

Early Methodism  
in and around  
Chester.



F. F. Bretherton.



With the author's best  
regards in memory of  
happy association in  
Sunderland.

Aug 1940. J. J. Probertson



UCSB LIBRARY

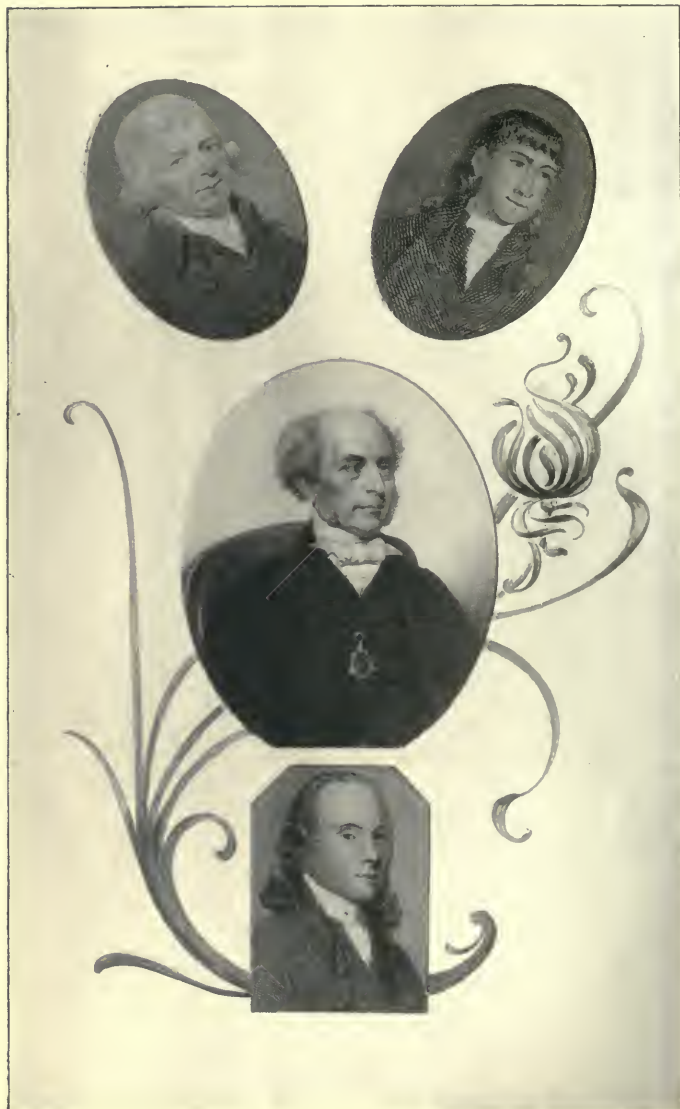
X-34894

EARLY METHODISM  
IN AND AROUND  
CHESTER . .

AMONG the many ancient cities in England which interest the traveller, and delight the antiquary, few, if any, can surpass Chester. Its walls, its bridges, its ruined priory, its many churches, its old houses, its almost unique "rows," all arrest and repay attention. The cathedral, though not one of the largest or most magnificent, recalls many names which deserve to be remembered. . . . The name of Matthew Henry sheds lustre on the city in which he spent fifteen years of his fruitful ministry; and a monument has been most properly erected to his honour in one of the public thoroughfares. Methodists, too, equally with Churchmen and Dissenters, have reason to regard Chester with interest, and associate with it some of the most blessed names in their briefer history. . . . By John Wesley made the head of a Circuit which reached from Warrington to Shrewsbury, it has the unique distinction of being the only Circuit which John Fletcher was ever appointed to superintend, with his curate and two other preachers to assist him. Probably no other Circuit in the Connexion has produced four preachers who have filled the chair of the Conference. But from Chester came Richard Reece, and John Gaulter, and the late Rev. John Bowers; and a still greater orator than either, if not the most effective of all who have been raised up among us, Samuel Bradburn.—(*George Osborn, D.D. ; Mag., April, 1870.*)



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation



REV. SAMUEL BRADBURN.      REV. RICHARD REECE.  
REV. JOHN BOWERS,  
REV. JOHN GAULTER.



# Early Methodism

in and around Chester.

---

1749—1812.

---

BY

FRANCIS FLETCHER BRETHERTON, B.A. (Lond.)

With a Preface by

REV. RICHARD GREEN,

*(Late Governor of Didsbury College.)*

---

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR BY  
PHILLIPSON & GOLDER,  
EASTGATE ROW, CHESTER.

---

1903.

OUR Church's heroes are its early evangelists. The highest enthusiasm of old and young is kindled by the story of their travels and labours—how that in afflictions, in imprisonments, in necessities, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings, in pureness, in knowledge, in long suffering, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, they preached the word, and laid broad and deep the foundations of our Church. Many with pardonable pride trace their own descent from the grand old saints of former days, and lovingly relate how, through their prayer, or self sacrificing labour, or hospitality, or wit, Methodism was established in their own neighbourhood. But

They who on glorious ancestry enlarge

Produce their debt instead of their discharge.

We confess that we are the sons of them who gave their substance and life that England might be saved; therefore let us also, seeing that we are compassed about with so great a crowd of witnesses, lay aside every weight.—(*The Annual Address of the Conference of 1901 to the Methodist Societies in the Connexion established by the late Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*)

## P R E F A C E .

---

*THE History of Methodism is not receiving less attention in our time than it formerly did. To the histories already issued, a much larger one than any of them has just been added, the product of the pen of Dr. J. Fletcher Hurst, a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This work, which is published in New York, comprises no less than ten large volumes; the first three dealing with British Methodism, the others with Methodism in America and in its world wide extension. Great interest attaches to these extensive surveys: but a number of smaller works, more limited in their range, and far more minute in their researches, have been, and are still being, given to the public. These are records of Methodism within the limits of individual circuits. A list of more than 150 such local histories was published in the "Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society for March, 1897." These, of course, vary greatly in their relative merits. "Early Methodism in and around Chester," which Mr. Bretherton has prepared with much care and patience, is an addition to the best of them.*

*The original part of this work was written many years ago by the Reverend, now the venerable, Benjamin Smith. The manuscript lay for a long time unpublished. It afterwards passed into the hands of Mr. R. Thursfield Smith, J.P., of Whitchurch, who introduced it to my notice.*

*The value of the work was at once apparent to me, but, as much additional matter had been accumulated since its completion, and as the means of elucidating many obscure periods of the story had been discovered, it was thought desirable to revise the whole. This I began to do, but the pressure of other work compelled me to lay it aside. About this time Mr. Bretherton was appointed to the Chester Circuit. His attention was soon arrested by the records of the planting of Methodism in the city and neighbourhood, and his interest in them deepened as his inquiries continued. The opportune moment for the completion of Mr. Smith's work seemed to have arrived, and Mr. Bretherton was requested to undertake it. I have had the opportunity of watching Mr. Bretherton's work from its inception, and the pleasure of rendering him such aid as it was in my power to give. He has been favoured with the constant help of that most successful collector of Wesleyana, Mr. Thursfield Smith, who has both laid his large store of books and manuscripts under tribute, and by his wide knowledge and efficient counsel, has aided in securing for the work the completeness that distinguishes it.*

*Many of the historians of local Methodism have been dependent mainly upon floating traditions and the recollections of elderly people, for what additions could be made to the more general records. Mr. Bretherton, while availing himself of so much of this kind of help as was within his reach, has avoided dependence upon it, making diligent quest for original documents, and testing accepted authorities. He has introduced fresh and interesting matter relating to Wesley himself, and has searched the storehouse of the Magazines, and many comparatively rare papers and pamphlets, with many parts of the wide field of Methodist biography.*

*A specially interesting feature of this volume is to be found in the attention given to the early period of Methodist history, the bulk of the work relating to events which transpired before the year 1800. This was the heroic age of Methodism, during which its essential principles found their most vivid illustration,—a period that deserves the thoughtful study of the Methodists of to-day. I earnestly hope Mr. Bretherton's volume will promote that study. Without hesitation, I give my hearty commendation to this work, trusting it may meet with a warm reception, not only in the neighbourhood of Chester itself, but in all parts of the country.*

*RICHARD GREEN.*

*Edgbaston,  
February, 1903.*

## TO THE READER.

---

THE genesis of this work has been so fully explained by Mr. Green, that only a few words on the point are necessary from me. The materials from various sources so increased upon my hands, that I found it necessary to rearrange and rewrite the whole of the original manuscript.

The work of Rev. B. Smith was remarkably accurate, and without the foundation he laid, this volume would never have been undertaken. At the same time, I should say that all the authorities he used have been worked over anew, and there is hardly a statement in the book made without independent investigation.

It is impossible to say here how much of this volume had a place in the Rev. B. Smith's manuscript: but it may be said briefly that the references to books and pamphlets scattered up and down the volume have all been introduced by myself, and in most cases represent material not known to him; that Chapters VII. and VIII. are almost entirely new; that I have bestowed a great deal of labour upon the New Connexion controversy, in Chapter V.; upon the family histories in Chapter VI.; and upon the Appendices. The selection of the illustrations was made by me.

For these reasons I am told by those who entrusted me with this task, that I am fully justified in calling myself the author of the book. Mr. Thursfield Smith's words at the outset were very definite on this point.—

*You and you only must carry this work out. If you think well, Rev. B. Smith's name and mine may be mentioned in the preface. (22/4/99).*

When other work had turned me aside from this history for six months, he wrote again:—

*I have been a little anxious about the Chester History. Time rolls on. If the work is not carried through by you now, I fear it will never be done. I am 73, and I think no one else can give you such help as I can, having for years given so much attention to the subject. I must say that I heartily approve of your plans. Of course the work must be yours. The few words relating to Rev. Benjamin Smith and myself are all that is desirable or necessary. In fact Mr. B. Smith has left the matter absolutely in my hands. You must be the "Master-builder. (24/1/00).*

No absolutely consistent system of arrangement has been practicable, owing to the unequal nature of the materials. The main scheme has been determined by the Methodist itinerancy; and I have sought to group everything around the names of the various preachers appointed to the Circuit year by year. For this purpose their names are in dark type the first time they respectively occur. Perhaps non-Methodist readers should be warned that the Methodist year begins in September and not January. As Wesley's visits to Chester took place usually in the spring, a little confusion may arise in places unless this be borne in mind.

In the references to other Churches which have been inevitable, I have endeavoured to avoid anything that could give offence to Anglicans or Dissenters, or to members of sister Methodist Churches.

I have refrained from moralizing; but many a moral has presented itself to my mind, and I am sure that there is much in these records at once to encourage and rebuke the successors of the early Methodists.

The work has been a labour of love, and I now send it forth in the hope that it may be of some service, especially to my many friends in and around Chester.

I take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to my colleague, the Rev. Thomas Moscrop, for reading the proofs; to the Rev. John Telford; and to many correspondents whose courtesy I have highly appreciated.

F. F. BRETHERTON.

FRANKHOLM,  
LITTLE SUTTON,  
CHESTER.

*March, 1903.*



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

---

		FACING PAGE
1	Portraits of the Revs. John Bowers, John Gaulter, Richard Reece, and Samuel Bradburn .. .. ,,	Title
2	Composite Picture of the Moat House Farm at Alpraham, with Richard Cawley's Class Ticket, Old Book in Bunbury Church, and the inscription under the Pear Tree .. .. ,,	10
3	A Letter from John Wesley to Jonathan Pritchard .. ,,	38
4	Do. do. do. —? .. .. ,,	56
5	A Summary of the Circuit in 1788 in the handwriting of Andrew Blair .. .. ,,	136
6	The Old Chapel at Neston .. .. ,,	189
*7	Portrait of Alderman Henry Bowers .. .. ,,	209
8	An Old Sunday School Hymn Sheet for 1799 .. .. ,,	225
9	Exterior of St. John Street Chapel .. .. ,,	252
10	Interior of St. John Street Chapel.. .. ,,	266
*11	Portrait of Mr. David Jackson .. .. ,,	260
12	The first page of the Circuit Stewards' Book, 1812 .. ,,	288

*\* From the Oil Paintings in the Vestry of St. John Street Chapel.*

---

With the following exceptions the plates were all made from photographs specially taken for me by Mr. J. F. Bland, of New Ferry. No. 12 was photographed by Mr. J. F. Holaway, of Chester.

The photographs of the farm at Alpraham, and of the book at Bunbury were executed by Mr. Harry Jones, of Liverpool, and kindly procured for me by Mr. William Littler, of Tarporley; Mr. J. G. Wright, of Wolverhampton, kindly gave me a photograph of the class ticket which he made from the original which he acquired from the late Mrs. Francis Butt.

The portraits of the four ministers of Chester origin who attained to the Presidency of the Wesleyan Conference are taken from the Methodist Magazine.

*Magazine* means the periodical, first called by Wesley the Arminian Magazine, but now for a long time the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine. It has appeared monthly from 1778 till the present day.

The Edition of Wesley's Journal quoted is that of 1809—13, in 17 volumes.

The capital letters appearing in brackets at certain places refer to the Notes printed on pp. 269—272.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

---

### **Chapter I.—1744 onwards. Early days at Bunbury and Alraham, pp. 1-25.**

A religious Society at Bunbury Church—The Cawley family of Moat House Farm—Visits of John Wesley, John Bennet, C. Hopper—"Pear Tree" Preachers—The Brothers Sim—Mr. Samuel Smith—The Gardner family—Mr. S. Hitchen—Mr. J. S. Hitchen—William Darney's verses—Rev. William Jackson.

### **Chapter II.—1747-1764. Introduction of Methodism into the City of Chester, pp. 26-57.**

John Bennet—Preaching at Huntington Hall and at Richard Jones' house in Love Lane—Barn Chapel in St. Martin's Ash—Wesley's first visit to Chester—Subsequent riot—Chapel destroyed—Another visit—A good Mayor—A friendly Vicar—Chester included in the "Manchester Round"—Mr. Jonathan Pritchard—Interesting Wesley letters—The early Preachers—Thomas Walsh and George Whitefield evangelize Chester—Further Wesley visits—He preaches at Mold, Tattenhall and Paikgate.

### **Chapter III.—1764-1775. The Octagon Chapel: its erection and early years, pp. 58-115.**

The Chapel and site fully described—John Hampson opens it—The first Trustees—Mr. Thomas Bennett—Mr. George Lowe—The heroine of early Methodism in Neston—Chester included in the Salop Circuit, 1765; in the Cheshire Circuit, 1766—Mr. Francis Gilbert entertains Wesley in Chester—The Gilbert family of Antigua—Wesley publishes Mary Gilbert's Journal—Thomas Olivers—Thomas Taylor—Samuel Bardsley—Conversion of Samuel Bradburn, the "Methodist Demosthenes"—The Cheshire North Circuit formed, 1770—The Chester Circuit formed, 1771.

## **Chapter IV.—1776-1787. Extension within the City.**

### **Commonhall Street Preaching Room, pp.**

**116-139.**

The previous and later history of the Room—(Matthew Henry's Chapel—The Queen Street Congregational Church—Jonathan Wilcoxon, etc.)—Several Wesley visits—Robert Roberts—John Murlin—The Rev. John Fletcher and the Rev. Melville Horne—Richard Rodda—John Gaulter and Richard Reece, future Presidents, begin to preach.

## **Chapter V.—1788-1797. The later visits and death of John Wesley. The formation of the Methodist New Connexion, pp. 140-174.**

Particulars of the veteran's work in Chester—George Lowe—Thomas Brisco—The pioneer work of Miles Martindale in the Wirral—Mr. John Sellers—Death of John Wesley—Connexional unrest—Local controversies—Erection of Trinity Lane Chapel, 1794—Financial details—It becomes an Independent Methodist Chapel, and in 1797 joins the New Connexion then formed—Extracts from contemporary publications.—Mr. James Parry.

## **Chapter VI.—1798-1811. The Octagon Chapel: last years, pp. 175-224.**

George Morley—The North Wales Mission—Owen Davies—John Hughes—John Bryan—Edward Jones (Bathafarn)—Formation of the Wrexham and Whitchurch Circuit—Extension at Mouldsworth and Kingsley—Mr. Joseph Janion—Alexander Suter—Francis West—The Neston Mission.

### **Some family histories and notable conversions.**

The Williams family of Rackery, descendants and connections—Mr. Ambrose Williams—William Moulton (grandfather of the late Dr. W. F. Moulton of Cambridge)—Mr. Collin Robinson—Mr. George Walker, the earlier—Alderman Henry Bowers—Rev. John Bowers—Miss Sarah Broster—Classical academies—Dr. Birchenall—The Lowe family—Mr. Howie, and others.

### **The Post-Methodist history of the Octagon Chapel, demolished 1864.**

The Rev. Philip Oliver's Trustees, etc.

