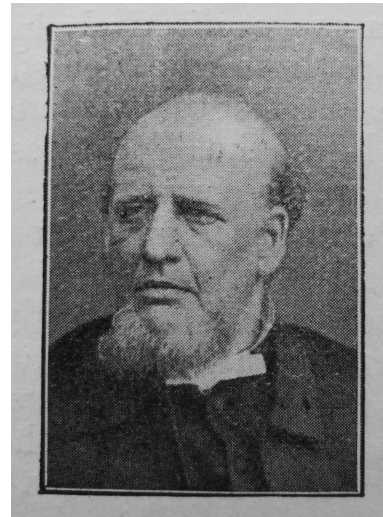


Charles Henry Boden

Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by S.A. Barron

The passing on Sunday, March 26th, 1905, of the Rev. C.H. Boden, of Loughborough, was the removal of one of the few survivors of a band of ministers, massive, able, strong men, whose natural powers and splendid devotion did much to make the old Nottingham District a beacon light in the "middle period" of our Connexional history. John Brownson, John Dickenson, Robert Parks, William Jefferson, Samuel Antliff, Charles Lacey, John Barfoot, William Cutts, William Price are names that will not speedily die. And of this galaxy of ministerial stars, Charles Henry Boden was one of the most brilliant. None was more generally admired and beloved; none exercised a more magnetic ministry; none had more markedly the inimitable touch of genius. When the writer was a youth, Mr. Boden's name, though his course had then passed its zenith, and the shadows were lengthening, was a name to conjure with, and the descriptions he then heard of marvellous sermons did not a little to quicken his own mind. And very numerous are the testimonies of those who came immediately under the influence of Mr. Boden's ministry.



The Rev. J.H. Saxton writes: "He moved me when I was a lad far more than any other, and I burned to enter the kingdom and preach the Gospel."

Mr. T. Lawrence, the Treasurer of the Foreign Missionary Fund, says: "When he travelled in Leicester, although I was but a young man, I received great kindness from him, and not a little inspiration."

These represent a host who owed to Mr. Boden's influence their best aspirations, and, in not a few cases, "even their own self besides." This great ministry was actively exercised during the long period of forty-two years, in some of the most important circuits, and largest centres of population, everywhere leading to filled chapels, great revivals of religion, numerous and remarkable conversions, prosperous churches, and life-long friendships. Then followed a long even-tide, a gradual failure of physical, though not of mental power, "a great fight of afflictions," bravely borne, and, at the last, a beautiful and peaceful "falling on sleep" on Sunday, the day on which he had always hoped he might be permitted to die. So he "came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season."

Charles Henry Boden was born at Walsall in 1825, but was brought up at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, to which place, in his childhood, the family removed. At the Ashby Grammar School he received a sound education, becoming a good Latinist, and acquiring an intellectual discipline and furnishing that laid the foundation of his later efficiency. Upon this foundation he diligently built. He was hard student, and extensive reader, giving himself to the study of Hebrew and Greek till he became able to read the Scriptures in the original. His father was a Salopian by birth; his mother a member of a

well-known Walsall family. They were of good social position, and Wesleyan Methodists. Their son, however, felt drawn by the evangelistic fervour of our people, and became an attendant upon Primitive Methodist worship.

In our old chapel on the Ashby Green he was converted, while yet in his teens. His gifts and attainments led to an immediate call to speak in public, followed, not long afterwards, by the further call to become a minister. After supplying for nine months, without pay, on his home circuit, he was stationed in the Ilkeston Circuit under the superintendency of the Rev. Thomas Roberts. He was married January 26th, 1854, nine years after his entrance into the ministry, to the daughter of Mr. S. Evans, the marriage taking place at the Canaan Street Chapel, Nottingham:

It proved to be ideally happy. Mrs. Boden's saintly character, amiable spirit, wifely affection, and quiet but untiring Christian service, rendered her a true helpmeet to her gifted husband. In days when salaries were small, and difficulties many, she made great sacrifices for his comfort, and to help the struggling churches under his care. She had her reward in her husband's devotion, and in the knowledge that both his health and his success were due in no small degree to her loving care, and to the happy home she made for him.

Mr. Boden travelled at Ilkeston, Derby, Ashby-de-la-Zouch (twice), Nottingham First (twice), Nottingham Second (twice), Sheffield, Leicester, and Keighley First. The last named was his only station outside the old Nottingham District. On these stations, he never had a decrease, but, on the other hand, reported, in some cases, very large increases. Empty chapels were filled; struggling causes extricated from difficulty; despairing workers filled with hope. In the Loughborough Circuit, for instance, in the fifties, he found things at the lowest ebb. Before he left the Swan Street Chapel was crowded; the whole circuit revived; and a basis laid for a progress that has been unbroken in all the later years. At Nottingham he was instrumental in the conversion of "Jemmy" Dupe, for so lengthened a period, the celebrated open-air preacher of the Nottingham Market Place. When, on one occasion, in one of the slums near to Canaan Street, Mr. Boden was threatened by some roughs, Jemmy put his arm around him, and said, "If you try to touch him, you will have to reckon with me." By Jemmy Dupe, the redoubtable prize fighter, Bendigo, was brought to the Saviour, becoming as notable a champion for Christ as he had been for the devil.

