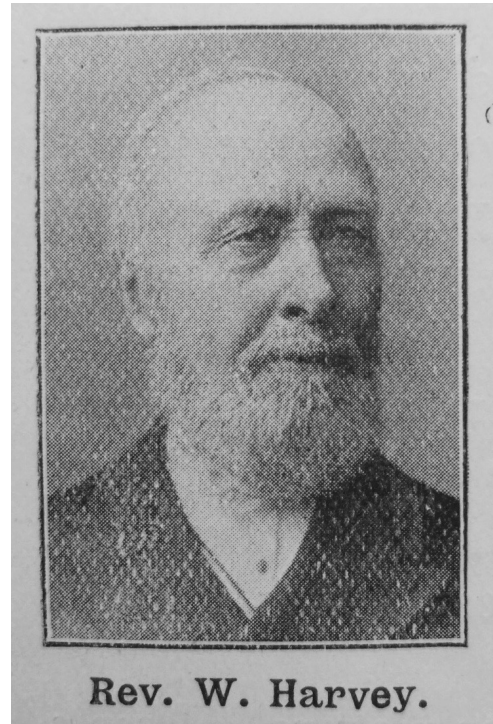


Rev. William Harvey

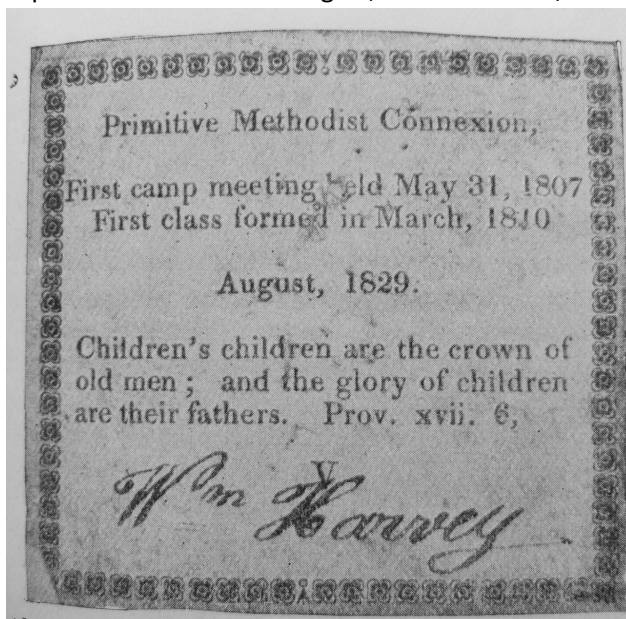
Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by L.J. Harvey

THE REV. WILLIAM HARVEY was born October 30th, 1811, and entered into rest on September 27th, 1902, having almost attained the patriarchal age of four score and eleven years, and for some time he claimed the distinction of being the senior minister in the Primitive Methodist Church, having spent over sixty-eight years in the ranks of the itinerant preachers.

He was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Harvey, and first saw the light of life in the busy black country of Bilston. Not much is known of his antecedents, though he often spoke of his mother as a saintly model woman, who took him when a child to the services of our Church which were held chiefly in the open air for there were no Primitive Methodist chapels in the early years of the last century, and also in a room connected with an inn known as the "Noah's Ark," at Round Oak, Brierley Hill, Staffordshire. For those days he received a fair education, and was quite an expert and fine penman. During his boyhood his mother died, which to him was a great loss, the other members of his family having no religious inclinations. While in his teens he heard Hugh Bourne preach from "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and soon after he joined the Church his deceased mother loved so well. His first-class ticket, a reproduction of which we give, bears the date, 1829. The following year he became a local preacher



Rev. W. Harvey.



in the Darlaston Circuit, which then covered all area now occupied by seventeen circuits. He then held a good and lucrative position in an iron works, and commenced a career which promised to lead on to fortune. He married, as he afterwards wrote, a most amiable and Christian young person, but their happy wedded life soon closed, his beloved only lived a few months.

