

The Rills and Rivers of F.W. Boreham's Preaching



A lake near the current site of the Theydon Bois Baptist Church in England, where F.W. Boreham served as student pastor.

ABSTRACT

Frank William Boreham (1871-1959) had a significant influence on Baptist churches throughout New Zealand and Australia. He was a noted essayist, author and minister, who served Baptist churches in Mosgiel (N.Z.), Hobart (Tasmania, Australia.) and Armadale (Victoria, Australia.) This article is devoted to examining Boreham's earliest sermon manuscripts, taken from a collection held by the Baptist Union of Victoria. No other scholarly research has been done to date on these works. The sermons derive from Boreham's period as a minister in England from 1891 to 1894, prior to him leaving for New Zealand in 1895. These sermons were delivered at a variety of locations around London, such as: Brixton and Theydon Bois. The task of this research has been to examine what kind of influences were prevalent in the manuscripts. The paper finds that the following factors shaped Boreham's early preaching: a love of nature and stories, a desire to be

practical, a strongly evangelistic theology, ministry models such as F.B. Meyer, Joseph Parker and C.H. Spurgeon, training at Spurgeon's College and experience as a Student Minister at Theydon Bois. The conclusion drawn is that at this early stage, Boreham had not yet found a way to bring his distinctive personality and preaching style into his messages. It would not be until F.W. Boreham started his ministry in New Zealand and Australia that he would allow his unique voice to be shared from the pulpit.

Introduction

Reflecting on his earliest years as an impressionable boy and adolescent in the nineteenth century, the Baptist minister and writer F.W. Boreham (1871-1959) once commented that, 'my life resembled a lake into which many rills and rivers were emptying themselves, yet which had no outlet for its ever-accumulating waters.'¹ In time, F.W. Boreham would find a means of expression, using the pulpits of the Mosgiel, Hobart and Armadale Baptist churches, and his pen to write editorials for the *Otago Daily Times*, the *Hobart Mercury* and the *Melbourne Age*, together with fifty-five devotional books. During his ministry at Hobart from 1906 to 1916 this outlet became well formed and clearly shaped through the landscape of Boreham's life.² He had discovered a unique way of preaching and moulding his influences together.

This article will not be devoted to the development of Boreham's polished preaching style, or his many essays and editorials, but rather will explore his rills and rivers. It will aim to examine the early factors that shaped F.W. Boreham's preaching from his days in England and the discernable impact they had upon his early sermons. These formative years from his birth in 1871 to his leaving England in 1895 were to have a significant bearing on both the style and the content of his later preaching in New Zealand and Australia. Boreham believed that the first twenty years of his life left an indelible imprint upon him.³

¹ F.W. Boreham, *My Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (London: The Epworth Press, 1940), 70.

² Boreham said that: 'It was at Hobart that I found myself. From the moment at which I entered the pulpit for the first time I realized that I was preaching with a confidence and an enjoyment that made my ministry a perfect revelry.' In: Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 183.

³ Boreham wrote that 'Southey used to say... however long a man's life, the first twenty years are by far the bigger half of it.' *My Pilgrimage*, 91.

The majority of the seventeen manuscripts used in this research were taken from a student pastorate that Boreham undertook at Theydon Bois, a small village outside of London, in 1893-4, but there are also sermons from 1891-2. These earlier sermons were delivered at the church near the Wandsworth Rd Railway Station, the Park Crescent Congregational Church in Clapham, Kenyon Baptist in Brixton and at Forest Row. These sermons provide a valuable cross-section of F.W. Boreham's early ministry and reveal a variety of rills and rivers that were beginning to mould Boreham's preaching style and substance. Some of these influences were evident from the beginning as controlling factors throughout the manuscripts. Others were more like rills- barely formed and just starting to take shape.

Nature.

Frank William Boreham was born to Francis and Fanny Boreham on the 3rd of March 1871. He was raised in the village of Tunbridge Wells, Kent, which is located an hour's train ride south of London. The captivating beauty of F.W. Boreham's surroundings in the Kent of his childhood was to have an influence upon his preaching. He encountered nature in a variety of ways.

The experience of walking to church had just as profound an effect on him as did each service itself. It was a place to encounter God. His father Francis was a keen walker, and on many occasions he would find a new way to walk to the Sunday worship service. Each moment in nature was an experience to be savoured for the young man.⁴ It was sacramental, a place resonant with God and grandeur. The family also went out for walks on Saturdays. Francis⁵ would season these hikes by means of using his 'racy conversation about nature.'⁶ The key was to observe one's surroundings.