**Chapter VII.—The commencement of Methodist  
Sunday and Day School work in Chester,  
pp. 225-242.**

The Methodists early in the field—Commencement at the Octagon, 1782—George Lowe—Thomas Bennett—Letter from John Wesley to Richard Rodda (1787)—Extracts from the public papers—The date discussed—Early accounts—Summary of events down to 1830—Library records—The Chester Wesleyan Day School.

**Chapter VIII.—1810 onwards. Erection of St. John  
Street Chapel, pp. 243-268.**

Full details of early negotiations—The site described—Building accounts—Opening services—Remarkable ministry of John Braithwaite—The first Trustees—The later Trustees—Mr. Matthew Harrison—Later finance—Mr. Charles Simpson—Mr. David Jackson.

**Notes, pp. 269-272.**

**Appendices, pp. 273-296.**

- I.—Schedules of membership, with notes.
- II.—The Circuit Steward's Account Book.
- III.—Subscriptions to Connexional efforts.
- IV.—Subscriptions to St. John Street Chapel.
- V.—Welsh Wesleyan Methodism in Chester.
- VI.—Erection of City Road Chapel.



## CHAPTER I.

---

### Early Days at Bunbury and Alpraham, 1744 Onwards.

---

THE first germ of Methodism in the neighbourhood of Chester is to be discerned in a little company assembling from time to time in the vestry of Bunbury Church for the same purposes of religious conversation and Bible study as those which had brought together, a few years previously, the first Methodists, the "Godly Club," within the University of Oxford. In the early part of the eighteenth century there were, in some parts of the country, religious awakenings which prepared the way for the wider work of the Evangelical Revival. This was the case in England, especially in the Metropolis and wherever Dr. Woodward's societies took root; in Scotland, at Kilsyth and Cambuslang; in Wales, under the preaching of Howell Harris. At Betley, near Nantwich, there was a society similar to that at Bunbury, associated with the name of Richard Moss, afterwards one of Wesley's preachers; and John Bennet speaks of a religious society "kept" in Chester. The gathering in the vestry met with episcopal approval. Janion, in a little volume on Cheshire Methodism which

has furnished much help for this and later chapters, says :—

I have heard my brother-in-law, Mr. Gardner, say, that the Bishop of Chester was so much pleased with the account of this society at Bunbury, that, in order to encourage them in their laudable endeavours, he presented them with a copy of *Burkitt's Notes on the New Testament*. (A)

When the society left the vestry for other places of meeting the book was chained up in the Church. It is there to this day, protected of late years by a grating. In 1744, when the meeting had been held for some time, the Clergyman began to regard it with some suspicion, and to fear that it would lead to a separation from the establishment. At length, through his determined opposition, it was removed to a room at Alpraham, and found a valiant supporter in Mr. Richard Cawley. He was born in 1716, and was the son of a Baptist gentleman, Mr. Stephen Cawley, who was, as appears from some family papers, High Constable. Mr. Richard Cawley, a man of character and weight, was well-fitted to defend the little evangelical cause and in due time to invite and entertain the Methodist preachers. In the earlier part of 1745, several letters were written by this gentleman to the Vicar. In these he gives an account of his conversion, justifies his connexion with the meetings at Alpraham, and evinces throughout a sound mind and devout spirit.

The character of Mr. Richard Cawley is dwelt upon with loving fulness in the early records. A zealous guardian of the intellectual and moral welfare of his household, no servant in his employ was ever allowed to remain ignorant of reading, an accomplishment much



rarer then than now. It is said that he even reversed the usual order of things and paid boys to allow him to teach them their letters. As an interesting testimony to the respect he inspired it is recorded that the unenlightened clergyman sometimes tried to force an evangelical strain into his discourses to please this honoured hearer. Mr. Cawley had a set of rules printed for exhibition in his house and in those of his friends. How far these rules owe their form to John Wesley it is difficult to determine ; but they breathe the spirit of early Methodist morality so indisputably that they are here transcribed at length.

WE and *our House* will serve the LORD. For GOD IS LOVE. THEREFORE *our Earnest Request is*, THAT *every one who comes here will conform to our few RULES.*

1. We have no time given to throw away, but to improve for Eternity ; therefore we can join in no conversation that is unprofitable, but only in that which is good to the use of edifying, ministering grace to the Hearers. Therefore

2. WE have nothing to say to the News of the Town, and of the Business of others: But we desire to hear of Things pertaining to the Kingdom of GOD.

3. Neither have we anything to say to the misconduct of others ; therefore, let not the fault of an absent person be mentioned, unless absolute necessity require it, and then let it be with the greatest Tenderness, without dwelling upon it. May GOD preserve us from a censorious and criticising Spirit, so contrary to that of CHRIST.

4. WE offer the right hand of fellowship to every one that cometh in the name of the LORD: But we receive not any to a doubtful disputation: But whosoever loveth the LORD JESUS in Sincerity, the same is our BROTHER, and SISTER, and MOTHER ; we cannot but remember that GOD is LOVE.

5. We neither receive nor Pay Visits on the LORD'S DAY, for we and our House desire particularly on that Day to serve the LORD.

6. WE do earnestly intreat every one to reprove us faithfully, whenever we deviate from any of these Rules, so shall we be as Guardian Angels to each other, and as a Holy mingled flame, ascend up before GOD. (Price One Penny.)

Prior to the visit of Wesley, shortly to be recorded, much attention had been paid to the place by itinerant preachers in connexion with his organization, amongst them being **John Bennet** and **John Nelson**. Unhappily no details can be given of their work, but it is evident that by the influence of these and like-minded men the Society at Bunbury took on an increasingly Methodist tone, and was imbued with great respect for the leaders of the movement.

The Rev. William Grimshaw, Vicar of Haworth, in Yorkshire, nearly as much a Methodist preacher as his fellow-clergyman Wesley, says in a long letter to Charles Wesley, dated August 20, 1747 :—

Last week I struck out into Lancashire and Cheshire, Mr. Bennet bearing me company. We visited the Societies in Rochdale, Manchester and Holme in Lancashire, and Boothbank in Cheshire. At the same time we made a visit to Mr. Carmichael, a clergyman at Tarvin, near Chester. He says he received remission of sins last September; and, I believe, preaches the same truth to his people.

Probably Alpraham was visited in the course of this journey.

The Providence which brought the great Apostle of Methodism to the succour of this little company at Alpraham is full of interest. About the time of

which we write there resided near Alpraham the parents of a servant maid, called Ann Smith. She was in the service of a lady who spent most of her time in London, occasionally resorting for a change to Bath and similar places. Ann Smith was led to hear Wesley, whose open-air preaching was attracting great attention, and was brought into the enjoyment of the great salvation. Mrs. Smith visited her daughter in London, and also heard the evangelists. On her return to Cheshire she told Mr. Cawley and others what she had heard, and informed him of the probable date of Wesley's next visit to the North of England.

In one of this young woman's letters quoted by Everett,<sup>1</sup> she speaks of an earnest prayer that a place might be given her among God's people. Her subsequent marriage with Dr. Whitehead, the friend and biographer of Wesley, brought her the fulfilment of this desire.

Early in the autumn of 1749 Mr. Richard Cawley wrote to John Wesley inviting him to Alpraham to help them in the things of God. Wesley arranged to visit Mr. Cawley, and to preach on October 12. Other calls, however, prevented the accomplishment of his purpose on that day. As the announcement had been duly made, Wesley sent a supply to preach and to announce that he himself would be there on October 20th. Mr. Cawley wrote to him again immediately before that date to say that the Vicar of Acton would allow him to occupy the pulpit of his Church.

Everett records Mr. Cawley's opinion of the preacher who supplied for Wesley:—

The person thus sent preached in such an engaging manner, and with words so inviting, that I believe that

1. *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester*, 1827.

most who heard him were ready to praise God on his account. I must confess I never saw persons so affected before.

Everett thinks this was Edward Perronet, the brother of Charles Perronet and the son of the venerable Vincent Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham. Both brothers were itinerant preachers and laboured in union with Wesley for some years. Edward Perronet subsequently left the Connexion and resided as a dissenting preacher at Canterbury.

It should be noted that it was the marriage which took place on October 3rd, 1749, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne between Grace Murray, whom Wesley regarded as his own affianced bride, and John Bennet, which caused the alteration in Wesley's plans. The whole subject is treated at length in the standard books, and does not call for more than a passing mention here. The later engagement was duly fulfilled and is recorded at some length in the *Journals* :—

Friday, October 20th, 1749.—After preaching in the morning at Davyholme, and about ten at Boothbank, in the afternoon I rode on and between four and five came to Alraham. A large congregation was waiting for me, whom I immediately called to seek *God while He may be found*. Many came again at five in the morning, and seemed just ready not only to repent, but also believe the Gospel.

Saturday, 21st.—By conversing with several here, I found we were not now among publicans and sinners, but among those who, a while ago, supposed they *needed no repentance*. Many of them had long been *exercising themselves unto godliness*, in much the same manner as we did at Oxford: but they were now thoroughly willing to renounce their own, and accept *the righteousness which is of God by faith*.

A gentleman, who had several years before heard me preach at Bath, sent to invite me to dinner, I had three or four hours serious conversation with him. *O who maketh me to differ?* Every objection he made to the Christiau system has passed through my mind also; but GOD did not suffer them to rest there, or to remove me from the hope of the Gospel.

I was not surprised when word was brought that the Vicar of Acton had not the courage to stand to his word: neither was I troubled. I love indeed to preach in a Church: but GOD can work wherever it pleaseth him.

Sunday, 22nd.—I preached at seven in Richard Cawley's house; and about one at Little Acton.

Janion describes this interview more fully, and states that the gentleman referred to was Richard Davenport, Esq., of Calveley Hall.

Mr. Davenport sent for Wesley to the Hall, together with Mr. Stephen Cawley and the Rev. Mr. Lowe, the clergyman of the Parish; and desired them to give him an account of the New Birth or Regeneration. Mr. Lowe laid great stress on water-baptism; but Wesley dwelled rather on the genuine marks and fruits of that great work of GOD in the soul, observing that it implied an entire change of heart, from nature to grace, from sin to holiness, and from the love of this world to the love of God. Mr. Davenport was much affected and said, Mr. Wesley, I understand you perfectly well, but I do not understand Mr. Lowe at all. He also pressed Mr. Wesley to accept a piece of gold of the value of (?) £36, and offered to send him to Mr. S. Cawley's house in his own carriage, both of which offers he respectfully declined.

Mr. J. S. Hitchen, writing to Everett in 1827, said that the piece of gold was worth 36/-, and adds that Wesley was at last prevailed upon to accept it on the ground that it might help him in an emergency. He

also stated that the Squire asked Wesley to promise to visit him upon his deathbed, and undertook in his turn to inform Mr. S. Cawley before anyone else, should a spiritual change take place in him.

It is from this visit that the definite commencement of Methodism at Alraham must be dated. Wesley, at the request of the people, promised to send a preacher for the next week. This was the first step towards establishing a regular Methodist ministry in the place.

The visit of Wesley was soon followed up by one from **Christopher Hopper**, a well-known member of his band of itinerant helpers. These were required by Wesley to furnish him with a written account of their course and religious experience, upon being received into full connection with his work. Our public examination of candidates for Ordination is the outcome of this practice. Many of the preachers also followed the example of their head in keeping full journals. The well-known six volumes of *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* were mainly compiled from materials thus provided by the itinerants themselves. On p. 200 of vol. 1 Hopper says :—

The latter end of the year 1749 I left the Dales, and the dear children GOD had given me. I rode to the Smeals, where I parted with my dear wife and friends, with melting hearts and many tears. In those days we had no provision made for preachers' wives, no funds, no stewards. He that had a staff might take it, go without, or stay at home. I then set out for Bristol. I called at Chester, Durham, Stockton, Thirsk, and Knaresborough, and found the LORD in every place. [In the course of this journey he preached at Manchester "in a little garret by the riverside." From Manchester] I rode

through Chester, and joined a Society at Alpraham, and another at Pool. It was an humbling time among the opulent farmers; the murrain raging amongst their cattle. They buried them in the open fields. Their graves were a solemn scene. The hand of the LORD was on the land. I visited the suburbs of Chester. God began a good work then, which has increased and continued to this day.

The labours of Christopher Hopper for a series of years were very extensive and successful. He formed some of the earliest societies in the North of England, visited Ireland several times, was the first Methodist preacher to go into North Britain, and travelled through a great number of Circuits in this country. There is a record of at least one further visit to Chester on his part, viz., July 26th, 1776. He passed away at the age of 80 on March 5th, 1802.

The next Methodist preacher to visit Alpraham was the celebrated John Nelson, the Yorkshire stonemason, one of the most valiant and worthy of the early evangelists. His visit also took place before the eventful year 1749 had come to an end. He seems to have been the first to preach in the open air at Alpraham. Both Wesley and Hopper had contented themselves, as previous itinerants had, with addressing the company that could be accommodated in the house of Mr. Richard Cawley's father, Mr. Stephen Cawley, of Moat House Farm. But with the growth of the work the numbers that came together were more than the house could hold. John Nelson boldly took his stand beneath a pear tree and addressed his hearers with his customary vigour. This place of preaching was often employed, and for a long time afterwards the Methodist preachers

were known as "Pear Tree Preachers." The old tree weathered many a storm and stood in the garden of the house, which is about half a mile from Calveley Station, till the middle of the following century. At length however it was blown down. The Superintendent wrote to the landlord, and received the following reply:—

PRECKFORTON CASTLE,

FEBRUARY 6TH, 1856.

DEAR AND REV. SIR,

Until I received your letter I knew nothing whatever of the interesting associations connected with a farm of mine, called the Moat House, in Alraham. Had I been aware that the Rev. John Wesley had once preached under a particular pear tree on my estate, I should have taken the greatest care of that Tree, and provided against its being blown down. I cannot say how sorry and annoyed I am to hear of the disaster that has befallen this tree. I quite approve of another being planted on the same spot, and when I hear it is planted, I will have it surrounded and protected by a good fence.

Believe me,

Dear and Rev. Sir,

Yours faithfully,

J. TOLLEMACHE.

THE REV. W. JESSOP,

Wesleyan Minister.

The planting of a new tree was made the occasion of a great Methodist gathering at which 200 persons were present. The Rev. Francis A. West gave an address. The Clergyman, Rev. W. B. Garnett, said, in the course of an address, that on the occasion of his visit in 1751 Wesley preached at the forge opposite Bunbury Church, and an attempt was made by some of the people to drown the preacher's voice by ringing





- a* THE MOAT HOUSE FARM, ALPRAHAM, shewing the celebrated Pear Tree at the the right hand side.
- b* RICHARD CAWLEY'S CLASS-TICKET, 1769.
- c* BURKITT'S COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT, now chained in Bunbury Church.
- d* THE INSCRIPTION UNDER THE TREE.



the Church bells. The worthy Clergyman added that Wesley would receive a very different reception if he were able to visit the Parish in those days. A stone slab was set up under the new tree bearing the following inscription :—

In the year 1749 the Rev. John Wesley first preached in the adjoining farm house : in the autumn of the same year John Nelson preached under a pear tree which stood on this spot ; that one having perished, the present one was planted 4th March, 1856, by the kind permission of John Tollemache, Esq., M.P., to commemorate the introduction of Methodism into Cheshire.

Preaching in the open air aroused great opposition, especially on the part of the rougher elements of the neighbourhood. A plan of campaign was organised, twenty-five shillings collected for the purpose of supplying the rioters with liquor, and a person named Thomas Lloyd was engaged to lead the mob. As they approached the scene of action some of them felt a little uneasy, and endeavoured to obtain the consent of Mr. Davenport, of Calveley Hall, which was not far off. Now Mr. Davenport, though by no means a Methodist convert, had, as already described, too much light and too much knowledge of the Methodists to countenance this riotous attempt to expel them from the parish. He replied to the champion of the forces of disorder :—

No, Thomas, by no means; lest they should be in the right, and we should be in the wrong. I would not have them persecuted for £100, merely on the possibility of their being right.

When this speech was reported to the crowd it soon dispersed.

Mr. Richard Cawley, always active in the defence of religious liberty, addressed a lengthy letter to the Vicar and Churchwardens about this time. He sums up in the following trenchant manner:—

1. Did you endeavour to prevent a swearing, drinking, and unintelligible minister from preaching?

2. Are neither of you nor any of your families guilty of these and other vices, and would you rather be miserable yourselves and have them eternally miserable, than be called to repentance by one of these laymen?

3. If we are wrong, please to inform us in that which is better, but do not imagine you can do it by clubs or staves. Why did the members of the Bunbury congregation not send a more worthy or more honourable ambassador than they did? Gentlemen, did you really intend to please and glorify God, by sending such a character to reform us? If so, why did you first equip him for Hell? O, consider the dreadful threatening denounced against those who do evil, that good may come. Remember and tremble, for their damnation is just. We are willing to hear Scripture or Reason, but are unwilling to listen to a person devoid of both, nor dare we take such a guide to Heaven, lest he should lead direct to destruction.