Not long after her decease, the Rev. George Bagley, who was a very powerful preacher, told him the Lord had taken his wife because he had refused "to go out to travel," as entering the ministry was then designated,

and unless he obeyed the next Divine call, something worse would happen to him. Whether the young man regarded his minister as a prophet of God, we know not, but very possibly he did, for in those days men believed that God ruled the affairs of the Church. However, he did not wish to "run

before he was sent," but promised that if he were convinced that the Lord had need of him in the home-mission field - all the circuits were then more or less mission fields - he would go, and do his best to enlighten and evangelise the grossly dark villages and towns in this country. In January, 1834, the redoubtable John Ride, superintendent of the Berkshire and Wiltshire Mission, known as Shefford Circuit, came into Staffordshire, seeking young men for his colleagues. Although there were more than twenty regular travelling preachers on the ground, more men were needed for the opening up of fresh places. William Harvey was recommended, and in March of the same year, without any kind of examination or preliminary training, he literally left all and followed the voice of the Great Head of the Church, and went into the south of England. He knew his remuneration would not amount to a tithe of what he had been in receipt of for years, but he was prepared to suffer the loss of all things that he might win men for Christ. Mounting the stage-coach in Birmingham, he rode to Hungerford, via Oxford - railways had not yet been laid down in the midland counties.

His reception was not the most encouraging. He heard his superintendent's wife say her husband must have been a fool to go so far and bring such a delicate-looking young man from a good home, into that wild and persecuting country; in less than six months he would run home. An old official said, "Thee should'st have tarried in Jericho till thy beard had grown." But the small, quiet, juvenile-looking man had some grit and grace, and he mentally resolved that "Mrs. Ride should, for once at least, prove to be a false prophetess, for, having put his hand to the plough he would never look back." He had for his co-adjutors Edward Bishop, Thomas Russell, George Price, and such-like heroic men, who suffered imprisonment and untold privation for conscience sake.

This young man was often commissioned to "break up new ground," which meant the establishment of congregations and societies where Primitive Methodism was unknown, or only known by repute, and often by evil report, for they were then everywhere spoken against. Frequently with no one to assist in any way, after visiting every house in the neighbourhood, he would conduct service on the village green or in the market square. The poor people were then mostly ignorant, ill-mannered, and very degraded; large numbers would often gather to hear what the stranger had to say, "and lewd fellows of the baser sort" would interrupt. It was not an unusual occurrence for the preacher to be pelted with stones and addled eggs, and sometimes guns were fired over his head while he was preaching in the open air on a dark winter's night. More than once he was driven out of a place, and followed by a hooting mob, some of whom would beat tin cans and others sing ribald songs. Such experiences tried the mettle of the missionary, but he would repeat his visits to these places, and often persecutors became converts, and miniature Sauls of Tarsus were rejoiced over, as they cried, "Lord, what wilt Thou have us to do."

Such was the success that attended the missionaries, that when W. Harvey's probation of four years ended, and he sought admission into full connexion, the increase of the membership was 684. It was in the Shefford Circuit that he met the lady who became his wife. She, like himself, was an itinerant preacher, for women at that time were stationed to Circuits by the Conference as well as men, and Jane Woolford, whose name appears in "Petty's History of the Connexion," was one of the most popular and successful female preachers.

They were married in 1838, and for fifty-three years she was his true helpmeet.

In June this interesting young couple went to the city of Bristol. No married minister had previously been there. Mr. Harvey writes: "I found we had to live in furnished lodgings, with only one room to live in night and day." What a beginning! There is no word of complaint. They lived not for this world. The churches grew, and a comfortable house was soon taken and furnished. Lower Easton chapel was rented, and retained for forty years, when the society and congregation removed to the spacious premises in Eastville, and formed the nucleus of that now most magnificent church.

