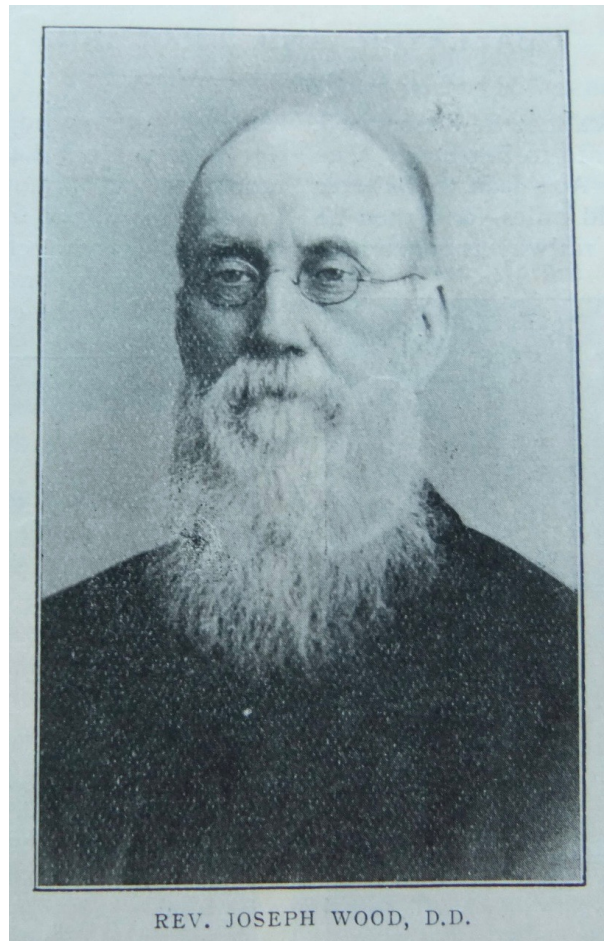


Transcription of article in the Christian Messenger by H. Bickerstaffe Kendall in a series 'Preachers of Thirty Years Ago'

As I look back, it seems as though I had known Joseph Wood from my own boyhood days, right along until the "bend of the road" was reached and he disappeared from the eyes of us all. As an occasional visitor at my fathers house, his physical stature was of course the first thing that drew attention. But soon there was added to this the feeling that it was pleasant to be in his company—pleasant to be noticed by him and then to sit silent, content to drink in the spirit of the occasion and listen to his bright and cheerful conversation that was not wanting in wit and sarcasm. Then as opportunities offered for hearing him preach or listening to his platform addresses—like the famous one on Africa—there came the conviction that Joseph Wood was big in other ways than in stature; that he had a big brain and was undoubtedly a clever man. As knowledge deepened by long acquaintance merging into friendship there remained, and still remains, the assurance that he had a heart commensurate with his stature and undoubted intellectual ability and adroitness. Bigness in this threefold sense



belonged to him. He was so big that though ministers, as we have seen, are soon forgotten, Joseph Wood will not soon be engulfed by the waters of Lethe. The active ministry of Dr. Wood fell between the years 1851 and 1894, and the history of our Church during the important period comprised within those years cannot be written without the mention of his name, or due recognition being given of his work. So that he is sure of his memorial. We are not presuming to write Dr. Wood's life, but simply giving our own impressions of the man. Yet that the man himself was a very considerable Connexional figure of his time will be evident from the Conference resolution which was passed on the occasion of his death. As that resolution was drawn up and moved by the writer of these lines it is of a piece with the rest of the fabric, and needs not to be printed with inverted commas. Enough if it be given a paragraph to itself. It is simply a picture in outline, as the writer conceived it should be drawn, of Dr. Wood's career as a Primitive Methodist preacher, and which the Grimsby Conference of 1899 saw good to endorse.

The Conference desires to express and place on record its deep sense of loss in the death, during its sessions, of the Rev. Joseph Wood, D.D. His early ministry is associated with memories of the founders and fathers of our Connexion, for whom he ever cherished grateful reverence. He was speedily recognised as an able preacher, an efficient platform speaker, and a capable administrator, who did his part in shaping the polity of the Connexion. For many years he was a conspicuous figure in our business meetings, and was ever shrewd, ready and interesting in debate. He did much to bring about the establishment of our Sunday School Union; for seven years he was its efficient General Secretary, and doubtless largely contributed to help forward the valuable organisation