Hopper's statement that at Alpraham and Pool he "joined a society," means that he united the little companies of believers assembling at these places to the already extensive Methodist organization. It would seem that Hopper took down the names of all willing to enter into Church fellowship, and then left them time for reflection upon the responsibilities of such an engagement. John Nelson consolidated the work at Alpraham by the preparation of a class paper. This was intended to promote regularity, and to acquaint the preachers with the names and addresses of the mem-

bers. On a ruled sheet of paper he inserted the names and gave it to Mr. Richard Cawley, whose name stood at the head as leader. This incident derives additional interest from the fact that this is probably the first appointment of a class leader in Cheshire.

As the work developed a new leader was appointed at Tiverton near Alpraham. This was William Sim, who, with his brothers John and Ralph, was amongst those received into the Methodist Society by John Nelson (*Mag.*, 1825). In the early part of his life he was preserved from drowning by the miraculous sagacity of a dog at Ebnor Bank, near Malpas. He was appointed a leader comparatively early in life, and fulfilled the duties for many years. It is said few men stood higher in Wesley's estimation. The three brothers, who remained single all their lives, contributed much to the development of Methodism in Alpraham and Bunbury. Their sister Mary never married, and in the last years of her long life was affectionately known as "Dame Sim." Janion gives an instance of the humility of John Sim, quoting an utterance of his in one of the Alpraham Love Feasts:—

"GOD hath been very good to me, a poor sorry dog that I am." This produced a much greater effect on the company than any fine speech could have done.

Jane, the second sister, became the wife of Mr. Richard Cawley. The intimacy between the two families was very close, and there is evidence that as early as 1742 Mr. Richard Cawley was in the habit of taking religious counsel with those who afterwards became his brothers-in-law. Mrs. Cawley was the subject of severe affliction patiently borne.

The tombstone of this admirable couple in Bunbury Churchyard records:—

Here lies the body of Richard Cawley of Alpraham, who departed this life, the 8th January, 1783, aged 67. Also Jane his wife; she died the 30th March, 1781, aged 71. Whose lives from their youth, were devoted to GOD, with a steady and uniform course of self denial, with a studious exertion, and a most benevolent regard for the eternal good of mankind; being greatly regretted by all who love our LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity.

The Sim family had another noteworthy Methodist connection. Mr. Samuel Smith, who resided on an estate of his own at Tattenhall, married Elizabeth, the third sister of the brothers Sim. This gentleman, who was first induced to attend Methodist preaching by the trouble incident upon his expensive habits, was a well-known and successful local preacher. His services were freely given, not merely near home but in distant places. Among these special mention is made of Kingswood, near Bristol. His two sons were educated at Wesley's School there. This famous foundation, on which so much of the care and strength of Wesley were bestowed, is now open only to the sons of Wesleyan ministers; but in the time of Mr. Smith the Wesleyan ministry, as we know it, had not come into being.

On one of his journeys Mr. Smith so favourably impressed the Earl of Dartmouth as to receive the offer of a benefice from him if he could secure episcopal ordination. Mr. Smith, however, refused the kind offer, and spent the remainder of his days among the Methodists. He died in great peace in 1777, followed in three years by his wife.

Mr. Richard Gardner, of Tattenhall Wood, was a member of the Church of England, but had no concern about salvation until the need of it was pressed home upon him by Mr. Samuel Smith. As the two gentlemen were one day riding together and holding deep converse, Mr. Smith was so concerned at the darkness of his companion that at last he said, "Mr. Gardner, you are blind." "Nay," replied he, "I can see as well as you, Mr. Smith." The words, however, made their mark, and Mr. Gardner and his wife were deeply impressed. Social considerations prevented them from seeking the help of the Methodists, and it was not until Mr. Gardner was taken ill of a fever that he would consent to become a hearer amongst them. Even then the good resolution was never carried out for the fever shortly proved fatal. But there was hope in his end. After his decease his widow soon became a devoted Methodist; her house was always open to receive the preachers, and she had the joy of seeing all her children united to the Society.

Mr. Gardner's son, John, and younger daughter, Elizabeth, are mentioned in the following pages. There seem to have been at least one other son, Richard, and one other daughter, who married Mr. Samuel Faulkner, of the Potteries, and subsequently of Whitehaven.

Mr John Gardner was a gifted man, agreeable and educated, and his business capacities were successfully devoted to the improvement of his estate. His conversion was brought about by an accident which served to arouse him from the sleep of nature. He was thrown from his horse on Spittle Hill, near Middlewich, down which he was riding rapidly in the dark, and incurred

such injuries to his knee as to render his state perilous for months. To him in this affliction a Methodist Local Preacher became a minister of GOD for good. A neighbour of his, James Wooldridge by name, had received Wesley's preachers into his own house and a Society had been formed there. Under the influence of this good man Mr. Gardner was brought to the light, and after his recovery into Methodist fellowship. The new convert speedily became a preacher. He had both gifts and graces; when he began to preach his discourses were of a superior character, and the manner of his delivery made them very impressive. His labours were very arduous, ranging from Caergwrle and Wrexham on the one side, to Norley and Frodsham on the other. However distant his appointment might be Mr. Gardner made a point of returning home the same night. Wesley esteemed him highly and on more than one occasion sought to induce him to become a travelling preacher, but always in vain. The services conducted by Mr. Gardner were the means of bringing hundreds to a knowledge of the truth. Amongst the seals of his ministry may be mentioned the Rev. Daniel Jackson, who rendered good service to the Connexion. On one occasion, at the conclusion of a service at Wrexham, Mr. Gardner announced that he would preach in the same place in a fortnight's time. A man in the audience called out, "I will prevent that." Before the appointed time arrived the interrupter was in his grave. [This is culled, without comment, from Janion.] In the course of time Mr. Wooldridge removed to Duckington, near Barnhill, and Mr. Gardner set apart one of the rooms of his own house for



public worship. Mr. Gardner married Miss Janion, of Bradley Orchard, sister of the historian of Chester Methodism. They had two sons, who died in early life, and two daughters. Of these, one was Mrs. Bridgens, a member of Society in Birmingham, who died in 1806; the other, Mrs. Hardy, survived her father. In his later years Mr. Gardner disposed of his Tattenhall property, and entered upon commercial life in Birmingham in 1787. Though this step, unfortunately, was not attended by success, he was able to render important services to Birmingham Methodism, and when he passed away on the 1st January, 1808, funeral sermons were preached in the Birmingham Chapels by John Nelson, grandson of the famous stonemason evangelist. Mrs. Gardner survived until 1816.

Mr. Samuel Smith's daughter, Mary, who was brought to GOD under the preaching of Thomas Taylor, married about 1784 one who occupied a most honourable position in local Methodism. The following obituary notice (*Mag.*, 1825) will show that he had won for himself a good degree:—

1824, Decr. 24th, at Alraham, in the Chester Circuit, Mr. Samuel Hitchen, in the seventy-fourth year of his age. He had been an upright member of the Methodist Society for upwards of fifty-four years, and a class leader for upwards of forty. He was an amiable, pious, and liberal man; and died in the LORD.

A fuller account of his life and labours is given by the Rev. William Smith, then Superintendent of the Circuit, in the *Magazine* for November, 1825. He was born at Oulton Lowe, in Cheshire. When an unenlightened, but by no means vicious, lad of about

twenty, he set out one Sunday morning to visit his father, from whom he was then distant a few miles. Taking a wrong turn in a fit of absent-mindedness he found himself quite out of the way. Then he said, "I will lose nothing by this mistake; I want a pair of new stockings, and being now near the stocking-weaver's house, I will call and order a pair, and thereby save a journey." But the stocking-weaver's house was filled with people assembled to hear William Alwood, a preacher whose labours had done much good in this part of Cheshire. Young Hitchen joined the company; the sermon entered his heart; the intending order was postponed; the remainder of the Sabbath was spent in deep contrition. JESUS gradually led him into the way of peace and salvation, and he entered upon a Christian course which was destined to be long and useful. In 1777 John Murlin made him a class leader. In 1790 he became a local preacher after considerable hesitation. In this capacity his piety and love of souls made him very effective. The article says:—

Many a toilsome journey he has taken on foot to the neighbouring villages, beneath an inclement sky and exposed to the winter's wind, to hold prayer meetings, form societies, meet classes, and preach to the people the Gospel of GOD our SAVIOUR.

Nay, so unremitting were his efforts to do good to his fellow creatures, that, during the last twenty years of his life, his plans of usefulness occupied every night, except one in fourteen. Nor was the fervency of his spirit in the least abated by the infirmities of age. A short time before his last illness, when preparing to go a distance of two miles to hold a prayer meeting, his son's wife said to him, "Father, you ought not to go, at your time of life; you should take of yourself." He replied,

“I think I am taking care of myself.” Intimating that the care of the soul is, of all others, the most important and essential. Many of our Societies in this part of Cheshire owe their existence, and in a great degree their permanency, to his instrumentality.

The death of his wife’s uncles, the three brothers Sim, who were all single men, brought Mr. Hitchen a competency. He was noted for his generosity; in particular is it recorded that when the high price of corn, due to the protracted war between England and France, occasioned general distress among the labouring classes, he sold his corn at a rate far below market prices; and to an extent which compelled him to become a buyer to meet the wants of his own household. His only surviving child was John Sim Hitchen, a useful local preacher and class leader, who fully maintained all the hospitable traditions of the home. Shortly before his death the old man called his son to him and gave him a solemn and impressive charge:—

My son, give your whole heart to GOD at all times. Set up a standard against the world. Set up a standard for the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and serve Him with all your ransomed powers. Give your children Christian advice and counsel. You have heretofore religiously instructed them; do so still; and walk before them in the fear of GOD. You and your dear wife should speak often to one another on the deep things of GOD, and pray with and for each other. Honour the LORD, and He will honour you. (B)

Eighteen months elapsed between Wesley’s first and second visits to Alpraham.

Thursday, April 4th, 1751.—We took horse about four. The snow fell without intermission, which the north wind drove full in our faces. After resting awhile at Bilbrook,

Newport and Whitchurch, and riding some miles of our way, we overtook some people going to the preaching at Alpraham, who guided us straight to the house. William Hitchens had not yet begun ; so I took his place, and felt no weakness nor weariness, while I declared, *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*. April 6th, being Good Friday, I preached at eight, and then walked to Bunbury Church. I preached again at one, and in the evening at Poole, near Nantwich, to another deeply serious audience.

It would seem that on this occasion Wesley had one of his preachers as a companion and another as a harbinger. William Hitchens, one of Wesley's earliest lay-preachers, at this time had been in the work for six years, and had about seven more years of service before him.

The following year found the great evangelist in the neighbourhood again.

Monday, March 23rd, 1752.—In the evening I preached to a small serious congregation at Billbrook. The storm of wind, snow, and hail, was ready for us in the morning almost as soon as we set out, and continued the most part of the day. When we had heaths or commons to cross, it was not easy to sit a horse, especially as the wind was full in our teeth. However, we reached Poole (two miles from Nantwich) in the evening, and found a congregation gathered from many miles round ; several of whom sat up all night for fear of losing the sermon.

Wednesday, 25th.—After preaching at five and at nine, I rode on to Alpraham, where a large congregation of serious sensible people attended, both at one and at seven in the evening.

For the third time, therefore, Wesley came within a few miles of Chester and went away without having visited

the city. Within three months' time, however, there commenced a series of visits extending over very many years and continuing nearly to the end of Wesley's life.

After the original society ceased to use the vestry as a place of meeting, Mr. Evans, the parish clerk and village schoolmaster, through whom in all probability the vestry had been available, opened his house to the members. For several years they met there on the Sunday afternoon or evening after Church hours. When Mr. Evans removed to Middlewich the class meetings, in addition to the preaching services, were held at Mr. S. Cawley's. Within about twelve months the class was removed to the house of Mr. Sim. Subsequently the preaching was removed thither also. There it continued until Christmas, 1823, with the exception of one summer during which the house was rebuilding. In 1823 a large room was engaged for a Sunday School and the services were held there as it afforded better accommodation. In 1806 a deed was signed by which land was secured in perpetuity for the erection of a Chapel in Bunbury, an enterprise which was immediately carried out by subscription, of which Samuel Hitchen had the management. In 1812 this was enlarged. In 1862 a new and beautiful Chapel was erected. A Chapel was erected at Alraham in 1829, as described in the following contemporary extract.

**NEW METHODIST CHAPEL.**—A very neat structure built by the Wesleyan Connection, calculated to accommodate 400 persons, was opened for Divine Service at Alraham in this County, on Friday week, on which occasion the Rev. Robt. Newton of Liverpool preached; and on the following Sabbath the Rev. James Everett of Manchester also made a feeling and very powerful appeal

in aid of the funds for liquidating the expense. The Chapel was crowded to excess at each of the Services, and the sum of £52 was collected. Alpraham is a place of some note in the annals of Methodism. In the year 1744 the Rev. John Wesley held the first Conference in London, and in the year 1749, at the earnest solicitation of several individuals resident in the neighbourhood of Alpraham, he visited that place and preached in the house now the residence of Mr. J. S. Hitchen, and at that time and since in the occupation of his respected family. From that time until the opening of the Chapel (a period of 80 years) the Ministers in the Methodist Connection have continued to publish the glad tidings of salvation under the same hospitable roof, where they always find a hearty welcome and a home. (*Chester Chronicle, June 5th, 1829.*)

The work at Chester and Alpraham is mentioned in an extraordinary poem included by William Darney in a volume of his hymns published in Leeds in 1751. This eccentric evangelist was an illiterate Scotchman who began to itinerate upon his own account, in 1742, among the Methodist societies in Yorkshire. He received much encouragement from Grimshaw, and succeeded in establishing many societies in Todmorden, Heptonstall, and neighbourhood. These went by the name of William Darney's societies, much in the same way as Cheshire was associated with the name of John Bennet. Though permitted to preach, Darney never had the full sanction of the Wesleys. Charles Wesley refused to admit him to a Conference in Leeds in 1751, and left written instructions that unless he would abstain from "railing, begging, and printing nonsense," he should not be allowed to preach in connection with Methodism any more.

The following verses are given here on account of their local references ; they will also serve to shew the quality of Darney's verse.

- 75 Therefore, *O Manchester!* return,  
 this Call it is for you ;  
 Seek to be sav'd by Grace alone,  
 this Doctrine it is true.
- 76 True Grace thro' Faith will bring good Fruit,  
 and make your Hearts rejoice,  
 In the true Vine then you take root,  
 and glorifie his Grace.
- 77 In *Cheshire* still the Work doth spread,  
 and JESUS gets the Day :  
 O praise him all ye faithful Seed,  
 still do ye watch and pray.
- 78 All ye at *Holme*, likewise *Bothbank*,  
*Warburton*, *Oldfield-brow* ;  
 Go on dear Souls, and never shrink,  
 for JESUS pleads for you.
- 79 In *Chester*, and in *Alpreham*,  
 there's some that can rejoice ;  
 Their Hearts do dance at JESUS Name.  
 who sav'd them by his Grace.
- 80 Now many Places here and there,  
 do long to hear the sound ;  
 And Multitudes in *Derbyshire*,  
 have the Redeemer found.

Readers of this strange effusion, entitled *The Progress of the Gospel in divers parts of Great Bratain*, (sic) will not be surprised at the author's remark: "Take notice, that the first Hymn in the Book which

gives an account of the Progress of the Gospel, is not made so proper for singing as for reading." Nor will they be surprised at the remark of the Rev. Thomas Jackson in his *Life of Charles Wesley*: "They are amongst the most rude and unpolished compositions that were ever committed to the press."

In another early effusion, of a similar order, though less rugged, is found the following :—

Avaunt my muse, once more thy pinions try,  
And from the centre of the kingdom fly;  
Survey GOD'S work towards the western shore,  
And view some parts we have not viewed before.  
*Manchester, Liverpool, West Chester, too,*  
There JESUS found much work for Him to do.  
In all these places, and the country round,  
There now are thousands of bright Christians found,  
Converted since field preaching did abound.<sup>1</sup>

In the congregation at Alraham were often to be found a couple named Jackson. Their son, Samuel, who was born at Alraham in 1785, has left upon record his vivid recollection of the immense crowd which assembled in the place to hear a funeral sermon on Wesley's decease, and how he had been affected to see so many in tears. It was not, however, until he reached his majority that this lad was truly converted. In 1813 he became a local preacher in the Northwich Circuit in which he then resided, and rendered good service for over fifty years. His younger brother, John, a faithful, liberal Methodist for many years, married Jane Done of

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Methodist Attempted in Plain Metre. Nottingham: printed for the author, at G. Burbage's office on the Long Row, 1780. (Said to be by James Kershaw.)*



Eaton. The seventh child of this worthy pair was born at Highwayside, Alraham, on May 7th, 1838, and received the name of William. John Jackson subsequently removed to Cholmondeston in the Nantwich Circuit, which in 1866 sent out his son William into the ministry. The Rev. William Jackson has served Methodism nobly in many Circuits, and is now the Chairman of the Portsmouth District (1902).