Later, when Boreham returned to Tunbridge Wells on a trip from New Zealand, he described its surrounds as follows:

⁴ He wrote that: 'We always set out...in a perfect fever of curiosity and every step of the way was made brimful of interest.' - in F.W. Boreham, *The Other Side of the Hill* (London: The Epworth Press, 1917), 113.

⁵ His Father worked in a local legal firm and the family grew up in relative comfort. Their home at 134 Upper Grosvenor Road had eight rooms and two stories. Crago, *The Story of F.W. Boreham* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1961), 19.

⁶ Crago, *The Story*, 21.

Its sylvan valleys, bespangled with primroses and bluebells and violets, its fragrant hedgerows aglow with the hawthorn and the honeysuckle; its exquisite parks carpeted with an infinite variety of ferns and flowers; its verdant and undulating common...its magnificent forests; its romantic walks; its arching avenues; its giant rocks and dainty mosses...⁷

These are the notes of someone who as a child was an observer, who paid attention to his environment. However, although nature was an influence on his preaching, it did take time to develop. It was not so much that he referred to nature extensively throughout these manuscripts, as nature taught him to be curious.

Boreham valued the instinct of curiosity highly.⁸ It was to become an invaluable tool both for the preparation and content of many sermons. He was able to draw spiritual merit or value from a simple phrase or word. His sermons sought to probe the hidden depths of spiritual matters.

The natural world gave Boreham a curious spirit. It was detailed and contained surprises that could be discovered around the next corner. For Boreham the scriptures held a similar kind of detail. He was able to take, and sometimes even twist, a single phrase or sentence from a text into several different meanings. He had a photographer's eye for minutia, for hidden shapes and colours. Of course sometimes this would not exactly accord with what the text itself was saying. For example on the 10th of December 1893 he preached a sermon at Theydon Bois⁹, which was based on a simple sentence of scripture: 'Beware! Lest thou forget the Lord.' (Deut. 6:12). From these six words he constructed five points: 'to forget God: is to miss the chief object of life, is Satan's most subtle temptation, is to abandon hope, is to forget all that's worth remembering, is impossible.'¹⁰ One sentence had been not only expounded, but expanded as well, to cover a variety of topics. It had unfolded and opened up into new possibilities, like so many things in nature.

⁷ F.W. Boreham, *Loose Leaves: From The Journal of my Voyage Round the World* (Mosgiel: 'Taieri Advocate' Office, 1902), 44.

⁸ Boreham commented that 'the world owes more than it can ever acknowledge to the instinct of curiosity, and so do I.' F.W. Boreham, *The Home of the Echoes* (London: The Epworth Press, 1921), 25.

⁹ F.W. Boreham. 1893. 'Beware! Lest thou forget the Lord.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 10 December, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

¹⁰ Boreham, 'Beware!'

Stories

While Francis Boreham imparted to his son a love of nature, his mother gave him a passion for stories. Fanny Boreham revelled in tales from the Bible and beyond. As a storyteller, she had a profound influence upon her young son's impressionable mind.¹¹ Every Sunday night Fanny would recount her tales around the fireplace. Here characters would come to life.

This regular Sunday night ritual fostered a deep love of storytelling in F.W. Boreham, that would later become a vital feature of his own preaching style. He saw his mother as a masterful story teller, who was able to hold her small audience spellbound. Faith and stories were linked for Boreham right from the very beginning. From his mother he learnt that stories were able to animate and inform faith- to give it life.¹²

F.W. Boreham often enjoyed introducing dramatic tales into his sermons. When he preached on the text that 'there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ,'¹³ he drew his listeners in by having them picture a courtroom setting. He summoned up the image of a hushed courtroom waiting for a verdict- guilty or not guilty. Every person in the court was on the edge of their seats. Satan stood as chief prosecutor, sins were the convicting evidence, the jury was each person's conscience and the final sentence from the Judge was: 'depart from me.' Even reading the manuscript it is easy to imagine the gavel being delicately poised above the judge's head as he was about to deliver his verdict. Just at the moment of condemnation Christ entered the room to release the congregation from its 'chains, fetters and manacles.'¹⁴ They were to be free forever.