during its formative period. Dr. Wood was ever deeply interested in the Hymnody of the Connexion, and in the higher education of its ministry; he was himself no mean scholar, and well read, especially in Methodist Theology and History; and the Connexion manifested its sense of his labours and gifts by electing him to the important office of Principal of the Manchester College, as well as to the Presidential chair in 1882. He carried with him into his all too early retirement the sympathy and love of his brethren, and retained to the last all his interest in the affairs of the Connexion, and his solicitude for the purity of its doctrine, and his godly jealousy lest our Church should lose any of the spirit of fervent evangelism which marked its early history. In our sadness we cannot but rejoice and be grateful that God granted such a minister to our Church, and permitted him to do such a good day's work. Next to the Divine consolation which we pray may in this hour of gloom be richly imparted to the bereaved ones, may the thought of what he was, what he achieved, and how much we loved him bring comfort to their hearts.

The foregoing sketch glances at several of the outstanding traits of Dr. Wood's intellectual make-up—traits which will bear to be further dwelt upon. His interest in the early history alike of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism was very marked, especially with that history as associated with villages and with persons of distinctive individuality. To him the history of Methodism was by preference looked at biographically and, we may add, topographically. He loved to realise the surroundings of the men and women whose heroic and consistent lives had done so much for Methodism. He felt with some degree of concern that, with such claims on our remembrance, these men and women were in danger of being forgotten. Already many facts and incidents were irrecoverably lost. It was only a poor salvage at the best that could now be reclaimed. All the more need was there that we should gather together what we could and be quick about it, for soon it would be too late.

We see Dr. Wood's proclivities showing themselves in the lines of his literary productiveness. His interest in Hymnody has already been touched upon. He was one of the best equipped and most assiduous members of the Committee which prepared the *Hymnal*. His taste in this direction is reflected in the article on "Christmas Hymns and Carols," which he contributed to the *ALDERSGATE* for 1894, followed during the next year by articles on "New Year Hymns and Poems," and "Springtime and Easter Hymns." With Hugh Bourne and William Clowes he had shaken hands and conversed: so in the *ALDERSGATE* (1897) we have "Reminiscences of my First and Last Interview with Hugh Bourne," and "Some Portraits and Letters of William Clowes." He had unbounded respect for the memory of Mr. Beckerlegge, who had unaccountably almost become "forgotten as a dead man out of mind." It was he who, when young Joseph Wood was greatly perplexed as to the choice he should make of a life-calling, had decided the dip of the balance. "There is not the money in the ministry," said the noble old man, "but there is glory; and you must go in for the glory." Dr. Wood never forgot his old superintendent, and it is but the truth to say that his article (1896) "A Tribute to the Memory of Fred. Adolphus Beckerlegge" was the mean of connexionally rehabilitating the good man. The same can be said as in John Bywater, another undeservedly forgotten worthy. The three articles he wrote (1898) on "Recollections of the late Rev. John Bywater and Early Chapel Building in Hull," were highly appreciated. We remember having received at the time a letter from the late Mr. William Beckworth, in which he expressed his satisfaction that John Bywater's memory had been so triumphantly vindicated in Dr. Wood's articles. Other papers which showed the same characteristic bent were those on Alderman Smethurst of Grimsby (1894) and William Sissons of Hull (1897).

Dr. Wood never wrote anything more charming or self-revealing than the two papers on "The Historic Villages of Methodism (1894) and "The Story of Methodism in the Village of My Boyhood"(1896). The two villages specially dealt with are Monyash and Cheddleton. Dr. Wood was himself village-born, having first seen the light in a lonely farmstead on wild Morridge, and he grew up to man's estate amongst the hills and dales of Derbyshire, where Methodism has struck its roots so deep. He loved these villages. Their scenery was indelibly engraven on his mind, and he loved to return at intervals to refresh his memory with the sight of the old familiar objects, to renew old acquaintanceships and to talk over old times. He writes with "picturesque sensibility" of the sturdy Methodists of the villages, and in all he wrote Nature was the background of their activities. Like Goliath of Gath he was "a man of war from his youth." There was not a discussion or controversy going on in the Connexion but he took a hand in it—whether it was the Equalization Fund, the removal of District boundaries, or whatever it might be. But he was not a dour fighter. He fought as though he enjoyed it, and was sure that others enjoyed it too. Like Taillefer who went into battle at Hastings singing and throwing up his sword and catching it again—so one thinks of Dr. Wood in controversy.

His last letter to me was written by his amanuensis little more than two months before his death. It is too sacred and intimate to be given here. Its last sentence was the autograph of a life:—" May God save the Connexion."

References

Christian Messenger 1913/296