Early in his ministry, Mr. Boden met with the venerable Hugh Bourne, who came to the East Bridgford branch of the Nottingham First Circuit, then under Mr. Boden's charge. Upon the young minister, the eccentric, but saintly old man made a deep and lasting impression. "The most apostolic man I ever met," he once said to the writer. "He taught me that, if I would be a successful minister, I must be spiritualised every day." It was that great lesson, which made the young man's many endowments, destined as they were to bring him to the front, to be of value to himself and the churches. It kept his aim right. He preached and lived to save.

Mr. Boden was a born preacher. The pulpit was his throne. He was an artist in words, and an adept at "putting things" forcefully. He had a fine imagination and a vivid sense of the beautiful and sublime. When, in his pulpit utterances, the fire burned, as it so often did, he would, as the enkindling vision flashed upon him, draw himself up and run his hands through his hair, and those who knew the preacher listened then for the stream of beautiful and thrilling thought, couched in

choicest language, which they knew was coming. He had a good presence, a clear enunciation, an instinct for the picturesque and dramatic presentation of truth, and a deliberate and most impressive delivery. He had keen discernment, was an astute debater, an able exponent or defender of a case. He excelled in the management of a business meeting, and knew how to plead a cause effectively in Connexional courts, while those who denied the faith were "not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." He was in constant demand for special services, and was often called by his church to speak on important and representative occasions.

He wielded also "the pen of the ready writer," and contributed many articles of great interest to our Connexional literature. If eloquence be "thought in motion," the power of swaying men, "the tongue of fire," then was Charles Henry Boden "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures," one of the greatest "Masters of Assemblies" that God ever gave to the service of our church.

But he was more than a great preacher. He was a wise circuit leader, a strong superintendent, patient and firm; and withal, a sympathetic pastor and true friend in the homes of the people. Large numbers were indebted to him for kind interest, wise counsel, and, when it was necessary, the helping hand. He had great social gifts, was a ready conversationalist, with considerable powers of description, narration, humour, satire and repartee. And all was adorned with "the white flower of a blameless life." He was a man of exalted Christian character, manly, upright, honourable, a hater of shams, meannesses, and trickeries of every kind. He "abhorred that which was evil, and clave to that which was good."

It was as a preacher, teacher, friend, and helper of men that he did the work of his life. He did not accept the frequently offered administrative honours of his church. His modest and retiring disposition, and his feeling that both his vocation and the most important work he could do was that of a circuit minister led him to decline positions that were often pressed upon him. He wisely concentrated himself upon the inspirational ministry for which he was so eminently gifted.

Failing health compelled Mr. Boden's retirement from the active ministry in 1887. He settled in the Loughborough Circuit, where for a time he was able to render valuable service. Mrs. Boden predeceased him by eight years, passing away after a severe affliction in 1896.

Her death was so heavy a blow that it seemed for a time as if he would soon follow her. He rallied, however, and amidst growing infirmity and great affliction was comforted by the devoted care of his only child, Mrs. Gilbert Tucker, the wife of the esteemed steward of the Loughborough Circuit. His mental vigour remained unimpaired to the last, ever and again, in conversation, flashes of the old brilliance manifesting themselves. The writer saw him frequently in his last years, and visited him not long before the end. His evidence was always clear, his assurance unshaken.

The Rev. E. Hancox, his pastor at the time of his death, says: "I visited him many times, and found him always living in the same bright and settled calm. He lay like a ship at anchor, waiting for the tide to carry him into the heavenly port." His last words were "Annie" (his daughter's name) and "all sunshine." He then lost consciousness, and on the following Sunday passed peacefully away.

In the presence of a large number of ministers, representative officials and friends from old circuits, as well as a great assemblage from the town in which he had lived so many years, had done so valuable a work, and was so highly respected, his remains were laid to rest in the Loughborough Cemetery, on March 29th.

“He, being dead, yet speaketh.” Even as the present is the outgrowth of the past, so has the past much to teach, and even more to stimulate, the present. Charles Henry Boden is with God. But his name and story form a permanent part of a great and noble Connexional tradition: a tradition of holy passion, evangelistic power, pastoral devotion, and unstinting self-sacrifice: a tradition to the illuminating suggestions and the inspiring lessons of which the ministry of this later time will do well to take heed.

References

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