In all probability Joseph Lewis, who was born at Bunbury in 1788, justified by faith in 1806, received as a candidate for the ministry in 1811, may be claimed as one of the fruits of Methodist preaching in the neighbourhood. He died in 1856. John Jones, who was born at Tiverton in the same year, died in Chester in 1872. As a local preacher in the Northwich Circuit, residing at Weaverham, he preached 4,680 sermons, travelling 30,000 miles to do so.

## CHAPTER II.

---

### Introduction of Methodism into the City of Chester, 1747-1764.

---

THE introduction of Methodism into the city of Chester took place several years before Wesley himself visited the neighbourhood. **John Bennet's** work in Cheshire has been already mentioned. The "Round" which went specially by his name in the earliest days was a very extensive one. It comprised Chinley in Derbyshire, Macclesfield, Burslem, Alpraham, Chester, Holywell; passing over the rising town of Liverpool, it went onward to Whitehaven in Cumberland, and back to Bolton, Manchester, and Chinley, including many of the intermediate towns and villages.

It is said that Bennet was invited to Chester by George Shaw, a tailor, then living in Boughton, a district lying on the outskirts of Chester as it is entered by the main roads from Manchester and Whitchurch. He had heard the preachers in Bolton and other places. The following letter describes what appears to be the first visit of John Bennet to the city. Probably he was

there again in August on the occasion of his journey through the district with Grimshaw, of Haworth.

Chinley, March 7th, 1746-7.

Sir,

This day I have given Mr. Charles Wesley a particular account of the Societies in Derbyshire, Cheshire, and Lancashire, according to his Request. His coming was not in vain. Surely a little cloud of Witnesses are arisen amongst us, who received the Word of Reconciliation under his ministry. I trust GOD will send you also hither, to water the good Seed of His Word. Last week I spent three days in and about Chester, and the Word was gladly received. I am assured that the Time is come that the Gospel must be preached in that City. The Inhabitants received me gladly, and said, "We have heard of Wesley, and read his books: why could you not have come hither sooner?" They also desired that I would write immediately and entreat you to come up thither also. I expounded at a town [Tarvin] four miles from Chester, where several of our friends (unknown to you) came to hear. A little society is begun near Namptwich, and they have got your Hymn books, &c. These long to see you. The manner I proceeded at Chester was as followeth: I heard a religious Society was kept in the City, and so I made an enquiry and found them out, upon which I was desired to preach, and afterwards pressed upon to stay longer, or visit them again.— I think your way is plain and open into those parts. I desire, if you can, you will allow yourself some time, and visit them in your Return from the North. If you intend to do so, please to let me know in time, that I may give Notice; for the people will come from each quarter . . . . .

I am,

Your unworthy Brother and Son in the Gospel,

JOHN BENNET.

(*Magazine*, 1778, p. 471).

John Bennet's work in Chester and the county was spread over a number of years, and his labours count

for very much in the early history of Methodism in the district. At the sixth Annual Conference, November, 1749, a great step was taken towards the organization of the growing work. It was decided that among the "Helpers" appointed to a Circuit one should be invested with special responsibility and authority. He was to be distinguished from his brother Helpers by the title of "Assistant," (altered in modern times to "Superintendent"). In the absence of the Wesleys all Methodist work and workers were to be under the direction of the Assistant, who was responsible to Wesley only. John Bennet was appointed to this important position for the Cheshire Circuit, then comprising Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and parts of Yorkshire as far as Sheffield. (c)

Early in 1753, Bennet unhappily severed his connection with Wesley, and there was widespread defection throughout the Circuit. The Methodists of Chester remained loyal to Wesley. (d)

Soon after the first appearance of the itinerant evangelists, Mr. George Catton of Huntington Hall, near Chester, opened his house for preaching, and extended hospitality to the preachers. In 1751 a house was opened in the City itself for the same purpose by Mr. Richard Jones of Love Lane, who was engaged in the tobacco pipe manufacture, for which the street was famous throughout a long period. The open air preaching, so characteristic of early Methodism, was also carried on with vigour. Several localities are mentioned as having been frequented for this purpose; the open place near St. John's Church (presumably the site now occupied by the Grosvenor Park), the square

near St. Martin's of the Ash, the Gallows' Hill near the Lepers' Hospital in Boughton, the present site of Queen Street Chapel (then known as the tilting croft), and the Dee Banks. In these places the Helpers of Wesley preached when they visited Chester and in their absence the converts did their best to publish the Gospel news to their friends and neighbours.

A Society was formed in accordance with the "Rules and Regulations of the people commonly called Methodists," drawn up by the Wesleys a few years previously. Early in 1752, when the house of Mr. Jones was proving too strait for the increasing congregation, the little Society was gladdened by the offer at a reasonable rent of a barn which they might fit up as they pleased. This barn was in a notable locality of Chester, known as St. Martin's Ash. The modern Square, so well known to all Cestrians, is not so large as the open space of earlier times to which the people resorted for recreation. The names in the immediate neighbourhood, White Friars, Black Friars and Gray Friars, serve to perpetuate the associations of ancient times. As the site was near the river, the Race Course, the Castle, and one part of the City Walls, it was more public than most of those selected by the early Methodists. The barn was a large and lofty structure and was made to provide for nearly 200 persons by the erection of a gallery. It stood on the south side of the Square, opposite the Church of St. Martin's of the Ash, thus distinguished from St. Martin's in the Fields, another Chester Church. The ancient Church of St. Martin's in the Ash had been replaced in 1721 by a new one. This was neither large nor costly and perhaps the transformed barn was quite

as commodious and almost as handsome as the Episcopalian Church occupying the historic site opposite.

It was shortly after their establishment in St. Martin's Ash that the Chester Methodists received their first visit from the founder of Methodism. The fact that the visit of 1752 fills a considerable space in Wesley's Journal leads to the conclusion that when he refers to the "accustomed place" of preaching, he does not imply that he had been there himself on any previous occasion. The Chester tradition has always had it that this was the first visit. George Walker, the first Steward of St. John Street, wrote the following in the manuscript history of the introduction of Methodism into Chester which he inserted in the 'Trustees' Minute Book in 1812:—

In the June of the same year, 1752, that bright luminary of the Christian World (Oh! how shall the writer of these memoirs, express in words his veneration of the character and conduct of the man he so highly respected, and so dearly loved), that refulgent star of righteousness, in whose life and actions the doctrines and practice of the Gospel truths show with peculiar lustre, that living evidence of the solid power of inspiration, that zealous patron of the Apostolic creed, that unalienable disciple of the cross of CHRIST, that unwearied promoter of the interests of the kingdom of the Redeemer, that assiduous gatherer of the spiritual Israel of the LORD, that Father of Methodism, and patriarch of the immensely crowded family who have embraced the doctrines, Mr. Wesley, paid his first Ministerial visit to the Chester Society. Here he was hailed as an Angel of God, respected as the servant of the Most High, and beloved as the most patriotic friend, and Father of the Church. From this period, his visits and superintendence of the Chester Society, became a regular part of his engagements, and it may be said on the part of his adherents, they sincerely loved him, and ever held his approach

among them as an high, a festive, and a Jubilee day!!! Oh! what simplicity and Christian love! Well does the writer recollect, and with indescribable pleasure trace back the happy hours spent in his enlivening conversation, and his instructive discourses. Yea, and while memory holds her place, his name, his virtues, will never be forgot!!! (E)

The following quotations give Wesley's deeply interesting account of his first visit to Chester:—

Monday, June 15th, 1752.—I had many little trials in this journey, of a kind I had not known before. I had borrowed a young, strong mare, when I set out from Manchester. But she fell lame before I got to Grimsby. I procured another, but was dismounted again between Newcastle and Berwick. At my return to Manchester, I took my own. But she had lamed herself in the pasture. I thought, nevertheless, to ride her three or four miles to-day. But she was gone out of the ground, and we could hear nothing of her. However, I comforted myself that I had another at Manchester, which I had lately bought. But when I came thither, I found, one had borrowed her too, and rode her away to Chester.

Saturday, 20th, I rode to Chester, and preached at six in the accustomed place, a little without the gates, near St. John's Church. One single man, a poor alehouse-keeper, seemed disgusted, spoke a harmless word, and ran away with all speed. All the rest behaved with the utmost seriousness, while I declared *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Sunday, 21st, I preached at seven in a much larger house, which was just taken, near St. Martin's Church, as eminent a part of the town as Drury Lane is in London, or as the Horse Fair was in Bristol. At Church, Mr. L—— preached a strong, plain, useful sermon, upon the faith of Abraham. At one, I began preaching again, on *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*. But the house not containing half of the congregation, I was obliged to stand at the door, on one side of a kind of Square, large enough to contain ten or twelve thousand people. I had a few hours before spoken to the

captain of a vessel, with whom I proposed sailing for Dublin : and the wind being fair, I knew not whether I should stay to preach another sermon in Chester. I find it useful to be in such a state of suspense : wherein I know not what will be the next hour, but lean absolutely on His disposal who knoweth and ruleth all things well.

At four, I preached in the Square, to a much larger congregation, among whom were abundance of gentry. One man screamed and hallooed as loud as he could, but none seconded or regarded him. The rest of the congregation were steadily serious from the beginning to the end.

Monday, 22nd, we walked round the walls of the city, which are something more than a mile and three quarters in circumference. But there are many vacant spaces within the walls, many gardens, and a good deal of pasture ground. So that I believe Newcastle-upon-Tyne, within the walls, contains at least a third more houses than Chester. The greatest convenience here is what they call *The Rows*; that is, covered galleries, which run through the main streets on each side, from East to West, and from North to South: by which means one may walk both clean and dry in any weather, from one end of the city to the other. I preached at six in the evening in the Square, to a vast multitude, rich and poor. The far greater part, the gentry in particular, were seriously and deeply attentive: though a few of the rabble, most of them drunk, laboured much to make a disturbance. One might already perceive a great increase of earnestness in the generality of the hearers. So is God able to cut short his work, to wound or heal, in whatever time it pleaseth Him.

On the Tuesday morning Wesley received letters which made it necessary for him to proceed to Bristol with all speed. Ten o'clock found him on his way thither. Nine days later he records :—

Wednesday, July 1st. Having finished my business at Bristol, I took horse again, and preached that evening at Evesham. Thursday, 2nd, I reached Bilbrook and Chester.



Friday, 3rd. I was saying in the morning to Mr. Parker, "Considering the good that has been done here already, I wonder the people of Chester are so quiet." He answered, "You must not expect they will be so always." Accordingly, one of the first things I heard after I came into the town was, that for two nights before, the mob had been employed in pulling down the house where I had preached. I asked, "Were there no Magistrates in the City?" Several answered me, "We went to the Mayor, after the first riot, and desired a warrant to bring the rioters before him, but he positively refused to grant any, or take any informations about it." So, being undisturbed, they assembled again the next night, and finished their work.

Saturday, 4th, I preached in our old room.

Sunday, 5th, I stood at seven in the morning near the ruins of the house, and explained the principles and practice of that *Sect which is everywhere spoken against*. I went afterwards to St. Martin's Church, which stands close to the place. The gentleman who officiated, seemed to be extremely moved at several passages of the second Lesson, Luke xvii. particularly, *It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones*. He began his sermon nearly in these words, "The last Lord's day I preached on *doing as you would be done to*, in hopes of preventing such proceedings as are contrary to all justice, mercy, and humanity. As I could not do that, I have chosen these words for your present consideration, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*." He concluded nearly thus: "I am sorry that any such outrage should be committed, particularly in this parish; where I have been teaching so many years. And to how little purpose! I will remove as soon as I possibly can from a place where I can do so little good. O what an account have they to make, who have either occasioned or encouraged these proceedings! May God grant, that they may repent in time! That

they may know what spirit they are of! That they may, before it is too late, acknowledge and love the truth as it is in JESUS.'

I preached again in the same place at one, and at four, and the whole congregation were quiet and serious.

It cannot be stated with certainty who were the clergymen referred to in these extracts from the Journal. On Sunday, June 21st, Wesley heard Mr. L.— *at Church*. He does not say which Church. In the list of Vicars given in *Fenwick's History of Chester*, there is no Mr. L.— at this date. It may have been a visitor; or an unbeneficed Clergyman; or possibly Wesley attended St. Peter's Church, the Vicar of which at this period is not recorded. Sunday, July 5th, Wesley heard at St. Martin's *the gentleman who officiated*. Probably this was Rev. John Baldwin, M.A., Vicar 1739-1793.

On the Monday, as no ship was ready to sail for Ireland, Wesley "took horse, with my wife," for Whitehaven. The first stage of the journey, which commenced at nine or ten in the morning, took them to Manchester, where the tireless preacher spoke the same evening. The words, "with my wife," must not be overlooked. On February 18th, 1751, Wesley had been united in matrimony at Wandsworth Parish Church, to the widow of Noah Vazeille, merchant, of Fenchurch Street, London. Mrs. Wesley's visit to Chester took place, therefore, in the early days of her married life, during the first four years of which she travelled extensively with her husband. At the time of the marriage it was agreed that Wesley should not preach one sermon or travel one mile the less on his wife's account. In the April preceding this Chester visit, Wesley informed a friend, "My wife is, at least, as

well as when we left London; the more she travels the better she bears it." Even in these early years, however, the storms were brewing. It is a matter of notoriety that the marriage proved most unhappy, and cast a dark shadow over thirty years of Wesley's life.<sup>1</sup>

The cruel wrong inflicted upon the Society by the destruction of the barn sanctuary did not break their spirit. The room in Love Lane being spared them as a rallying centre, the re-erection of the barn was undertaken with such vigour that they were able to occupy it again by Christmas, 1752.

There is preserved in Manchester a very remarkable old account book. The first page, which was declared by George Marsden to be in the handwriting of John Wesley, reads as follows:—

A True Account of the Money Brot. in by the Stewards from Each Society in the Manchester Round; for the use of the Preachers, and for ye discharging of Necessary Expence.

Aprill ye 20, 1752.

Chester	Jon <sup>h</sup> . Pritchard	12/-
Alraham	Ricd. Cawley	12/-
Acton	Wm. Davison	7/-
Boothbank	Jon. Cross	10/11
Oldfield Brow	William Johnson	8/-
Davyholme	Robert Haywood	15/-
Shackerley	Jon. Hampson	4/-
Bolton	George Eskrick	8/2
Bank House	James Scofield	8/-
Asbury	Jos. Booth	5/6
Manchester	Ricd. Barlow	£2 3 5
Kadbrooke	Mary Webster	6
	Total	<u>£7 0 0</u>
Woodley		
Maxfield		

1. *A full and fair account of the whole matter may be found in Telford's John Wesley, chap. xv.*

Of George Eſcrick it is elsewhere recorded that he once walked the forty miles to Chester, and back next day, spending twopence on the road each way.

It should be said that the meeting was at Boothbank near Bucklow Hill.

Successive items from Chester are :—

1752 June, 12/-; Sept., 14/-; Decr., 14/-.

1753 March, 18/- (these by Jonathan Pritchard); June, 32/- (by Richard Jones); Sep., 19/- (by John Hampson); Decr., 21/- (do.).

1754 March, 27/3 (do.); June, 20/- (by Henry Moss); Sept., 14/- (by J. P.); Decr., 19/6 (by H. Moss).

1755 March, 16/9; June, 20/- (both by J. P.); Sep., 20/- (by John Hampson).

From this point the accounts are less complete—

1756 June, 8/- (by J. P.).

Octr. 27/- (by John Whitehead).

1757 Jany. 27/3 (by J. P.)

March, 28/2 (by M. Johnson).

June, 27/9 (by John Hacker).

Also, by the same,

Dudden Heath, 10/-

Alraham, 9/-

Wood Green, 6/6

Little Acton and Poole, 21/6

Octr., (by \* \*), 14/4

1762 May, Mold, . . .

Parkgate, 9/-

Alraham, 10/-

Chester, 42/-

Little Acton, 17/-

There are also records of monies brought from Tattenhall by Samuel Smith and Richard Bruce.

On the debit side there appear many interesting items, *e.g.* :

1752 Hopper, travelling charges to Newcastle and pocket money, One guinea. Carriage of his box, 2/1.

1752 July 12, Fenwick 1/6, Licensing Chester House.

**John Haughton** was placed in charge of the Cheshire Circuit or Manchester Round in 1752. His stay was short, for in 1754 he became a clergyman of the Episcopal Church and obtained a position in Ireland.