¹¹ In this regard Boreham shared something in common with one of his models for ministry, George Augustus Selwyn, an early Bishop in New Zealand. In his biography of Selwyn, Boreham commented that 'it is altogether impossible to exaggerate the importance, as an essential element in the formation of his character, of those early conversations between mother and son.' She fired him with 'apostolic passion and dauntless devotion.' F.W. Boreham, *George Augustus Selwyn: Pioneer Bishop of New Zealand* (London: SW Partridge & Co. Ltd., 1911)23

¹² Some of these stories stayed with Boreham for the rest of his life. He wrote for example that 'the conception of the cross that is always in my mind in preaching and in writing is the conception that took shape within me at the fireside in those days of long ago' Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 30.

¹³ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'No condemnation.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 20 May, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

¹⁴ Boreham, 'No condemnation.'

For a story to be effective, as well as being emotionally engaging, it must also draw a gripping conclusion. It needs suspense. F.W. Boreham's courtroom tale gathered in momentum, like the pages of a murder mystery. It was a creative, fresh way of telling an old story. It rushed towards resolution. Boreham had learnt this art of animating a good story from his mother.

Some stories had more life than others, as well. The ones F.W. Boreham remembered were those that moved him emotionally. He wrote that when his mother spoke of the cross she could bring him to tears.¹⁵ Emotion became an important way of telling the story.

These strong feelings were particularly contained in the story of Jesus' death. Four days before leaving for New Zealand F.W. Boreham preached at the Tunbridge Wells Tabernacle.¹⁶ The title of his address was 'who bore our sins.' Time and again throughout his message he used the story of the cross. He spoke of Jesus' burden in carrying the cross and of his thirst. The congregation was taken to Calvary and Gethsemane. The story of the cross was not just dramatic, for Boreham it was the central story of faith. It was the believer's manifesto and continued to have an impact upon his early preaching. It was his central motif.

The cross was also positive and laden with hope. The gospel story had resolution. At this stage of his ministry Boreham loved a story with a happy ending, like those that his mother told around the fire at Wroxton Lodge. When he reflected back on these tales he said that they were drawn from an age of 'chivalry and...gold,' and were 'remote and rainbow-tinted.'¹⁷

This desire for rainbow-flecked tales, coloured Boreham's reading of the Bible and his presentation of it in his sermons. Stories of triumph, rather than tragedy, from the Scriptures sat more comfortably with him. As a result, Boreham was not always faithful in his interpretation of a given text. For example, when he preached on Ezekiel chapters 1 to 3 he spoke of what it meant to serve God effectively. His final point was the 'secret of successful service.'¹⁸ However, he had little in his manuscript

¹⁵ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 30.

¹⁶ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Who bore our sins.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 2 December, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

¹⁷ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 26.

¹⁸ F.W. Boreham. 1891. 'Some secrets of successful service.' Sermon, Wandsworth, United Kingdom, 20 December, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

about the cost of service, which is the major thrust of the passage itself. There is no mention in Boreham's manuscript of sermon topics about how 'briers and thorns' would surround Ezekiel or that the prophet would 'dwell among scorpions.'¹⁹ Instead Boreham skipped these verses of tragedy and trial. He rushed ahead to chapter 3 verse 14 that contains a vision of God's glory. While Boreham finished by speaking of how faithful service could be successful, in this sermon he brushed over some important themes in the text itself. At times in these earlier manuscripts Boreham seems afraid of speaking the hard word to his congregation or of detailing a message that in any way could be construed as being negative. He wanted a certain type of story- one with a happy ending.

George Jones and the Emmanuel Church

Boreham's preaching was also cultivated by factors outside of his family home at Upper Grosvenor Road. He was influenced by the context and the faith of those around him. The village of Tunbridge Wells had a strong evangelical heritage.²⁰ The names of streets and sites around the town, such as Mount Sion and Mount Ephraim, bore out this vibrant Christian past.²¹ Francis and Fanny Boreham lived out this heritage by attending the St John's Church and later the Emmanuel Church on Mount Ephraim, near the family home of Wroxtton Lodge.

During his years in Tunbridge Wells from 1871 to 1887, Boreham's minister was Rev. George Jones, who served at the Emmanuel Church from 1849 to 1888. Boreham's impressions of church were not always favourable under George Jones' leadership. He struggled to see a purpose in the preaching of his church minister. He reflected that the sermons at Emmanuel under Jones' tenure 'seemed so hopelessly remote from real life and from the pleasures and pursuits of the week.'²² He continued that he was not able to detect much application or purpose in many of the messages that he heard at the Emmanuel Church.

¹⁹ KJV. In each of these sermon manuscripts Boreham cited from the King James Version of the Bible.