The other circuits he ably superintended were: Faringdon, Mitcheldever, Poole, Frome, Pontypool, Hereford, Redruth (twice), Tredegar (twice), St. Austell, St. Ives, Pillawell, Monmouth (twice), Radstock, St. Day, and Aberdare, all in South and West of England and in South Wales.

The success of some of these stations was really phenomenal. When he administered the affairs of Tredegar circuit, in the fifties, it ran into three counties, and now there are ten distinct circuits on the ground. In 1880, when he had travelled forty-six years, he sought superannuation, and reported that the net increase of members during those years was 2,263. Is not this a marvellous record? Few have been able to render such an account of their stewardship. The most striking scenes and successes he witnessed were among the miners and fisherfolk of Cornwall, and the colliers of South Wales. Many hundreds were saved and added to the church, not a few of whom became worthy officials, and their children and grandchildren are with us in vast numbers to this day.

Some who were gathered in during stirring revivals which he led are in the ministry in this and other countries, and in our own and other churches. He had charge of the erection and enlargement of many chapels, but delighted more in spiritual church building than in the construction of material edifices. He was a most assiduous pastor. Hugh Bourne spent some weeks with Mr. Harvey, and he often visited every house in a village, and partly from Mr. Bourne he got the cue for pastoral work. As a preacher he was emphatically a man of *one book*, his sermons were full of rich, and *apropos* passages of Scripture, which aptly illustrated and illuminated his points. The longer he remained in a circuit the more his sermons were appreciated.

He was an excellent disciplinarian, and a most attentive and accurate business man; no detail was ever forgotten. In the Bristol District, of former times, where he spent his ministerial life, he was regarded as second to none for correctness, and neat calligraphy.

He was Secretary of the District Meeting at least a dozen times, G.C.D. on four occasions, and went as delegate to five Conferences. Doubtless he would have been a permanent member of Conference for many years, had the interpretation of the Deed Poll, which was received at the Sheffield Conference in 1900, always obtained. Though he became a supernumary twenty-two years prior to his decease, and gave up the responsibilities and toils of the full ministry, he never left the *active* ministry, for until a few months of his decease he wearied not in well doing. He spent eleven years in Merthyr Tydvil, where in 1891 his beloved wife died, after which sorrowful event, he abode for ten years with his youngest son, the Rev. L.J. Harvey, and rendered most valuable assistance both in the pulpit and in the homes of the people; and many in Tredegar, Hanley, Darlaston and Northwich revere his name and cherish his memory.

Many extracts from letters received since his decease may be given, but a few brief ones must suffice. His last colleague, the Rev. B. Walton writes:- "In my opinion he was not only a pioneer of our church, but a master builder as well."

Rev. Alfred Smith says:- "God has called to himself one of the best and most faithful of his servants. I have, and always have had the sincerest respect and admiration for his beautiful character."

Rev. J. Hodges says:- "Personally I know no man in our ministry who has had such a splendid record of successful and *abiding* work."

And the Rev. J. Odell, writing to a son says:- "So your heroic and noble father has passed home to God. I knew him in those brave days of old, when he administered the affairs of old Tredegar circuit. He was then a man of rare industry and faithful service."

We need not indulge in further quotations. In April 1901, he elected to go and live with his only daughter, that he might be near his wife's grave. He preached several times after going to Dowlais; in fact he did so until he was over ninety years of age. For a few months his memory failed, and his natural powers gradually declined, though to the comfort and joy of his family, he did not lose his reason. One of his last efforts was to read the 91st Psalm. This he could not do, but when it was read to him, he said he could hear it, and if he could not, he knew it and many other Psalms "by heart." The final verse, which was literally verified in his case, reads: "With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation." The doctor said he had no disease, nor did he suffer much pain. He was simply spent out, nature was exhausted, and he fell asleep. He was buried in Pant Cemetery in the grave which received his wife, eleven years previously. His minister, the Rev. Thomas Wood, impressively officiated at the funeral. His family of one daughter and four sons hope for re-union by and by.

References

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