Associated with Haughton during part of 1753 was one who did and suffered much in the early days of Methodism, **Jonathan Maskew**. He had enjoyed the privilege of close association with the apostolic Vicar of Haworth. The circumstances of his appointment will throw a valuable sidelight upon the Methodism of those days. Although the limits of the Circuits were traced out and appointments to them made by the Conference, yet the Helpers were not stationed with the regularity of modern times. The Conferences themselves were not held at fixed dates, but at times best suiting the convenience of Wesley and others. During one year two Conferences were held. The labourers were few and emergencies frequently arose from revival and persecution alike, to say nothing of sickness, death, and defection. There being no "list of reserve," the frequent moving of the Helpers became necessary. In these matters the word of Wesley was supreme. In 1752 Maskew had been directed to labour in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and its vicinity. This he did until early in 1753, when he received the following letter of instruction :—<sup>1</sup>

LONDON,

FEBRUARY 22ND, 1753.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I cannot blame you at all for writing to me, before you determined anything. I believe your staying so long in the Newcastle Circuit has been for good, both for you, and for others; and you are still wanted there. But you are wanted more elsewhere. I do not mean you should go to Mr. Grimshaw's Circuit (although you might stay a fortnight there, not more), but to Manchester. I promised you should set out to help brother Haughton, as soon as brother Hopper could go to Newcastle. So that you are sadly beyond your time; the blame of which is probably (as usual) laid upon me. Therefore, the sooner you are at Manchester, the better. Peace be with your spirit.

I am,

Your affectionate brother,

J. WESLEY.

The following letter, written a month previously, shews the minuteness of Wesley's superintendency in still clearer light. This letter, which has not been published before, was lent by Mrs. James Bowers, of Chester:—

LONDON,

JAN. 16TH, 1753.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

If there are two Preachers in the Round (as I suppose there are now, if Jonathan Maskew is come) then you may tell Mr. Haughton, I desire the Preaching may be constantly at Chester, in the manner I settled it when I was in the Country. I hope to set out for the North, about the beginning of March. I am not determined, whether I go down towards Newcastle by Chester, or endeavour to see you in my return. I hope S. Roughly, bro. Jones and all our Friends, are pressing on, & walking in Love. Ought I not to have heard something from you, rather than from others, concerning S. Barlow of Manchester? If

London

Jan. 16. 1753

My Dear Brother

If there are two Preachers in the Room  
(I suppose there are now, if Jonathan Masker  
come) then you may tell Mr Haughton, I desire  
the Preaching may be constantly at Chester, in  
the manner I desired it when I was in the  
Country. I hope to set out for the North, about  
the beginning of March. I am not yet determined  
whether I go down toward Newcastle by Chester,  
or endeavour to see you in my return. I hope  
S. Rowley, Bro: Jones & all our Friends, are  
prospering on, & walking in Love. Ought I not  
to have heard something from you, rather than  
from others, concerning S. Barton of Manchester  
If she does remove to Chester, I trust it will  
be for the Good of Many. For she has both a  
preaching & a healing Spirit. I am

Your Affectionate Brother  
J Wesley.





she does remove to Chester, I trust that it will be for the Good of Many. For she has both a searching & a healing Spirit.

I am,  
Your affectionate Brother,  
J. WESLEY.

[Addressed to]

MR. JONATHAN PRITCHARD,  
In Boughton, near Chester.

This letter agrees with the statement of John Gaulter<sup>1</sup> :—

About a year after the Society had entered their new preaching house, Mr. John Wesley, in one of his annual tours, called upon them. He united the congregations in the city and neighbourhood to the Manchester Circuit, and appointed a regular change of travelling ministers, according to the established economy of the Connection. This infant plant of the Church was flourished by a succession of faithful pastors. Every other LORD'S Day the Preachers attended, which at that period of time was considered as an ample supply.

Of "Sister Barlow," mentioned in the letter, no record has been found in Chester. It may be noted that Manchester was represented by Richard Barlow at the Boothbank Quarterly Meeting.

Jonathan Maskew did not maintain his position in the itinerant ranks to the end of his life. He married a widow and settled down on a farm near Haworth. His zeal, however, was unabated, and he practically created a Circuit for himself in the surrounding country. Gaulter, who wrote his life, depicts him actively engaged in Christian work until his death in 1793. Many of those who entered the company of Helpers left after

---

1. *Mag.*, 1809.

a few years. The extreme severity of the labours to which the preachers were called proved too much for any but the strongest men. The desire for marriage and a settled habitation prevailed with many. Happily it may be said of many who thus left the "full" work, that they became centres of light in the neighbourhoods where they settled.

A month after dispatching Maskew to the Manchester round, Wesley paid his third visit to the city of Chester, where he found a marked improvement upon the previous state of affairs.

Tuesday, March 27th, 1753, We rode to Chester, where we found the scene quite changed, since I was here before. There is now no talk of pulling down houses. The present Mayor, being a man of courage as well as honesty, will suffer no riot of any kind, so that there is peace through all the city.

Wednesday, 28th, The house was full of serious hearers at five. In the evening some gay young men made a little disturbance; and a large mob was gathered about the door. But in a short time, they dispersed of themselves. However, we thought it best to acquaint the Mayor with what had passed: on which he ordered the City Crier, to go down next evening and proclaim, that all riots should be severely punished. And promised, if need were, to come down himself and read the act of Parliament. But it needed not. After his mind was known, none was so hardy as to make a disturbance.

Who was this courageous Mayor? There is every reason for believing that it was Thomas Broster. It is true that Matthew Harrison, in a note published in the *Cheshire Sheaf*, declares that Broster was the Mayor who refused to protect the Methodists; but this is probably only because the date "1752" is assigned to Broster in the

municipal records. If Broster was elected towards the close of 1752 he would be in office during April, 1753. That this was the case is definitely stated in a little volume published in 1839 by the Rev. P. C. Turner, entitled *Memoirs of Miss Sarah Broster, of Chester*. Miss Broster, of whom a fuller account is given on a later page, was the daughter of Mr. Peter Broster (Mayor 1791) and granddaughter of Mr. Thomas Broster (Mayor 1752). Mr. Turner says one of the gay young men referred to in Wesley's Journal as endeavouring to make a disturbance

was brother to the late Sir Richard Perrins, Knight, one of the Barons of the Exchequer. The Mayor sent three constables to bring the young men before him; when they appeared they had each a large oak stick in their hands. The Mayor said to them You will have no use for those weapons in the place where I am going to send you, therefore lay them down on this table. They then asked the Mayor where he meant to send them. He said To the house of correction unless you can get some respectable person to engage for your future good behaviour. They then sent out and procured a proper person, who promised for their future good conduct, and they were discharged; but the Mayor detained their weapons. This support of the Methodists gave offence to some of the clergy, and also much to the relations of the three young gentlemen.

At the Conference held in May, 1753, the names of **John Haughton** and **James Scholfield** were put down for the Cheshire Circuit. The name of the second preacher is also down for the Lincolnshire Circuit. Presumably he was to spend part of the year in each round. Wesley had to make the most of his scanty material, and provide each Circuit with some help from the itinerants. Like Haughton and Maskew, Scholfield soon left the work. Like Bennet he entered upon a

course of active opposition to the Wesleys. But there were no redeeming features in his case; on the contrary the sad record of his unfaithfulness is to be found in the Journals under date April, 1757.

In May, 1753 (and probably on other occasions), there passed through Chester on his way to London from Dublin, *via* Parkgate, one of the most eminent of the men whom GOD raised up to aid in the Evangelical Revival. This was Thomas Walsh, who added to the zeal of his comrades remarkable accomplishments as a student of the sacred languages. Wesley, no mean judge, said, "Such a master of Biblic knowledge I never saw before, and never expect to see again." The impression produced in Chester by Walsh, who was at the time only a young man of some three and twenty years, was remarkable. The open space near the "Room" had to be used to accommodate the crowds who flocked to hear him.

The Societies in Chester and the neighbourhood were also privileged during this year to receive considerable encouragement from the fervent evangelist, George Whitefield. It is probable that he passed through Chester as early as 1738, when, on November 30, he landed at Parkgate and hurried to Nantwich. But the first record of his preaching in Chester is as follows:—

WOLVERHAMPTON,

OCT. 27TH, 1753.

My last I think was from Nantwich. . . . I have preached four times at Alpraham in Cheshire, where the LORD was with us of a truth; and where He had prepared my way, by blessing several of my poor writings. At Chester, I

preached four times; a great concourse attended; all was quiet; several of the clergy were present; and the word came with power. I have since heard that the most noted rebel in the town was brought under deep conviction and could not sleep night or day. . . . Wrexham has been a rude place; and, upon my coming there, the town was alarmed, and several thousands came to hear. Some of the baser sort made a great noise, and threw stones, but none touched me, and, I trust, our LORD got Himself the victory. Next day, near Alpraham, we had another heaven upon earth.<sup>1</sup>

The Conference of 1754 was held in London. One of the preachers appointed to the extensive tract of country forming the Manchester Circuit was **Peter Jaco**, then girding on the armour which he was to wear with honour for many years. He says:—

At the Conference in London, the 4th of May, 1754, I was appointed for the Manchester Circuit, which then took in Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and part of Yorkshire. Here GOD so blessed my mean labours, that I was fully convinced He had called me to preach His Gospel. Meantime my hardships were great. I had many difficulties to struggle with. In some places the work was to begin; and in most places being in its infancy, we had hardly the necessaries of life; so that after preaching three or four times a day, and riding thirty or forty miles, I have often been thankful for a little clean straw, with a canvas sheet, to lie on. Very frequently also we had violent oppositions. At Warrington I was struck so violently with a brick on the breast, that the blood gushed out through my mouth, nose, and ears.<sup>2</sup>

The twelfth Conference, that of 1755, was held at Leeds, commencing on May 6th. The inchoate and fragmentary character of Methodism, contrasting so

---

1. *Tyerman's Whitefield II.*, 315.      2. *E.M.P. I.*, 264.

strongly with the precision exhibited in subsequent periods of its history, appears from the fact that three lists of Preachers are inserted in the "Minutes." The first list contains thirty-four names, beginning with those of John and Charles Wesley, and is headed "Our present itinerants." The second list, containing twelve names, is headed "Half-itinerants." These men did not give themselves up entirely to preaching nor did they put themselves wholly at the disposal of the Wesleys, but made occasional evangelistic excursions, receiving such support as was forthcoming from the people amongst whom they laboured. They retained a settled home, and in some cases a business. The third list contains the names of fourteen brethren styled "our chief local preachers." This designation is somewhat perplexing. How was the line drawn between ordinary and chief local preachers?

The Cheshire circuit still included Manchester and Liverpool, together with the rest of Lancashire and portions of other counties. It was committed to the charge of **R. Moss** as Assistant, a brother who did not remain among the itinerant preachers to the end of his life, and whose work does not appear to have left any very distinct mark. **Jacob Rowel** was the Helper. He had already endured much hardness and had sustained actual bodily injury during his labours. When he died nine-and-twenty years later the Conference obituary described him as a "faithful old soldier, fairly worn out in his Master's service."

The following letter, the original of which was kindly lent by Mrs. James Bowers, is of remarkable

interest from several points of view. There is good reason to believe that it was addressed to Jonathan Pritchard, but the letter itself bears no address or name.

LONDON,

JUNE 16TH, 1756.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

If our brethren at Chester purpose ever to prosecute, they cannot have a fairer Opportunity: provided they have a sufficient number of Witnesses whose Depositions will come home to the point; Particularly with regard to those words, You shall have no Justice from me. Those Depositions might be drawn up in the Country, and sent up to Mr. P'Anson in New Palace Yard, Westminster. The sooner the better; for Term will begin shortly. Delay doe's much hurt in Cases of this Kind. Do you hear how ye Manchester Mob is now?

I am,

Your affectionate Brother,

J. WESLEY.

Is b. Moss gone yet into the Birstal Circuit?

The letter is in good preservation, and the date is written with perfect clearness. A critical examination brings out several points which call for consideration. To begin with, the letter is headed "London"; but at the date given Wesley was in the midst of a long visit to Ireland, and his doings on that very day are described in the Journals. The heading may be an oversight arising from the fact that Wesley wrote more letters from London than from any other place; though remarkably accurate, he was not infallible, and it may here be recalled that it was partly through his failure to address a letter properly that his intention to marry Grace Murray was circumvented by his brother. It seems more probable, however, that the heading was

intentionally adopted to indicate that any reply should be sent to the Metropolis, and not to Ireland, where the writer had no permanent address.

The date agrees with the query about R. Moss, who was appointed to the Cheshire Circuit at the Conference of 1755. But it is not so easy to see how the date can harmonise with the reference to prosecution. The riot already described in these pages, in the course of which the mob pulled down the first chapel in St. Martin's Ash, and the Mayor refused redress, was in July, 1752. No other actual riot is recorded, but Wesley cannot be referring to this four years after its occurrence, and counselling against delay in prosecution. The probable order of events is as follows:—Riot in 1752; no appeal made from the Mayor's action until too much time had elapsed; the next Mayor, a man of integrity, kept the rabble well in hand; persecution subsequently renewed, and an unsuccessful application made for protection. In 1756, therefore, Wesley's advice was sought, and because the evil conduct was persistent he advised an immediate appeal to the highest court. That this was not the first assault, and that on some previous occasions there had been delay, is implied in the words—If . . . purpose *ever*. To seek the protection of the law was quite in accord with the principles of the founders of Methodism. They were nobly free from all personal vindictiveness, but they believed that a magistrate should not bear the sword in vain. (F)

On Thursday, August 12th, 1756, Wesley crossed from Dublin to Holyhead, accompanied by Thomas



Walsh, John Haughton and J. Morgan. The passage, described as pleasant, occupied twenty-three hours.

Friday, August 13th, Having hired horses for Chester, we set out about seven.

Saturday, 14th, . . . . We rode on, through one of the pleasantest countries in the world, by Holywell, to Chester. Here we had a comfortable meeting in the evening; as well as the next day, both in the room, and in the square.

Monday, 16th, The rain was suspended, while I preached to a large and quiet congregation.

Not many months afterwards Wesley was again in Chester. He reached it by way of Nantwich and Poole, preaching at each of these places.

Wednesday, April 20th, 1757, The congregation at Chester in the evening was as quiet and serious as that at the Foundery: and the Society was nearly a third part larger than when I was here in Autumn.

A notable accession to the Society in this year was Peter Heath. He was born in 1731 of pious parents. He had a long and anxious search for the light; but the peace of God entered his soul in 1757 as he was engaged in private prayer. His newly found joy could not be kept to himself until the next class meeting should come round, so he went from house to house among his friends calling upon them to rejoice with him.

In 1758, John Nelson was once more in the neighbourhood. In a very curious old letter written by him to Charles Wesley, under date March 17th, 1758, he says: "I was glad to hear from you, but I have been abroad two months. I have been quite through the Manchester round." He goes on to speak of numbers of

conversions witnessed on this journey. He must have visited Chester and Alpraham on this occasion.

At the Conference of 1758, the preachers appointed to the Circuit were **John Turnough, James Wild** and **Thomas Oliver**s. The two former soon disappear from Methodist records; the third was a notable man, and an account of his life will appear in these pages. He describes his Circuit as including a great part of Lancashire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire.

Some further Wesley visits are now to be described in his own words:—

Monday, April 30th, 1759, We had a numerous congregation at Acton-bridge, two or three miles from Northwich. Some large trees screened us both from the sun and wind. In the afternoon I rode to Chester. It was well the wind was pretty high; for the sun shone as it uses to do in the dog-days.

Wednesday, May 2nd, I rode over to Mould in Flintshire, about twelve miles from Chester. The sun was very hot, and the wind very cold; but as the place they had chosen for me, was exposed both to the sun and the wind, the one balanced with the other; and notwithstanding the Chester Races, which had drawn the rich away, and the Market-day which detained many of the poor, we had a multitude of people, the serious part of whom soon influenced the rest: So that all but two or three remained uncovered, and kneeled down as soon as I began to pray.

Thursday, 3rd, We crossed from Chester to Liverpool.

Monday, 24th March, 1760. About noon I preached at Warrington. Many of *the beasts of the people* were present. But the bridle from above was in their teeth, so that they made not the least disturbance. At seven in the evening I preached at Chester; but I was scarcely able to open my eyes. They were much inflamed before I set out: and the inflammation

was much increased, by riding forty miles, with a strong and cold wind exactly in my face. But in the evening I applied the eyewater, made with *lapis calaminaris*, which removed the disorder before morning.

Tuesday, 25th, I rode to Mould in Flintshire. The wind was often ready to bear away both man and horse. But the earnest, serious congregation rewarded us for our trouble.

During the same year Wesley was again in the neighbourhood of Chester. His preachers were waiting for him in Conference at Bristol and through delays of various kinds his journey from Ireland had occupied more time than was anticipated. When he landed at Parkgate it was already time for him to be opening Conference and he started off for Bristol with all possible speed. Although he rode past the ancient City in his haste the following extract from the Journal is inserted as showing the indifference of Wesley to labour and expense when engagements had to be fulfilled. Much light is thrown also upon the conditions of travel in this country at the time, and upon the toils of the itinerants whose work is now under consideration.

