following his death, it is stated: "To this society, first as a committee-man and later as an officer, for many years he rendered special service, as for example in the revision of its rules, preparing quinquennial returns for the Government Actuaries, and as its General Secretary, which office he held for five years. In these ways he put his brethren under great obligation by the administration of the affairs of the Society, as well as by the perfecting of its constitution, and during this lengthened period he won our esteem and thorough confidence. His interest in the Society never flagged, he toiled uncomplainingly, made many sacrifices ungrudgingly, and we, with those who follow, will reap the benefit of his abundant labours. It was probably the efficiency with which he was known to have served in this department that led to those higher distinctions which followed almost immediately.

In 1889, on the nomination of the Manchester District, in which the whole of his connexional life had been spent, the Conference elected him by a large majority as the General Committee Secretary. Five years later he succeeded to that office, and for another quinquennial term filled it with conspicuous ability. His prudence, punctuality, impartiality, and courtesy, were such as to make him the admiration of all his brethren, and rarely, if ever, has a term of office been completed with so few jars and so much satisfaction. He was never known during that term to meet his committee with a case that he had not well considered, or upon which he was not prepared with a suggested resolution, and it was much to his credit that very rarely did the committee modify his proposals. Such was their confidence in his character and the wisdom of his judgment that he came to be regarded as a sort of Connexional oracle, and that confidence he was never once known to abuse. The peace and prosperity of those five years were due in no small measure to the clear head and warm heart that were at the centre of our Connexional affairs.

At the close of his Connexional Secretaryship the Conference appointed him as its chief officer, and with singular ability did he conduct himself and the business during his occupancy of the presidential chair. At the close of it he prepared a programme which he hoped to follow, and during his year of office, if health had permitted, he would have given special prominence to the claims of youth, having adopted as his motto, "Our young people for Christ and the Church." But immediately after the Conference closed, while on his way to the General Missionary Committee, and by an attack which nobody could have foreseen, he was utterly prostrated, and for several weeks lay between life and death. All that wifely devotion, medical skill, and the sympathetic prayers of the whole Church could do, was requisitioned, but without avail. By the blessing of God his life was spared, and he was permitted to attend the next Conference, but in so enfeebled a condition, that his efforts to speak were only heard with difficulty. Returning to Bournemouth, buoyed up by the hopes of recovery and resumption of his much-loved work, he survived the autumn and the winter, but on the 9th of April succumbed, and a few days later he was interred in the cemetery of that town, awaiting "in sure and certain hope," another and brighter Eastertide.

The funeral of our departed friend was attended by the chief officers of the Connexion, and by representatives of our churches, who travelled long distances to pay a tribute of love to him, and speak a word of comfort to his disconsolate widow. For some time after letters poured in from all parts of the Connexion, every district feeling its sense of loss. The Conference over which he had presided, the General Committee, of which he had been Secretary, the Missionary Society, of which he had been Deputy Treasurer, "the Local Preachers Aid Committee," which had been established largely by his endeavours, and many other courts, sent to Mrs. Goodman their condolences. Even the Colonial Districts joined in the general tribute, recognising his efforts in facilitating Methodist union there, and in the settlement of financial claims between the Home and Colonial Conferences. The Sunday School Union, in which he took so deep an interest, meeting the week after the funeral, passed a resolution in the terms of which every one who know our departed friend will concur. The resolution, as recorded, ran as follows: "That this meeting of the General Sunday School Committee having been informed of the death of the Rev. Wm. Goodman, which occurred on Tuesday, April 9th, 1901, in the 59th year of his age, and the 38th of his ministry, places on record its admiration of his blameless character, its appreciation of the many services rendered by him to the Connexion, and its sense of the great loss the Connexion has sustained by his death. His transparency and constancy made him a valuable friend; his faith in Christ and loyal following of Him in service and sacrifice entitled him to the enviable distinction of 'an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile.' His firm grip of Gospel verities, and his faithful declaration of them made him an able minister of the New Testament; while his judicial mind, together with uniform courtesy and unflinching impartiality made him a model administrator in those high offices to which from time to time the Connexion called him. A thorough total abstainer, he not only adhered to his principles, but fearlessly advocated them. A Christian Endeavourer, not only in name but in deed, he was concerned for the honour of Christ and the purity of the Church; and his interest in the young life of the Church and the nation was evident throughout his long connection with the Committee. We are glad to learn that the faith for which he had so long contended was his support and solace in his last hours, and that he died as he had lived - 'a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and Faith.' " This resolution was signed by the Rev. Joseph Odell as President of Conference and the Sunday-School Union; Robert Bryant, Vice-President; Danzy Sheen, for the Sunday Schools; T.H. Hunt, for the Temperance Society; George Bennett, for the Christian Endeavour Council; and S.S. Henshaw, for the Bible and Prayer Union.

These expressions of genuine affection were very comforting to Mrs. Goodman and the members of the family in the trying hour, and so, in a less degree, those passages in them which most deservedly recognised her devotion to him both in sickness and health, her valuable assistance in many of his official duties, tending to the prolongation of his precious life, its comfort and its usefulness.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1903/321