²⁰ The Archbishop of Canterbury remarked in 1888 that 'Tunbridge Wells was a kind of sacred city... They looked upon it from without as a kind of modern Jerusalem.' As cited in: Alan Savage, *Royal Tunbridge Wells: A History of a Spa Town*. Revised by Charlie Bell (Tunbridge Wells: Oast Books, 1995), 151.

²¹ Crago, *The Story*, 17.

²² Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 47.

This desire to have a practical purpose and to be useful was a driving force in Boreham's sermons in England. He wanted his messages to make sense and to have a clear application. The earliest sermons from his time in England have little biblical context. Instead he was nearly always anxious to get to the main point and apply the biblical narrative to real life.

At times this stress on usefulness would be at the expense of mentioning God. The first sermon with a structure centred on God was given in Christmas 1893.²³ Up until this point Boreham's sermons looked at the 'we' of the congregation. There are many examples of this, throughout his topic headings, such as: '*we* are to have life, *we* are to enjoy newness of life, *we* are to walk in newness of life.'²⁴ Boreham was desperate to connect with his listeners and to give them simple, clear and achievable applications.

His earliest efforts from 1891 to 1893 might be labelled: leaves from a manual on Christian living. Here Boreham explored how Christians should: serve, walk in newness of life, be saved, know the Lord, remember God, live out the fruits of the Spirit and speak. These topics were useful and practical, but they were not always accurate exegetically. They were concerned with the issue of right living and holiness.

Dwight L. Moody and Evangelistic Preaching

A visit of Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) to Tunbridge Wells had a profound influence on F.W. Boreham.²⁵ In contrast to the preaching of George Jones and others at the Emmanuel Church, Boreham found Moody's sermon easy to understand and to apply.²⁶ Dwight L. Moody

²³ F.W. Boreham. 1893. 'A Saviour and a great one', Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 24 December, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

²⁴ F.W. Boreham. 1892. 'Walk in the newness of life' Sermon, Clapham, United Kingdom, 12 June, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

²⁵ He later recalled Moody's visit to Tunbridge Wells by writing that he could still picture 'The temporary platform on which he stood; the great black crowd; the languor of the sultry summer's day, the smell of the grass; the American twang in the preacher's voice; the text; the line of reasoning; the telling illustrations and above all, the passionate appeal- those all come back to me.' FW Boreham, *The Uttermost Star and Other Gleams of Fancy* (London: The Epworth Press, 1919), 179.

²⁶ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 51.

was the child of a bricklayer and his language was plain and direct.²⁷ His stories moved Boreham. The American evangelist's mood changed with the content of his sermon. Boreham recalled that: 'he became sometimes impassioned and sometimes pathetic.'²⁸ This was preaching not as a lecture, but more as a performance. The goal was conversion.

The impact was that Moody's sermon contained much of the evangelistic theology, which was adopted by F.W. Boreham. For example in one sermon Moody stated that: 'As I was coming along the street today I thought that if I could only impress upon you all that we have come to a vineyard, to reap and to gather.'²⁹ Moody's sermons, at times, lacked Biblical content and context and were more based on personal experiences. He drew from a strong atonement theology that saw the world as being 'diseased.'³⁰

Boreham trawled Moody's preaching style and content. He shared Moody's conviction that the goal of a sermon was to bring people to the point of conversion. In a series of lectures on the subject of preaching he extolled ministers to:

Keep fresh in your memory the details of your own conversion: revive as frequently and vividly as possible the recollection of every conversion brought about by your ministry...and inflame your devotion at least once a week by reading some classic record of a notable conversion.³¹

This focus had a profound impact on Boreham's sermons. On two occasions prior to Christmas in 1892 and 1893 he chose to preach on the topic of salvation, rather than focus exclusively on the details of the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. In 1892 at Forest Row while he began by exploring the details of the angelic declaration,³² his understanding of this cry was related to the whole ministry of Christ, not just his birth or incarnation. Here the text was used to apply to the death

²⁷ F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1110.

²⁸ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 52.

²⁹ Dwight L. Moody, *The Best of all his Works* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 14.

³⁰ Moody, *The Best*, 15.

³¹ In F.W. Boreham, 'The Bevan Lectures, 'The Preacher's Aim', *The Australian Christian World*, Vol. XLII- No.28, Melbourne, July 10, 1931, 8.

³² The statement was 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will toward men,' in F.W. Boreham. 1892. 'Christmas Sermon.' Sermon, Forest Row, United Kingdom, Christmas 1892 (no exact date provided), Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

of Christ on the cross. This address was loaded with the crucifixion, from the beginning to the end. At the start Boreham said that the incarnation was 'only surpassed by Calvary.'³³ His emphasis on evangelism was all-encompassing.