We reached Dublin on Wednesday, 20th August, 1760. I then inquired for a Chester ship, and found one, which was expected to set sail on Friday morning: but on Friday morning, the Captain sent us word, "He must wait for General Montague." So in the afternoon I rode over to Skerries, where the packet lay: but before I came thither, the wind, which was fair before, shifted to the east and blew a storm. I saw the hand of God, and after resting a while, rode cheerfully back to Dublin. It being the Watchnight, I came just in time, to spend a comfortable hour with the congregation. O how good it is, to have no choice of our own, but to leave all things to the will of God!

Saturday, 23rd, The Captain of the Chester ship sent word, "The General would not go, and he would sail the next

morning." So we have one more day to spend in Ireland. Let us "live this day as if it were our last!"

Sunday, 24th, At seven I took leave of my friends, and about noon embarked in the *Nonpareil* for Chester. We had forty or fifty passengers on board, half of whom were cabin passengers. I was afraid we should have an uneasy time, in the midst of such a crowd of gentry. We sailed out with a fair wind, but at four in the afternoon it failed, and left us in a dead calm. I then made the gentlemen an offer of preaching, which they thankfully accepted. While I was preaching the wind sprung up fair: but the next day we were becalmed again. In the afternoon they desired me to give them another sermon, and again the wind sprung up while I was speaking, and continued till about noon on Tuesday, we landed at Parkgate. Being in haste, I would not stay for my own horse, which I found could not land till low water. So I bought one, and having hired another, set forward without delay. We reached Whitchurch that evening.

Wednesday, 27th, We breakfasted at Newport, where finding our horses begin to fail, we thought it best to take the Birmingham road, that, if they should fail us altogether, we might stay among our friends. But they would go no farther than Wolverhampton; so we hired fresh horses there, and immediately set out for Worcester: but one of them soon after fell, and gave me such a shock (though I did not quit my seat) that I was seized with a violent bleeding at the nose, which nothing we could apply would stop, so we were obliged to go at a foot pace for two miles, and then stay at Broadwater.

Thursday, 28th, Soon after we set out, the other horse fell lame. A honest man at Worcester found this was caused by a bad shoe. A smith cured this by a new shoe: but at the same time by paring the hoof too closely, he effectually lamed the other foot, so that we had hard work to reach Gloucester. After resting here a while, we pushed on to Newport: where I took a chaise, and reached Bristol before eleven. I spent the two following days with the preachers, who had been waiting for me all the week. And their love and unanimity were such as soon made me forget all my labours.

One of the preachers who accompanied Wesley on this voyage was **Nicholas Manners**.

I left Ireland (1760) in company with Mr. Wesley, my brother, and some other preachers, and many passengers. Mr. Wesley preached twice on the deck. We were fifty hours on our passage; part of which time the wind was high and unfair; so that the sails were often shifted to put the ship into different courses, which made sailing both troublesome and dangerous. All of us who were preachers had cabin beds, for which each paid half a guinea. But notwithstanding, my brother and I slept two nights on the deck to preserve us from being sick. We lay on the boards, and covered us with sailcloth; and though it was cold and hard, yet it was better than being sick. The morning after we landed at Parkgate, I took a walk in the fields, and the air was so agreeable as I had never perceived since I went to Ireland. The many black bogs in Ireland send forth such quantities of corrupted particles into the air, that it is unwholesome to some English constitutions. Contrary to my determination to desist from travelling, I was appointed to labour in Manchester Circuit. Two or three days after our landing, being alone and much distressed about preaching; a stillness in and about me, which words cannot well describe, suddenly took place, when I heard a voice say, "If thou wilt pray more, thou wilt do better." We were four preachers in the circuit, and good was done in several parts of it, particularly at Manchester, which had been in a low condition for some time. <sup>1</sup>

No doubt Chester was included within the territory assigned to Nicholas Manners and his colleagues at this date. The extent of the Circuit about this time appears from the statement of **Thomas Lee** :—

The next year I was in the Manchester Round, which then contained Lancashire, Cheshire, part of Shropshire, and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Some particulars of the Life and Experience of Nicholas Manners.*  
York: printed for the Author; and sold by R. Spence. MDCCLXXXV.

of Wales, Staffordshire, and part of Derbyshire. Our labour was hard; but we saw much fruit of it, particularly at Manchester and Bolton.<sup>1</sup>

Chester was included in Wesley's spring journey the next year also.

April 1st, 1761, I left Manchester in the morning in a better condition than ever I knew it before: such is the shaking not only among the dry bones, but likewise among the living souls. About noon I preached at Little Leigh, and at Chester in the evening.

Thursday, 2nd, I rode over to Tattenhall, eight or nine miles from Chester. When we came, the town seemed to be all in an uproar. Yet when I began preaching (in the open air, the house not being large enough to contain one quarter of the congregation) none opposed, or made the least disturbance, the fear of God falling upon them. I think Tattenhall will be less bitter for the time to come. Well may Satan be angry with field preaching.

Friday, 3rd, I preached about one at Mould in Flintshire, and was again obliged to preach abroad though the wind was exceedingly rough. All were deeply attentive. I preached in the evening at Chester, and in the morning set out for Liverpool.

This was Wesley's first visit to Tattenhall. His acknowledged position as a clergyman and scholar, together with his apt manner of handling a mob, availed here as in so many places to make the work easier for his persecuted followers.

On April 2nd, Wesley addressed a long letter to the Rev. Mr. G——.

Wednesday, March 30th, 1762, was a day notable even to Wesley, who was no stranger to inclement weather, and indifferent or hostile receptions.

In his Journal under that date he records:—

Having been invited to preach at Wem, Mrs. Glynne desired to take me thither (from Shrewsbury in a post chaise: but in little more than an hour, we were fast enough. However, the horses pulled, till the traces broke. I should then have walked on, had I been alone, tho' the mud was deep, and the snow drove impetuously: but I could not leave my friend. So I waited patiently, till the man had made shift to mend the traces. And the horses pulled amain: so that with much ado, not long after the time appointed, I came to Wem. I came, but the person who invited me was gone; gone out of town at four in the morning. And I could find no one who seemed either to expect or desire my company. I enquired after the place where Mr. Mather preached: but it was filled with hemp. It remained only to go into the market-house: but neither man, woman, nor child cared to follow us; the north-wind roared so loud on every side, and poured in from every quarter: however, before I had done singing, two or three crept in, and after them, two or three hundred. And the power of GOD was so present among them, that, I believe, many forgot the storm. The wind grew still higher in the afternoon, so that it was difficult to sit our horses. And it blew full in our faces, but could not prevent our reaching Chester in the evening. Though the warning was short, the room was full: and full of serious, earnest hearers: many of whom expressed a longing desire for the whole salvation of GOD. Here I rested on Thursday.

Friday, April 1st, I rode to Parkgate and found several ships: but the wind was contrary. I preached at five in the small house they have just built: and the hearers were remarkably serious. I gave notice of preaching at five in the morning. But at half an hour after four, one brought us word that the wind was come fair, and that Captain Jordan would sail in less than an hour.

William Crane and Francis Walker were the two preachers who accompanied Wesley on this occasion.

On his return from this visit to Ireland, Wesley again visited Chester.

He embarked at Dublin on Saturday, July 31st, 1762, and preached on board the "Dorset" on the Sunday morning. He tells us that his text was Prov. iii. 17, and that "all who were able to creep out were willingly present."

Monday, August 2nd, I rode on to Chester. Never was the society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end, and I found nothing but peace and love among them. About twelve of them believed they were saved from sin, and their lives did not contradict their profession. Most of the rest were strongly athirst for God, and looking for Him continually.

These remarks seem to indicate that Wesley had been cognisant of a want of harmony in the Chester flock, but did not record such in his Journal until the restoration of unity.

The Conference of 1763 was held in London in July. There were twenty Circuits in England, two in Wales, two in Scotland, and seven in Ireland.

It is scarcely possible at this distance of time, and with such scanty fragments of information which have been preserved, to form any adequate idea of the great labour, patient endurance, and painful suffering, which this work must have cost, to have produced such results as these. Twenty years only had elapsed since Wesley, with his brother and two or three laymen, had begun to sow the seed of the kingdom by means of field and itinerant preaching. Yet now, notwithstanding that it had been frowned on by the learned, persecuted by the violent, lampooned by the witty, and was at



the same time opposed by open and violent enemies, and harassed by the defection of former friends, the proclamation of Gospel mercy had by this means been to a tolerable extent made through the length and breadth of the land.<sup>1</sup>

The tenth English Circuit in the list was designated Chester. To some extent Chester was regarded as the centre of the Circuit. But where was the circumference? In the list we find no Manchester, or Liverpool, Cheshire, or Shropshire Circuit. A York Circuit is named, and also Staffordshire. In what Circuit were Manchester, Stockport, and Liverpool included? It is very clear that the organization was not yet fully developed, and was liable to sudden and large changes, especially in the division and arrangement of Circuits.

In Walker's manuscript it is stated that Chester was made the head of a Circuit in 1763, with about 140 members, divided into 8 classes; also that there were four preachers appointed to the Circuit, three of whom were engaged in the country and one in the City in rotation. The same record declares that the Circuit then included Warrington, Namptwich, Northwich, Shrewsbury, Wrexham, Neston, and Tarporley, with many other places occasionally visited.

Walker also says that **John Furz** was the Assistant appointed to the Chester Circuit at the Conference of 1763. This is confirmed by his published Journal:—

“Afterwards [having been employed in the York Circuit] I spent two years in Cheshire and Lancashire, where was the most rapid work of God that I ever saw.”<sup>2</sup>

1. *Smith: History of Wesleyan Methodism, I, 318.*

2. *E.M.P., V., 127.*

It appears from the details added by Furz that Manchester and Liverpool were within the range of his labours at that time.

No preacher is recorded for 1764. But from *Blanshard's Life of Bradburn* it appears that **Joseph Guilford** was labouring in Chester at the commencement of 1764. On a pane of glass at Boothbank was inscribed: Joseph Guilford preached here, 1764. In the *Memoir of Bradburn* published in 1816, Guilford is also referred to: "Whose words, like a mighty torrent, seemed to bear down everything that stood in the way." The same volume preserves an interesting account of a sermon heard by S. Bradburn at the old chapel.

One evening in particular, being exceedingly cast down, and finding an uncommon weight upon my spirits, I went to preaching; and while Mr. Guilford was describing the happiness of the righteous in glory, my heart melted like wax before the fire. In a moment all that heaviness was removed, and the love of God so abundantly shed abroad in my heart, that I could scarcely refrain from crying out in the preaching house. All my sins seemed as if they had never been; and I appeared to my own apprehension, to be in the midst of the glorious throng of saints and angels of which he was then speaking, praising and adoring God and the Lamb. When preaching was over I went into a place near St Martin's Ash's Churchyard, which adjoined the preaching house, and there I poured out my soul before the LORD in prayer and praise, and continued rejoicing in God my Saviour most of the night.

This was in the beginning of 1765. Unhappily, the good impressions were transient. The actual conversion of the great preacher took place subsequently, and will be recorded in its place.

Wesley's next visit was on

Tuesday, July 17th, 1764. In the evening, I preached in the little square adjoining to the Preaching house at Chester.

London  
June 16. 1756

My Dear Brother

If our Brethren at Chester purpose  
ever to prosecute, they cannot have a fairer  
Opportunity: Provided they have a sufficient  
number of Witnesses, whose Depositions will  
come home to the point; Particularly, with  
regard to those Words, you shall receive  
Justice from me. Those Depositions might  
be drawn up in the Country, & sent up to Mr  
J<sup>r</sup> Unson, in New Palace Yard, Westminster.  
The sooner the better; for Term will begin  
shortly. Delay does much Hurt in Cases of  
this kind. <sup>Do you hear</sup> How <sup>is</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>at</sup> Manchester now?

I am

Your affectionate Brother

Is Mr. Mose gone yet into  
the Bristol Circuit?

Wesley



Here were many wild, rude people, but they were quite outnumbered by those who were civil and attentive: and I believe some impressions were made on the wildest. What can shake Satan's kingdom like *field preaching*?

Wednesday, 18th, I should have been glad of a day of rest: but notice had been given of my preaching at noon, near Tattenhall. The rain began almost as soon as we came in: so I could not preach abroad as I designed, but in a large commodious barn, where all that were present seemed to receive the Word of GOD with joy and reverence. The congregation at Chester in the evening, was more numerous, and far more serious than the day before. There wants only a little more field-preaching here, and Chester would be as quiet as London.

## CHAPTER III.

---

### The Octagon Chapel: its erection & early years. 1764—1775.

---

THE year 1764 saw the erection of the first Methodist Chapel, strictly so called, in Chester. The barn-sanctuary had rendered good service for twelve years and still sufficed to hold the ordinary congregation; but this did not preclude the hope that a larger and more commodious building would attract more hearers. The old place, moreover, was subject to the serious disadvantage of insecurity of tenure. The Methodists felt the necessity of having a good building of their own, and now found themselves in a position to undertake the responsibility of erecting one. Two of their number, though still comparatively young men, were settled in business: Mr. Thomas Bennett, Ironfounder; Mr. Geo. Lowe, Miller. (G) These two gathered sympathizers around them; and, after the consideration of several sites, a large piece of ground was purchased on the Boughton side of the city, situated at no great distance from the house of Mr. Richard Jones in which the services had been held at the first. The neighbourhood has entirely changed since those days. There was of course no station then;

the important thoroughfare of City Road had not been laid out; the old gate at the Bars was still standing; the streets now forming Newtown were unthought of. It is difficult to determine the exact site occupied by the first Chapel; on one part of it the City Road has encroached, and on another part of it stands a Calvinistic Methodist, or Presbyterian, Chapel. Access to the Chapel was from Foregate, by an avenue about twenty five yards in length, and four or five in width, on each side of which were small dwellings and gardens. On the north side of the Chapel, the remotest from Foregate, a Preacher's house was built to accommodate the "Assistant" and a "Helper." A "large and pleasant garden" was attached. Chester must have been one of the first Circuits to make such good provision for the preachers.

It was decided that the Chapel should be built in the form of an Octagon; a trustworthy tradition declaring that this determination was arrived at on the strong recommendation of Wesley. There was at this time no model Chapel. The "New Chapel" in London, was not built till some years subsequently. At Manchester the Methodists had removed from the crazy old garret near the river, being fortunate in the fact that no serious accident had occurred there; yet they had only erected a small building in Birchin Lane, by no means worthy to be taken as a pattern for a Chapel in a county town. In the third edition (1770) of the *Large Minutes of Conference* is the following regulation:—Build all preaching houses, if the ground will admit, in the Octagon form. It is the best for the voice, and on many accounts more commodious than any other.—

When this regulation was first made we cannot say; but this is the first time it appeared in print. It is highly probable that the successful experiment at Chester led Wesley to make this rule, which continued to appear in the *Large Minutes* so long as he lived, although it was not largely observed. The Methodists of Chester were familiar with the octagonal form of architecture, for a large water tower of that shape stood on the old Bridge Gate. Wesley must have seen it when he took his walk round the Walls. It was taken down in 1781. The diameter of the Chester Octagon Chapel was forty six feet within; a gallery was erected, and the entire building was estimated to seat 600 with comfort, and perhaps another 200 with pressure. A curious story is told to the effect that the leading men of the society wanted to have a bell in a little cupola which was erected on the top of the octagonal roof of the new Chapel. Now the use of a bell was not lawful except by episcopal sanction: that was sought, and promised, on condition that the Bishop should preach the first sermon in the building. The Methodists, however, shrewdly suspected that this would mean "consecration," and decided to forego their bell.

The pulpit was extended in the form of a long elevated pew to the breadth of one of the walls of the Chapel. It is said that in the earliest days the leaders sat in this pew, the preacher standing behind the desk in the centre of it.

The following seven trustees were appointed:—

Thomas Bennett, Chester, Ironfounder.

George Lowe, Chester, Miller.

Richard Bruce, Acton, Northwich, Gentleman.



Joseph Brown, Bull's Green, Tarporley,  
Gentleman.

James Wooldridge, Duckington, Barnhill,  
Farmer.

John Gardner, Tattenhall Lanes, Farmer.

Richard Barker, Acton Bridge, Northwich,  
Gentleman.

The last named did not sign the Deed nor enter upon the duties of Trustee-ship. As the rule that a Trustee must, at the time of his appointment, be a member of society, did not then exist, it is probable that some of those whose names are mentioned were not actual members of the Methodist Society but sympathizers with its work.

Only two of the Trustees were resident in Chester. Some names are absent from the list which one would have expected to find there; especially that of Jonathan Pritchard of Boughton, who must have counted for far more in the early Methodism of Chester than this book reveals. John Wesley's letters show the position he occupied in the founder's esteem both ten years before and ten years after the erection of this Chapel. He was the representative of the Circuit at the Boothbank Quarterly Meeting in 1752; His social position rendered it easy for him to entertain the preachers; and his house came to be looked upon as the usual resting place of Wesley and his helpers in the earliest period of their work in Chester.

