

## The Golden Wedding of the Rev. W.R. and Mrs. Widdowson

Transcription of article in the Christian Messenger by Thomas Jackson

In these days when, in addition to the four seasons known to our sires, there is added, or super-added, a fifth, known as the "silly season," the question "Is marriage a failure?" is even submitted to persons whose sanity is undisputed. "How to be happy though married" is the startling discovery of the modern penny-a-liner type of scribe, whose chief stock-in-trade consists of chaff and effeminacy. The New Testament teaching respecting marriage and the sanctity of nuptial ties, is so much goody-goody advice which is out of date. If a golden wedding occurred with them it would have to be celebrated in sackcloth and ashes. What a welcome contrast is supplied by the servants of the Lord, who, for upwards of half a century, have lived in the fear and love of God; walked in the way of His commandments; retained an unbroken fellowship with the Church of their early choice; made Christ the Head of their house and His religion the



dominant influence in their home. To the comparative few who are spared through fifty years of married life, and permitted to celebrate their golden wedding, this privilege and honour were recently claimed by the Rev. W.R. and Mrs. Widdowson.

In May last Queen's Road Church, Watford, was the scene of this unique and joyous golden wedding celebration. There were the bridal bouquet, the golden wedding cake, the floral garlands, choice hot-house plants and blooms, neatly printed or written inscriptions and mottoes offering their silent yet suggestive contribution; the organ supplied the exhilarating strains of the "Wedding March"; friends ministerial and lay representing the Primitive Methodist and other churches and organisations, in hymns, prayers, and congratulatory addresses expressed the feelings and sentiments of gratitude and respect the large body of friends shared. The venerable couple, while grateful to their many friends for all the kind words spoken, and the tokens of appreciation and respect shown them, yet found the source of their joy to be in the favour, the loving-kindness and the promises of the Heavenly Father. The accompanying photo was taken on the day of their golden wedding, and the following particulars respecting them will be of interest:—

Mr. Widdowson commenced his ministry in the Belper Circuit in 1849. His salary was about £4 per quarter with about thirty shillings additional for board and lodgings. His salary and allowance during the whole of his probation did not exceed these amounts. It seems, however, that probationers then, as now, regardless of whether salaries were small or otherwise, were of opinion that it was "not good to be alone," as while they had an eye to duty they had also one on interest, and so made engagements which could only end in marriage. Mr. Widdowson was no exception to the rule, for

we find, that a month after he had finished probation, he was married to Miss Shepherd, the daughter of a prosperous, intelligent, and godly farmer, who had nobly stood in defence of our cause in times of persecution and difficulty. He was married to Miss Shepherd in Canaan Street Chapel Nottingham, by the late Rev. John Dickenson.

For fifty years he has had in Mrs. Widdowson a true help-meet. By her sterling piety she has won the esteem and respect of all who have become acquainted with her, and in manifold ways she has rendered splendid service to the Church of Christ and Primitive Methodism. While travelling in the Nottingham Circuit, the newly-married couple had as salary nineteen shillings per week, but owing to the distress that followed the Crimean War they had to go short at times of even this small allowance. They next removed to Spalding and Holbeach, which had just previously been made a branch of the Donnington Circuit. At that time it was an exceedingly poor station, the minister's salary was small, even for those days, and bread was sold at thirteen pence for the four-pound loaf. During subsequent years our friends travelled on poor and difficult stations, but invariably succeeded in improving their material, numerical, and spiritual state. On one of the early stations of his ministry Mr. Widdowson occasionally walked forty miles and preached four times on a Sunday. He was successful in missioning a considerable number of places.

During his ministry in the Haltwhistle Circuit he built three chapels, one each on the Penrith and Buckingham stations, erected a schoolroom on the Watford station, enlarged Street Chapel on the Glastonbury station, and also erected a schoolroom there. On the whole of these erections there is not £200 of debt remaining.

From the time of the formation of the Home Missions into a separate District, up to the date of his superannuation, he had been closely associated with their work. The highest offices in his District have been worthily filled by him, and he has several times represented it in Conference. For many years he was a member of the General Missionary Committee and rendered exceptional and gratuitous clerical assistance to successive missionary secretaries. He has a practical knowledge of the Home Missions of Primitive Methodism unequalled by any other minister of our Church. He is a loyal Primitive Methodist, and thinks highly of the Connexional worthies who have preceded him to the heavenly home; often talks of the good old times and rejoices in the growth and progress of his Church.

He is in thorough sympathy with all that relates to the prosperity and well-being of the Church today, and is young in heart if venerable in years. He takes a delight in the duties of his office as a Custodian and Registrar of the Connexional Documents that are kept at the Whitechapel Institute, and makes a pleasure of what to some with less antiquarian tastes would be a drudgery. Our friend has had a long and useful ministry in our Church, and both he and his excellent wife have a worthy and honourable record that they may well prize, and their friends be proud of. Their children and grand-children are treading in their footsteps. They are not only filling honourable positions in business life, but are occupying prominent positions in the Church, and actively engaged in Christian and Temperance work. Of the grand-children, three are local preachers, and each one is a life abstainer.

The influence of Mrs. Widdowson's unobtrusive, but robust and winsome piety explains this commendable and comforting character of their family life. They have known some of the bitters as well as some of the sweets of life. The dark shadow of bereavement has more than once fallen upon their home, and dear ones have passed on before, who were expected to follow them to the homeland. Yet through the dark days, as in those of sunshine, they have kept hopeful, submissive and trustful. The golden wedding is past, yet the eventide is light with them, and our prayer is that they may be spared for some years to their family and the Church.

### **References**

*Christian Messenger* 1904/345