Theological themes came into sharper focus during his final months at Theydon Bois. He spoke of sin on a variety of occasions. He tackled the theme of eschatology in a message delivered at Theydon Bois on June 17, 1894.³⁴ In this sermon the stress was on offering instruction about Christ's second coming. This address provided a number of details about Boreham's eschatology.

In his later manuscripts, from 1894-5, Boreham also did not seem to be as conscious of the need to connect immediately with the congregation. Instead, headings within each sermon often came directly from the Biblical text. For example, in a message on Christ stilling the storm at sea,³⁵ he spoke of 'the alarm of the disciples, the action of the master and the result.' In this way the application could be drawn directly from the passage itself.

This reflected one other development in his overall style during this time, which took shape during 1894. It was that he became increasingly able to combine his two main themes: right teaching and right living. In a sermon with an eschatological theme,³⁶ he started by providing his teaching on the essence of Christ's return. He finished with a note of application by speaking about the implications of his coming, for each person. In a sermon delivered first in late 1894 he started by looking at the cross theologically,³⁷ but then closed by asking every Christian to treasure what Christ had done for them. In these sermons he was able to move from what he saw as right teaching to right living, to draw his application from his understanding of a given text.

London - New Preaching Models.

When F.W. Boreham came to London at just sixteen years of age in 1887, he found it to be both thrilling and terrifying. He was

³³ Boreham, 'Christmas Sermon.'

³⁴ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Behold! I come quickly.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 17 June, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

³⁵ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Peace! Be still.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 10 June, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

³⁶ Boreham, 'Behold! I come quickly.'

³⁷ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Who bore our sins.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 2 December, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

overwhelmed by the sheer mass of people in the capital. This led to a crisis of identity,³⁸ which he sought to resolve both by finding a deeper faith and looking to strong Christian examples of successful ministers.

Boreham was converted shortly after arriving in London. Although he had undoubtedly experienced God at Tunbridge Wells,³⁹ he was to credit his shift away from the family home as bringing about significant development in his faith. It represented his spiritual awakening. It also gave him the chance to learn from a number of powerful and well-known Christian leaders. His mind was impressionable.⁴⁰ He sought out other preaching models, to supplement Moody's influence upon him. One of the first in London to leave such a stamp was F.B. Meyer (1847-1929.) Meyer had a profound impact upon Boreham's life.⁴¹ In particular, Boreham was taken by Meyer's practical emphasis on holiness.

F.W. Boreham enjoyed Meyer's preaching because he captured his attention and his feelings. Meyer would use his emotions throughout his Bible classes. At times he would leave his seat and exclaim: 'O my brothers, I want you always to remember *this!*'⁴² Boreham joined one of Meyer's classes with hundreds of others. The topics were closely related to F.B. Meyer's own spiritual experiences. There was a practical undertone to his preaching. Meyer argued that God's word should be applied to 'each individual in the audience.'⁴³

Another person to leave an imprint on the young preacher's sensitive mind was Dr Joseph Parker (1830-1902), who spoke regularly at

³⁸ Boreham wrote that: 'London took my breath away. It appalled me. I had never imagined such pushing, jostling multitudes. I remember standing in the heart of the world's metropolis, under the very shadow of St Paul's, and shivering in the thick of the crowd at my own utter loneliness.' In: Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 58-9.

³⁹ He even felt something of God's presence was symbolised by the tower at his church. He said that 'I was awed by a dim, subconscious sense of the vast, the sublime, the infinite that towered above me.' In: F.W. Boreham, *The Other Side of the Hill*, 114.

⁴⁰ Boreham reflecting back on this stage said that: 'My mind must have been as impressionable as a sensitive plate. The least thing swept me off my feet.' in Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 61.

⁴¹ One example of this is that F.B. Meyer wrote the Introduction to Boreham's first book. In: F.W. Boreham, *Won to Glory: A Review of the 24th Chapter of Genesis* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1891).

⁴² Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 65.

⁴³ F.B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching: Plans and Methods* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1954), 73.

the City Temple Thursday Service in London. The lure was again the attractiveness and emotion of the speaker. Parker impacted his audience. Boreham did see faults in Parker and his pronounced preaching style, but he also learnt from him.⁴⁴

Parker's specific legacy for Boreham's preaching was that he taught him the value of re-iterating what he said.⁴⁵ Repetition was imperative to Parker both within the same sermon and in terms of delivering the same sermon twice.