Wooldridge was a very worthy man; before he went to Duckington, where a considerable Society grew up under his fostering care, he was, it is said, a game keeper at Cholmondeley. Local tradition has it that

Wesley preached under a tree at Duckington, and a stick made from that tree is in the possession of an enthusiastic Wesleyan collector.

George Lowe must be distinguished from his son George Lowe, Junior, the goldsmith, who was old enough before his father's death to join him upon the new trust formed in 1806; also from the Rev. George Lowe. He married a heroic Methodist girl whose experiences are amongst the most romantic in the annals of local Methodism. Going back a few years we find a certain Mrs. Bennett and her daughter Mary, born in 1743, attending the services in Love Lane and St. Martin's Ash, for two or three years, without seeking enrolment upon the Methodist class paper, because they knew how strongly the head of the family would disapprove. He was a sea-captain whose vessel traded with Cheshire cheese from Parkgate to London. In those days when there were no railroads and the highways were imperfect, this product of the county often reached consumers by sea. At length, in 1755, they took the decisive step. When Captain Edward Bennett, who had not forbidden his household to attend Methodist services, and was perhaps unaware of the extent to which they had done so, learnt that his wife and daughter had actually joined the Methodists, he was exceedingly angry, and determined to put a stop to their association with persons whom he regarded as deceivers or dupes. Mary was thus placed in the supremely difficult position of having to decide the right course to pursue when the duty of obedience to her father came into conflict with her religious convictions. Her father endeavoured to convince her by

arguments, and when that failed tried to coerce her by personal chastisement. Keenly as she felt the humiliation of her father's correction, and strong as was her desire to honour him she deemed it her duty to refuse to separate herself from Methodist fellowship. In the following year (1756) Captain Bennett removed his family to Neston, a little town about a mile inland from Parkgate. This residence would prove equally convenient for himself, and he hoped the change would bring the vagaries of his wife and daughter to an end. "There," said he, "these runagate false prophets will not come." Eleven miles each way should surely prove enough to prevent any intercourse between them and the Chester Methodists, and there were none of that body in Neston. The extraordinary powers of walking which Methodism developed in its first adherents did not enter into his reckoning, and Mary was actually able to put in an appearance sometimes at the five o'clock morning service at St. Martin's Ash. On the Sunday the frequent absences of the Captain left his family without much restraint. Twenty two miles however was a long distance even for early Methodists, and Mrs. Bennett tried to get a room for services in Neston so that her own religious privileges might be restored and Gospel preaching extended to her new neighbours. But no one in Neston dare harbour the abhorred schismatics. At length she succeeded in securing a small cottage at Leighton about a mile away. The work there developed, and eventually Leighton was put upon the plan. The unfriendly intentions of Captain Bennett resulted, therefore, in the extension of Methodist influence. The testimony which the

Methodists bore at Leighton against drunkenness, profanity, and impurity, goaded the forces of evil into violent opposition. The persons most hated for their zeal were Mary Bennett, who did a great deal to induce people to attend the services, and Robert Roberts, then a local preacher, and afterwards a minister. It became known one night that this earnest brother was to accompany Mary Bennett to her mother's house before proceeding to his own home. Their way lay through a lonely lane by which a brook flowed. Some miscreants determined to waylay them and throw them into the water. The plot failed so far as the local preacher was concerned, for he returned home alone. The cruel men had therefore an even better opportunity of molesting Mary as she walked homeward in solitude. One man, a sailor, even less scrupulous than the others, pushed her into the brook, where she struggled in the darkness for some time and was unable to find a footing on the slippery sides. Happily her cries were heard by a Methodist friend, who hurried up in time to save her from drowning. The details of the assault gradually became known when it appeared that the delinquents would not be prosecuted. The neighbourhood was therefore greatly startled when the intelligence came that the reckless sailor had himself been drowned while on a voyage from London to Chester.

In 1760 Mary Bennett returned to Chester to become, when only seventeen years of age, the wife of George Lowe. Throughout a long and happy life of more than usual duration their home was open to the Preachers, and their energies were employed in active Methodist work. So well known was their hospitality

that their house was familiarly called the "Pilgrim's Inn." On the day before her death, which took place on June 10th, 1807, Mrs. Lowe assured her pastor, Thomas Preston, of her confidence in GOD, saying, "JESUS is precious!"<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Bennett was born in 1732, at Christleton, a village within three miles of Chester. His parents possessed a little property and, being able to provide for their son's advancement in business, sent him to his uncle, an ironmonger of Dublin, by name Turner. One Sunday the young man went casually with a companion to hear a Methodist preacher in that city and was so effectually influenced that at the early age of seventeen he joined the Society. This was in 1749, the year in which Wesley paid his first visit to Alraham near Chester. The shopmates of Thomas Bennett were mostly Romanists and hated the Methodists, whom the Irish populace had nicknamed "Swaddlers." Their persecution merely served to establish the new convert more firmly in the faith, and he continued a member of the Methodist Society in Dublin for six years. At the end of that time his mother died and he returned to England to take possession of the property which then fell to him. He joined the Society and, at the suggestion of Mr. Jonathan Pritchard, established himself as an ironmonger, with prospects on the whole encouraging. He soon afterwards (March, 1756) married a Miss Anne Moseley of Manchester, whose brother subsequently be-

---

1. *Mag.* 1809. *Of the introduction of Methodism into the neighbourhood and city of Chester; in a Memoir of Mrs. Lowe, of that city, By Rev. John Gaulter.*

came widely known throughout Lancashire as Sir John Moseley, Bart. Miss Moseley was awakened under the preaching of Whitfield, in St. Anne's Square, Manchester, and was one of the first female leaders in that city. Mr. and Mrs. Bennett lived a very happy life together for many years. One of their joys they found in entertaining the preachers who visited Chester, their house also being known as a "Pilgrims' Inn."

Thomas Bennett died on October 29th, 1803, having been a member of Society 54 years. The manuscript memoir of this good man in the old Circuit Register claims him as the "principal instrument of erecting the Octagon Chapel in Chester." His son, T. Moseley Bennett, Ironfounder, of Liverpool, supplied some of the materials for St. John Street Chapel.

Thomas Bennett enjoyed in a high degree the favour of Wesley; and it is evident that he shared Wesley's views as to the Established Church and belonged to the old school of Methodists. Although visited by several Methodist preachers shortly before he died, it was at the hands of the Rev. William Nelson, Vicar of St. Bridget's, that he received the Sacrament. It was not an unknown thing however, at that time, for a Methodist preacher to administer the Sacrament in a private house. Francis West did so in 1804 in the case of John Jones, when he lay at the point of death, in Chester.

The Octagon Chapel was opened for divine service on Sunday, June 23rd, 1765. George Walker has left on record that the opening service was held at 5 p.m., and that the preacher was John Hampson. With this

statement agrees the following extract from Mary Gilbert's diary, if a liberal interpretation be given to the word morning.

Sunday, June 23rd, 1765: In the Morning we went to the New chapel. Mr. H—— opened it, his Text was in ii. Cor. vi, 41. [Chron.] *Let thy Priests O Lord God be clothed with Salvation, and let thy Saints rejoice in goodness.* He concluded with saying, that as GOD had given us a more convenient Place to worship Him in, we ought in Gratitude to let our Lives and Conversations be more exemplary than ever before.

During the early years of Wesley's itinerancy Hampson was often his travelling companion; as early as 1753 an entry in the Journal shows them together in the vicinity of Bristol. At a subsequent period he married a lady near of kin to a gentleman of considerable property in Cheshire. Here he settled for some time, preaching occasionally in Manchester, Chester, and other places for many miles round. On the title page of his hymn-book, issued in 1767, he is described as Mr. J. Hampson, near Northwich. In 1773 he was the leader of the class in which Mr. Joseph Janion met at Little Leigh. From Cheshire he came to Manchester, where he entered into business, but without success. Subsequently he rejoined the itinerancy.<sup>1</sup> John Hampson was a preacher of great force,—a Boanerges some called him,—he did a great deal of valuable work in laying the foundations of Methodism, and it is matter for regret that he did not remain in the ranks to the end of his life. In the year 1785 Wesley's *Deed of Declaration*, constituting one hundred preachers the

---

1 *Atmore: The Methodist Memorial.*

Conference of the people called Methodists, was executed and enrolled ; when its contents were disclosed it was seen that the names of John Hampson and his son were not included. This omission, from whatever cause arising, so grieved both father and son that they resigned their connection with Wesley. The elder Hampson became an Independent Minister ; being subsequently in distress through age and infirmity, and the inability of his own flock to help him, £12 per annum was generously allowed him out of the Preachers' Fund. The younger Hampson obtained ordination in the Established Church, and a living in Sunderland. He wrote the first life of Wesley, a book which was considered unfriendly in tone.

At this point may be mentioned a notable book printed in Chester for the preacher who opened the Octagon Chapel. It is called :—

A COLLECTION OF HYMNS,  
CALCULATED FOR PROMOTING THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF  
ALMIGHTY GOD,  
COLLECTED BY  
JOHN HAMPSON.

—  
CHESTER :

Printed by J. HARVIE, and sold at the Printing-Office in Northgate-Street ; at J. BULKLEY'S, Bookseller in Bridge-Street ; and by MR. J. HAMPSON, near Northwich.

—  
MDCCLXVII.



The volume will be interesting to readers of this history because it came forth from a Chester printing house. It has additional interest as being one of the many hymn books issued in anticipation of that published by Wesley in 1780. The familiar preface to Wesley's hymn book gives some idea of the state of things prevailing before he took the work in hand. The Societies had a beautiful hymn book entitled: "Hymns and Spiritual Songs" (1753); an older "Collection of Psalms and Hymns" (1741), specially prepared for public service; and "Select Hymns with Tunes Annexed," together with many penny and two-penny tracts of twelve and twenty-four pages a piece,—a series of Hymns for the Great Festivals, occupying a dozen such booklets. There were in addition many small collections compiled by others than Wesley in use in various Societies. In the light of these facts it is not surprising to learn that Dr. Osborn's grandmother had to take thirteen hymn books to Chapel. Many of the little books contained poems not intended for public worship. For instance in a very early one belonging to Mr. R. T. Smith is an effusion entitled "To a friend in love"! We are inclined to attribute the premier place for size and worth among those fore-runners of the Wesleyan hymn book, not prepared by Wesley himself, to John Hampson's Chester volume.

It was not long before Wesley, whose oversight of Methodism in Chester was so constant, came to rejoice over the completion of the new building. He had paid a brief visit to Chester in the spring of 1765 while the new Chapel was in process of erection. He waited in the city two days as several ships were ready to sail

from Parkgate, but the wind continuing foul he crossed over to Liverpool, in which place he found the work in a very encouraging state.

On Thursday, August 15th, 1765, Wesley rode from Huddersfield to Manchester for the Conference, the first held in that town. On Friday, 16th, he records :—

I rode over to Chester, and preached to as many as the new house would well contain. We had likewise a numerous congregation on Saturday morning as well as evening. How the grace of GOD concurs with his Providence! A new house not only brings a new congregation but likewise (what we have observed over and over again) a new blessing from GOD. And no wonder, if every *labour of love* finds even a present reward.

Sunday, 18th. The house contained the morning congregation. But in the evening, multitudes were constrained to go away. So does Truth win its way against all opposition, if it be steadily declared with meekness of wisdom.

Of the Conference which was held on the Tuesday to Friday of the following week, an interesting note is to be found in the MS. diary of Samuel Bardsley.

Under date Tuesday, August 20th, 1765, Bardsley writes :—

The Conference begun. There were present a deal of preachers. Everything was carried on with decency & order. The Revd. Mr. Wesley came ou Thursday before the Conference and went on Friday to Chester: preached there and came back on Monday & preached here every evening . . . . As he was going to the preaching something remarkable to me was his humility; in taking me by the arm, & walking through the town with me. The LORD grant that I may be so serviceable for the good of Souls according to my abilities as he has been.

The significance of the remark about Wesley's condescension will be apparent to those who are aware of the fact that Bardsley had been previously engaged in a very humble occupation in Manchester.

At the Conference of 1765, Manchester was included in the Lancashire Circuit, and Salop appears to have taken the place of Chester. The "Assistant" appointed to the Salop Circuit was **Alexander Mather**, and the "Helper" was **William Minethorp**. The younger preacher's course though not a long one, was full of honour. When he passed away in 1776 after 12 years of service, Wesley's testimony of him was "An Israelite indeed in whom was no guile!" The romantic career of Alexander Mather may be read in the second volume of the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*. At the tender age of twelve he bore arms in the Pretender's cause on the fatal field of Culloden. He was afterwards hunted from pillar to post, being nearly drowned in the course of his wanderings, until at length a wise officer extended the King's clemency to him. Leaving his home in North Britain he came to England while still quite a young man and had some chequered experiences as a journeyman-baker in the Metropolis. During this period he married a fellow-country woman whom he met in London. He heard Nelson and Wesley preach, and after much travail of soul came to the light. Ere long he became a preacher, and in 1756 was invited to enter upon the itinerant work; but as no provision was forthcoming for Mrs. Mather he was compelled to decline. In the next year four shillings a week was promised for the wife's maintenance, and the pair were appointed to Epworth ;

the distance between which place and London, about 150 miles, they covered on foot. Mrs. Mather was the first preacher's wife to receive regular maintenance from a Circuit.

On Wednesday, April 2nd, 1766, Wesley says:—

We rode through heavy rain [from Manchester] to Chester. Friday, 4th, I visited a poor woman, who has been ill eight years, and is not yet weary nor faint in her mind. A heavy-laden sinner desired to receive the Sacrament with her, and found rest to her soul; and from that hour increased every day in the knowledge and love of God.

On the occasion of his visits in 1765 and 1766 Wesley made his home with a West Indian family named Gilbert, newly arrived in the city. The position Mr. Francis Gilbert occupied in Wesley's confidence appears from the *Minutes* for 1765. In reply to the question—What are the Rules relating to the Preachers' Fund?—the answer is—Let an exact account of all receipts and disbursements be produced at the yearly Conference, by Francis Gilbert, Secretary. The opinion the great preacher entertained of Mary Gilbert, the niece of Francis Gilbert, is quoted a little lower down. The presence of this family in Chester calls for some explanation. A number of facts are here brought together which it is hoped will prove of interest to students of early Methodism.

Francis Gilbert was the second son of the Hon. Nathaniel Gilbert, of the Island of Antigua. The Gilberts had been among the first settlers in that Island, and considered themselves descendants of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the great Elizabethan navigator.

Francis Gilbert was early placed by his father in a large mercantile concern in St. John's, where he was speedily ruined by a dishonest clerk, whose malpractices were facilitated, it is to be feared, by the gay habits of his young superior.

Not daring to face his father, Francis Gilbert fled first to Jamaica and then to England. In this country he was introduced, with the happiest results, to the Wesleys, was brought to God, and became a member of the Methodist Society. He "was for a short time a travelling preacher in their connexion, and until his last long illness prevented, he remained a local preacher."

Francis Gilbert wrote of his new found faith to his elder brother Nathaniel, who was Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua, and sent him some of John Wesley's publications. The impressions produced by these brought Nathaniel Gilbert and his wife to England in 1757. Wesley's Journals show that they lived in Wandsworth, and declare the grace of God as seen in their household.

In 1759 Nathaniel Gilbert and his wife returned to Antigua, accompanied by a widowed lady, Mrs. Leadbetter, who afterwards married Francis Gilbert. They were much blessed in their labours in St. John's and were privileged to found Methodism in this beautiful West Indian Island. Mrs. Leadbetter was a notable lady, as the following pamphlet shows: *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Mary Gilbert, with some account of her husband Mr. Francis Gilbert, second son of the Honourable Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua. In a letter to*

*the Rev. Mr. Benson. By Henrietta F. Gilbert [Her niece.] London, 1817, Printed by Thomas Cordeux, 14, City Road. Sold by T. Blanshard, 14, City Road; and at the Methodist Preaching Houses in Town and Country.*

She was born on the twenty-fourth of February 1733, and was married in 1750 to a gentleman twice her own age, by name Leadbetter. She was converted in 1753 under C. Wesley. Her husband passed away in October 1758, having previously come under good Methodist influences. Soon after the death of her husband she made the acquaintance of Mr. Nathaniel Gilbert and his wife "who had come to England two years before on a religious account, and were about to return to Antigua, their native place; intending to propagate the knowledge of that Gospel they had become more fully instructed in, under the ministry of the Messrs. Wesleys; and wishing to be accompanied by one or two equally zealous in the best of causes." Mrs. Leadbetter was successfully engaged in religious work in Antigua for three years. At the end of that period, in 1762, she returned to England and was associated with the leaders of the Methodist movement.