Right from the very beginning this technique of repetition had a marked effect on F.W. Boreham. He was concerned with repeating his main themes, so as to drive his point home. For example, in the earliest sermon from 1891, Boreham formulated six headings, all around the theme of service. These were: the basis, attitude, enticement, authority, spirit and secret of service, for every Christian.⁴⁶ This duplication within the delivered sermon itself would have made the point clear to the congregation at Wandsworth Road. It gave Boreham a sharp focus. Such a concern for repetition is consistent in a number of sermons from this period.

The reason for highlighting certain words and themes over and again was simple. Boreham believed that every sermon or form of verbal communication had a certain degree of 'leakage.'⁴⁷ That is, the hearers would only capture a limited portion of what was being said and because of this the pulpit was the place for ideas to be stressed and repeated. He agreed with Parker that the more that a preacher's content was re-affirmed, the more the congregation would retain it.

C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a further preaching model from his early time in London. Spurgeon's reputation as a thorough and informative teacher of the Scriptures was well established, but he did not captivate F.W. Boreham. He never felt fully engaged with what Spurgeon was saying.⁴⁸ In Boreham's eyes, Spurgeon lacked the raw emotion,

⁴⁴ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 98.

⁴⁵ Boreham commented that Dr Parker 'taught me- as also did Dr Meyer- the high art of repeating myself.' - *My Pilgrimage*, 98.

⁴⁶ Boreham, 'Some secrets.'

⁴⁷ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 100. Boreham listed the causes of leakage as being: 'the acoustic properties of the building, the ears of the congregation, sultry conditions' and that 'minds will wander.'

⁴⁸ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 64.

drama and performance of Moody, Meyer, and Parker. His presence was not so much compelling as rational and eloquent.⁴⁹

One key platform for Spurgeon's messages was that, in his own words, they 'should have real teaching in them and their doctrine should be solid, substantial and abundant.'⁵⁰ This left Boreham feeling dry and concluding that the fires of passion in Spurgeon's preaching had diminished, as he reached the end of his career at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.⁵¹

Despite these misgivings, some of Boreham's later sermons from this period indicate a similarity to Spurgeon's style of drawing application from the main theological point of a text.⁵² He also shared Spurgeon's stress on evangelism, and the cross. Like Spurgeon, Boreham preached from a variety of texts each week and they both preached from single passages.

A common thread running through each of Boreham's preaching models, like Spurgeon, was that they all sought to bring about change in their listeners' lives. This was also a driving factor behind Boreham's sermons and influences, as well. For example, his stress on usefulness, evangelistic theology and repetition were all designed so that his sermons would have an impact upon his congregation. His desire was that his sermons should be remembered.

Spurgeon's College.

The influence of F.W. Boreham's preaching models was consolidated by the period that he spent in theological training. After his baptism in 1890, Boreham was encouraged to apply for Spurgeon's at the insistence of his Minister, Rev. James Douglas. He started college on 9th of August 1892. Together with the experience of working as the Student Pastor of

⁴⁹ F.W. Boreham, *Arrows of Desire: A Book of Essays* (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 99.

⁵⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1954), 70.

⁵¹ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 64.

⁵² There are numerous examples of this in Spurgeon's Sermon Notes. In a sermon on Lot's wife for example, he made the point that Lot lingered. Drawing from the text he reminded his congregation that 'when our worldly occupation is incessant and takes up most of our thoughts, we are hindered from decision.' In: C.H. Spurgeon, *My Sermon-Notes. Genesis to Proverbs. A Selection from Outlines of Discourses Delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1887), 9.

Theydon Bois it was to have a significant influence on his preaching, in a variety of ways.

Every day a student of the College would be expected to deliver a sermon that was critiqued by fellow students and faculty.⁵³ When Boreham undertook this exercise he was complimented for his style of delivery and for the 'light and popular touch about his utterances.'⁵⁴ However, his presentations were not seen as being without fault. In particular, students said that his high-pitched voice and monotonous delivery required further work.⁵⁵ It is impossible to gauge from the manuscripts whether Boreham made these changes in his manner and delivery. What can be shown is that during his time at Spurgeon's College his reference to stories and his use of theology, did change markedly. Both became more detailed. This was in keeping with the overall movement of his sermons from 1892.

A vital part of College training was the discussion of sermon plans and outlines.⁵⁶ Boreham's earliest manuscripts were simple, outlining just one or two main points and filling them out with three or four illustrations. After completing training at Spurgeon's College, the last sermon that he preached in England was far more detailed. It had a greater emotional direction and the impact of it was heightened as Boreham went along. It was loaded with atonement theology⁵⁷ and finished with a poem by W.E. Aytoun. He had carried out the plan for sermon outlines given to him at Spurgeon's.

Another decisive influence from Spurgeon's was the lecturer Dr A.T. Pierson. Boreham loved Pierson's unmistakeable sense of enthusiasm. In part, he was taken by Pierson's energetic delivery.⁵⁸ He was also impressed by his attitude. He commented in *My Pilgrimage* that Pierson was dubbed M.R. by his students. This was because any topic that he addressed was considered to be 'most remarkable.' The impact of this was that it led Boreham to see the importance of stressing vital subjects. They were to be emphasised as well as repeated. For Boreham

⁵³ Boreham noted in *My Pilgrimage* that this was the usual custom for each week.

⁵⁴ Crago, *The Story*, 50.

⁵⁵ Crago, *The Story*, 50.

⁵⁶ Ian M. Randall. *A School of the Prophets. 150 years of Spurgeon's College*. (London: Spurgeon's College, 2005), 18.

⁵⁷ In this sermon Boreham stated that 'Sin must be punished, sin and men are inseparable' but that 'he (Christ) bore the reproach of sins'. In: F.W. Boreham, 'Who bore our sins.'

⁵⁸ Boreham asserted of A.T. Pierson that 'he magnetized us all.' Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 94.

the emotion involved in highlighting a vital point was always the hook to draw him in to a sermon or lecture. The mood was just as important as the material. This was evident when F.W. Boreham and a group of students went to hear Pierson preach and were amazed that he could retain the interest of six or seven thousand people at a time.⁵⁹

This sense of issuing a superlative mood and emphasising certain points was not lost on Boreham. Many of his sermon headings from this period were laden with exclamation marks such as: 'Beware! Lest thou forget the Lord,'⁶⁰ 'Peace! Be still,'⁶¹ 'Behold the King's Spear!'⁶² or 'Behold! I come quickly.'⁶³

Through much of his ministry, and influenced by models such as A.T. Pierson, Boreham endeavoured to maintain his energy and emotion in the pulpit. Towards the end of his time at Theydon Bois Boreham's sermons did become more emotional. As he began engaging with theological rather than practical topics, the emotional pitch of his sermons seemed to shift as well. Themes such as Christ's second coming were laden with feeling.⁶⁴

For Boreham, the cross remained the place of deepest emotion. In his last sermon on English soil at Tunbridge Wells, Boreham concluded by speaking of what the cross meant for each of his listeners.⁶⁵ It was a passionate appeal. He wanted the Christian to value it, the unconcerned to know that they were treading under the foot of the Son of God and the anxious to be comforted that Christ had borne their sins.⁶⁶ The increased emotional pitch of these sermons may have reflected Boreham's own conflicting feelings about leaving home for the uncertain territory of Mosgiel in New Zealand. He was to leave his friends, his family and his wife- to-be, Stella, back in England. In his autobiography, F.W. Boreham makes little mention of the anguish that he may have experienced prior to leaving home. The only hint of it may be in these sermon manuscripts.⁶⁷ In his final English sermons it may have been

⁵⁹ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 94.

⁶⁰ Boreham, 'Beware! Lest thou'.

⁶¹ Boreham, 'Peace!'

⁶² F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Behold the King's Spear!' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 11 November, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

⁶³ Boreham, 'Behold! I come quickly.'

⁶⁴ Boreham, 'Behold! I come quickly.'

⁶⁵ Boreham, 'Who bore our sins.'

⁶⁶ Boreham, 'Who bore our sins.'

⁶⁷ T. Howard Crago did mention this sense of uncertainty in his biography of Boreham, as he wrote of 'the pain of wrenching himself away from all he held dear.' In: Crago, *The Story*, 63.

Boreham's own anxiety, rather than A.T. Pierson's influence that led to such a strong sentimental undertone.

Ministry Experiences and Confidence

One reason for F.W. Boreham being so impressionable and influenced by his preaching models and Spurgeon's College was that his confidence was not fully developed. Instead of finding his own unique outlet as a way of preaching, he looked to other ministers and lecturers as his examples. He sought guidance from those who he perceived had achieved a degree of spiritual influence and success. Boreham's belief in his ability as a preacher was not yet fully formed.

When he was first invited to preach at the Park Crescent Congregational Church in Clapham for five months in 1892, Boreham said the experience was like: 'a soldier... who found himself in the frontline totally unarmed and unequipped.'⁶⁸ Regardless of his own perceived limitations and lack of confidence, Boreham continued to preach. He became the student pastor at Theydon Bois, a small village in Essex located around twenty five kilometres north of London, on the 2nd of August 1893.⁶⁹ There are some hints of his self-assurance developing during this era. For example, when a service was held to celebrate the successful fund raising venture that enabled the congregation to purchase a new organ, Boreham spoke on the life of Robert Moffat. The topic was *Daybreak in Darkest Africa*.⁷⁰ The message was accompanied by a picture that Boreham had completed with crayon and paper.

This unique and original approach suggests that Boreham grew in self-belief over his early years, through experiences such as ministering at the Park Crescent Congregational Church or the Theydon Bois Baptist Church. His sermons also became more audacious, direct and creative. It is interesting to contrast a sermon given in 1894 with that from 1910 on the same text.⁷¹ In 1894 his sermon centred on the theme 'A word fitly spoken.' The headings were: 'The word spoken should always fit the speaker and the hearer, fit words must be fitly spoken, some words rarely or never fit.' When he delivered this message at Hobart in 1910 his theme had been changed to 'Lips like Lilies.' This was a much more adventurous and imaginative approach to the same text. Over the space

⁶⁸ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 90

⁶⁹ Crago, *The Story*, 51.

⁷⁰ Crago, *The Story*, 53

⁷¹ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'A word fitly spoken.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 4 February, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

of sixteen years Boreham's confidence had developed to the point where he could launch out in his own unique style. Creative sermons like *Daybreak in Darkest Africa* would no longer be anomalies. There were also some signs of his confidence continuing to develop during this period.

While limited at first, Boreham became better equipped at telling people the whole story behind a passage. His sermons were more direct. For example, when speaking from Revelation he said that one of the reasons for Christ's return was 'vengeance' on those who had not accepted his cross in faith.⁷² He was also able to preach in 1894 on 'a way of salvation' and a 'way of damnation.'⁷³ These themes suggest that while Boreham was not yet able to bring the full range of his inventive talents to a text, he was learning to share a hard word with his congregation. This would be a slow process that would take years to complete. When Boreham arrived at his placement in Mosgiel in New Zealand, in 1895, he still commented on how 'ridiculously young and inexperienced'⁷⁴ he felt.

Conclusion: A Derivative or Distinctive Preacher?

The main factors shaping F.W. Boreham's early sermons were derived from other prominent ministers. Boreham's distinct voice was muted and shackled. He looked to his ministry models for a pattern to follow. His sermons were useful in a way that F.B. Meyer's were direct pleas for holy living, drew on rhetorical devices from Joseph Parker and contained the heavy evangelistic tone of Dwight L. Moody. They also bore similarities to C.H. Spurgeon's preaching, in terms of his selecting a one off text each week and drawing points of application from the theology imbedded in a given passage. These rivers of influence were therefore largely derived from other sources. They were flowing from places far from home. While F.W. Boreham had found an outlet for his faith through preaching, he was largely speaking through the voice of different ministers.

It was his experience at Spurgeon's College that slowly developed Boreham's original approach. For in time, it would be the secondary influences that would replace the primary ones in his preaching. The rills would become rivers. In this way, Boreham's sermons would be

⁷² Boreham, 'Behold! I come quickly.'

⁷³ F.W. Boreham. 1894. 'Salvation or Damnation.' Sermon, Theydon Bois, United Kingdom, 25 November, Preacher's handwritten sermon manuscript.

⁷⁴ Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 115.

remembered for their: pervasive use of nature, creatively crafted words and focus on history and biography.

These small, distinctive notes were just beginning to be heard in his sermons from 1891 to 1895, as his confidence grew. His life, ministry and preaching would be a work in progress, as it is for each of us. F.W. Boreham once wrote that: 'each person on the planet is a novelty, is absolutely unique.' He continued that each person 'sees as nobody else sees.' Therefore they must 'paint or preach or pray or write as nobody else does.'⁷⁵ They must be themselves, but this takes time.

For F.W. Boreham it would not be until he reached Hobart in 1906 that he learnt to preach in a way that was not derived from Parker or Spurgeon, Moody or Meyer. Here he used material and a manner that was more in keeping with his Tunbridge Wells upbringing. At Hobart he could allow nature or his own creative application of the Scriptures to sing through a sermon. It is only with time that we can learn to paint or preach or pray or write as nobody else does. It is only with confidence that the outlet of our lives can flow in its own unique direction.

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⁷⁵ F.W. Boreham, *I Forgot to Say* (London: The Epworth Press, 1939), 133.