It is recorded that the Wesleys entertained the highest opinion of her. Charles Wesley spoke of her in very high terms to a lady friend, who subsequently declared: "Mrs. Leadbetter is all you represented her to be." When Francis Gilbert contemplated making her his wife he consulted his father in the Gospel, John Wesley, who replied: "No man in his senses can object to her."

In 1761 the Hon. Nathaniel Gilbert died and left over £40,000 to his eldest son. Francis was entirely

disinherited, the alienation brought about by his early misconduct unhappily remaining. In 1762 Mrs. Leadbetter returned from Antigua. Francis Gilbert remained there till 1764. Then he too came back to England, and when he is next heard of he is at the little town of Kendal, in Westmoreland, with Mrs. Leadbetter was a member of his household and several children of the elder brother resident with him. The family removed in 1765 to Chester. It will be shown how in that year they were twice privileged to entertain Wesley: in April at Kendal; in August at Chester.

It is well-known that Wesley's Journals by no means tell the whole story of his work. Not only are there gaps in the records, but many visits are summed up in a few words that give us little idea of the amount of work actually done at the places mentioned. There are many means of filling up these deficiencies in some measure; most valuable are the references in contemporary diaries. The diary of Miss Mary Gilbert is a notable case in point; she gives the texts of at least nine sermons not mentioned in the Journal.

For instance, Wesley writes:—

April 11th, 1765. We rode on to Francis Gilbert's at Kendal, where there is now a real work of God.

Mary Gilbert, writing under the same date says:—

At noon, we had the pleasure of the Rev. Mr. Jno. Wesley's Company to Dinner; and in the Evening he preached on Jer. viii, 22—*Is there no balm in Gilead, etc.* His Conversation was very edifying, and God blest it to my poor Soul.

Of the next day she records:—

At Five in the Morning, Mr. Wesley preached on Psalms lxxxiv, 1.—*How amiable, etc.* At Night we took leave of him.

The reason for the removal of Mr. Francis Gilbert and his family party from Kendal to Chester can only be conjectured; possibly it was undertaken for the educational benefit of his nieces; possibly Wesley had enlisted his sympathy with the opportunities and necessities of the Chester Society with respect to their large new Chapel then nearly finished.

The journey, and first impressions of Chester are vividly described by Mary Gilbert:—

Sunday, May 5th, 1765, My Uncle met the Society [at Kendal] and informed them of his being to leave them soon. The Sorrow that sat on every Countenance would have drawn Tears from any ones Eyes, who could in the least sympathize with another's Grief.

Tuesday, June 4th, We were called up at half an Hour after One, and at a quarter past Two, set out on our Journey to Chester. When we came near Lancaster, our Coachman had like twice to have overturned us. At seven we breakfasted there, at one dined at Preston, and at Nine in the Evening reached Mr. A——'s House in Warrington. We soon got to Bed truly fatigued, and I slept till six in the Morning, without ever waking, or moving out of the posture I laid myself in when I went to Bed.

About eight on Wednesday Morning, we set out again, and had a delightful Journey the rest of the way to Chester, where we arrived about Noon. In the Afternoon we took a Walk round the Walls. You have here an extensive Prospect of a fine open Country, far unlike the Barren Kendal Mountains. We then walked to the Dock, and from thence to the Preaching House. Mr. G[uilford] preached.

Monday, 10th, In the Afternoon we went to see the Infirmary. Every Thing is neat and clean about it.

Thursday, 13th, In the Afternoon I set out with my Uncle, Aunt, Mrs. Leadbetter, and some other Friends, to go to a little Village called Crislington [now called Christleton, though still pronounced by the country people in accordance with the



old spelling] about two Miles out of the Town, where my Uncle was to preach. We had a very pleasant walk, and went to see the delightfullest, tho' oddest contrived Garden that I ever saw. The Owner of it is the Rector of that Place, but one would think by the manner of his laying it out, that he had very little else to think of. Some Part of it represents a Field of Battle, a General's Tent, with Cannons all round it, a Mount, a Tower, a Draw-Bridge, and every thing to resemble a Camp of Soldiers. The other Parts of the Garden are laid out in the same peculiar Taste.

The reference to Mr. Gilbert's preaching at Christleton when he had been a fortnight in the neighbourhood may point a moral not unneeded in modern Methodism. With what promptitude did these good folks find out the sanctuary in the City to which they had travelled! How little time did they waste in finding a place in the new Society!

Tuesday, 18th, Mr. B[ennet]t persuaded my Aunt, Mrs. L., Miss H., and myself to go to his Class, which we did upon his promising not to speak to us.

This last phrase has a curiously modern ring about it.

The details given by the authoress with respect to the opening service of the Octagon Chapel on June 23rd, 1765, have been quoted already.

Another very interesting passage in her Journal reads as follows:—

Thursday, June 29th, In the Afternoon we went with Mr. and Mrs. B——t to Eaton by Water, to see Lord Grosvenor's Seat. We had a Parcel of Obstinate Men in the Boat, who knew nothing of the Sea, and yet would have their Own Way, which rendered what might have been otherwise pleasant, very disagreeable. The Gardens are extremely pleasant, and far

surpass any Thing I have ever seen. My mind was fixt on God, while I was in the Boat, and I had such a confidence in Him, that I dont know I felt Fear arise once the whole Time.

Not long after their removal to Chester, the family was again privileged to entertain the great evangelist. To the particulars already given of Wesley's visit to Chester just before the Manchester Conference of 1765 the following may be quoted from Miss Gilbert.

Friday, August 16th, We had the pleasure of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Company to Tea, and in the evening he preached on ii. Cor. vi. 2, *Now is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation.*

Sunday, 18th, In the morning Mr. Wesley preached on Mark ix. 23. My Soul was exceedingly blest. He seemed to speak as exactly to my State, as if I had mentioned it to him.

Mary Gilbert records the farewell sermon of Mr. M[ather] on Aug. 21st, 1765, and the first sermon of the New Assistant, Mr. J[ohnson], "I think him a good preacher; but I cannot yet give up Mr. M—— for any other." Several references are made to her sorrow in losing Alexander Mather; happily however the new preacher was able to win her regard, for a subsequent entry reads:—

Mr. J——n dined with us this Day; I think he is one of the most agreeable men I know.

Thursday, Oct. 10th. This Day being the quarterly Meeting, we had a number of strange Preachers in Town; and in the Evening one Mr. S——t preached. He is not a very connected preacher, but one of the most lively and powerful that I ever heard.

Shortly after this Mary Gilbert acted as bearer at the interment of a young friend of hers which took place at Trinity Church. It would be interesting to

know whether it was a usual thing in those days for young women to serve in that capacity at the funerals of the young.

The visit of Wesley to Chester in the Spring of 1766 is passed over very slightly in his Journal, as already mentioned. He makes no record of preaching at all; from Miss Gilbert we learn that he preached six sermons, administered the Sacrament, and held a Love Feast.

Her words are :—

Wednesday, April 2nd, 1766. The Rev. Mr. Wesley gave us his Company to Tea, and afterwards preached on Rom. viii, 33, 34. I found my mind very wandering. The next evening he preached again on John v, 8, 9. I found a Blessing this Evening though I sought it not as I ought. O what a good God is ours !

Friday, 4th. I was also much blessed in the Evening while Mr. Wesley was preaching on these words, Isa. xvii, 9—*This is eternal life, etc.* Should be John xvii, 3.]

Saturday, 5th. I found the word very sweet in the Evening while Mr. Wesley was inforcing the Words, Matt. ix, 5.

Sunday, 6th. This morning I found my desires very earnest for the blessing while Mr. Wesley was preaching on Isaiah xxxv, 8—*And a highway shall be there, and a way, etc.* And also afterwards while he was administering the Sacrament. In the Evening, I was again encouraged to come to the LORD while Mr. Wesley was inviting us to come and drink of the water of life freely, but still I had not Power to accept the invitation. We had afterwards a comfortable Love Feast.

Things were quieter in Chester in the time of the Gilberts than they were in the days of the St Martin's Ash riot; nevertheless that the lawless elements were

not entirely under control appears from the following entry :—

Thursday, Dec. 25th, 1766. Being Christmas-Day. In the Evening my Uncle preached with much Life and Power, on Luke ii, 10—*Behold I bring you good Tidings of great Joy.* The Enemy stirred up the Mob to make a disturbance while we were singing the last hymn ; but in spite of them, we concluded singing, and after waiting some Minutes they were dispersed, and we returned Home in Peace.

A sermon on the *evening* of Christmas Day or Good Friday would seem very strange to Methodists of the present time. It must be remembered that at the period of Miss Gilbert's Diary the Methodists did not hold service during Church hours ; and that, apart from the occasional visits of their founder, they were dependent upon the ministrations of the Established Church for the Sacraments. Mary Gilbert mentions attending the Cathedral, St Werburgh's, St John's, and Trinity, Churches for the purpose of receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

On the seventeenth of November, 1767, the two friends of Wesley, Francis Gilbert and Mrs Leadbetter were united in matrimony at Chester, Mary Gilbert thus mentions the event in her diary :—

On this day were united, My Uncle *F.* and my truly dear and respected friend Mrs. *M.L.* With unspeakable pleasure I embraced her, as a most dear loved Relative. With the same satisfaction she was received by those of my Aunts, who reside in this place, as their Sister ; and I doubt not will be by those who are now absent, when they hear the surprising Tidings. My Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for them is, that they may be long blest with each other ; that this Union may be a Means of uniting them more closely to the blessed

bridegroom of the Church; and that finally, they may be received into the Family of Heaven, with a *Well done good and faithful Servants, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord.*

The happy translation to the home above came very soon to the writer of this prayer, for on January 21st, 1768, Mary Gilbert passed away at the early age of 17. After her death Francis Gilbert removed to Whitchurch (Salop) where Alice Gilbert, a younger sister of Mary died in 1772, also in her minority. A pamphlet was published relating to Alice, entitled:—*A short account of the life and death of Miss Alice Gilbert who died August 27 1772 in the nineteenth year of her age. London Printed by R Hawes, in Lamb Street, facing Crispin Street, near the Market in Spital Fields, 1773.*

Nathaniel Gilbert died suddenly in 1774, in great Christian confidence, leaving behind him in St John's, Antigua, a Methodist Society of sixty members. At this point Francis Gilbert took up his residence there and engaged in Christian work until medical advice sent him to England in 1775. There he renewed his association with English Methodism and was a member of Mr Fletcher's class at Madeley; the four names upon the good Vicar's book being John Fletcher, Mary Fletcher, Francis Gilbert and George Perks. Francis Gilbert died on the first of July 1779. His widow survived him for many years. The decade from 1781 to 1791 she spent in Antigua, being abundant in labours for the good of the people. She returned to England just too late to see the aged John Wesley. After a year in Bristol she came to London in 1792, was associated in succession with several London Chapels, and passed away at an advanced age April 21, 1816, being cherished

to the last by the niece who wrote the Memoirs referred to on page 73.

Tyerman mentions some other members of this devoted family. The third daughter of Nathaniel Gilbert, Mrs. Yates, died a death as blessed as that of Mary and Alice. His son Nicholas was for years a faithful minister of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The honoured name of Nathaniel Gilbert was borne by another son. This young man was educated in England and after having visited Antigua came back to England; settled in the parish of Madeley; enjoyed the advantages of Fletcher's ministry and counsels; and devoted himself to God. On receiving episcopal ordination, the places of his ministerial labour were Bristol, London, Budworth, Sierra Leone, Aveley, and Bledlow. He was an eminently good and useful man; and peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, in 1807, in the forty-sixth year of his age.<sup>2</sup>

"As late as the year 1864, Fletcher's clerical successor in the Madeley vicarage was the great grandson of Nathaniel Gilbert, and testified that he had reason to believe that no child or grand child of the first West Indian Methodist had passed away without being prepared for the better world; and that almost all of them had been even distinguished among Christians for their earnest devotion to the Divine Redeemer."<sup>3</sup>

1. *John Wesley II.* 299.

2. *John Wesley II.* 200.

3. *Wesley's Designated Successor*, 513.

At the Leeds Conference of 1766 the designation of Salop which had been introduced into the "Minutes" the previous year was dropped and Cheshire reinstated, with **T. Johnson** and **Parson Greenwood** as the Preachers. The former was thirty-three years old when he gave himself up to the work of preaching; despite this late beginning he was privileged to spend forty-five years about his Master's business, passing away at a ripe old age on Oct. 18, 1797.

A brief obituary notice of him states:—

He was a lively zealous preacher, and his manner of preaching was peculiar to himself. In the early part of his ministry he suffered much from cruel and unreasonable men; but as he never shrunk from the cross of his Divine Master, so the LORD never failed to deliver him. Though he was no stranger to affliction, yet he delighted in his work, and took cheerfully his part thereof, when not absolutely disabled. He was a faithful and affectionate fellow-labourer; a plain honest man. He lived agreeable to what he preached, and in a glorious manner closed a peaceful and useful life.

To the second preacher also was granted the blessing of long years in the work; he returned to Chester in 1789 as the Superintendent.

The Conference of 1767 was held in London and again the Cheshire preachers were changed, the newly appointed ones being **Thomas Taylor** and **Mosley Cheek**.

The life and experiences of Thomas Taylor are fully described in the fifth volume of the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*. This sturdy Yorkshireman was born in 1738 and entered the work in 1761. Though but a novice he was immediately appointed to Wales as the sole travelling preacher for the Principality. At the

time of his appointment to Chester he had served in Scotland and Ireland as well as Wales. He survived Wesley, took an active part in the proceedings of the anxious Conferences succeeding the death of the founder of Methodism, and remained in harness nearly up to the time of his death in 1816.

The following extracts from his Journal relate to the period of his residence in Chester :—

My next remove was to Chester, where a change took place of such consequence to me, that I should be wanting in gratitude to a kind Providence if I passed it over in silence. I found it was expedient for me to marry, but it appeared a matter of great importance. Only two things in all my life gave me greater concern; namely, my acceptance with God, and my call to preach. What I wanted was, a person of grace, of good understanding, of a good natural disposition, (for my own is violent) and one who had been well educated. I had contracted an acquaintance with one while in the city of Cork, in whom I had reason to believe the above properties met; she was descended from an eminent French Protestant family, whose grandfather, among many others, had fled from the rage of Louis XIV., and had left his estate behind, only taking what effects he could carry along with him. She was early bereaved of her father, and not long after of her mother. My great objection was, the bringing of a person of her delicate constitution into such a way of life as she must expect if she became my wife. This I feared would be more than her spirits could bear. Besides I found a great aversion to bring any more burdens upon the societies; for she was left an orphan, and her affairs were very ill managed. Yet, believing it to be the will of God, I at length ventured upon this important step; for which I have abundant reason to bless God, and hope I shall do it for ever.

Writing in later life to defend his brethren against the aspersions of some who accused them of making



money out of Methodism, he refers to his own experiences as typical of the poverty of the early itinerants. Indeed his argument goes to show that, poor as he was, he was not so poor as some who had absolutely no means of their own. The whole passage is most striking, telling as it does of the almost incredible lack of provision made for the pioneer preachers of the heroic age of Methodism; but only the passage relating to Chester can be given here.

In 1767 I left Scotland, being appointed for Chester. I bought a horse out of my own pocket, nor do I remember anything that I had for travelling expenses. When I came to Chester, my property amounted to six guineas. Judge now how rich I had become, after near seven years of hard toil and labour. In Chester I married a wife with a little property, the greatest part of which I have lost by a person breaking. From Chester we were appointed for Dublin, and had two guineas to take us thither. . . . .

. . . . I will further add, for twenty years, what I have received for preaching has not kept my family with food; and I can assure my reader, we do not keep an extravagant table.

Concerning Mosley Cheek, the "Helper" at this time there is little than can be said. The following extract from the diary of a good man who afterwards became a travelling preacher gives us a glimpse of his work:—

That evening Mr. Cheek preached in the Methodist meeting, and desired any who chose to stay at the meeting of the society. I gladly accepted the invitation. In his exhortation he said, If any desired to join the Society, they might speak to some one who knew them, and they should be admitted on trial. As I longed to be joined to them, I spoke to Mr. J., and was that night admitted.

The Rev. Melville Horne, who related many anecdotes illustrative of the character of his friend,

Fletcher of Madeley, mentions the ministry of Mr. Cheek in the Chester Circuit:—

In the contests of humility, kindness, and affection, it was impossible to surpass Mr. Fletcher. On one occasion, the Rev. Mosley Cheek had been preaching in his parish; and, on their way home to Madeley, in a dark night, and along a deep, dirty road, Mr. Fletcher carefully held the lantern to Mr. Cheek, while he himself walked through the mire. Mr. Cheek made fruitless attempts to take the lantern from him; Mr. Fletcher replying to his protests, "What, my brother, have you been holding up the glorious light of the Gospel, and will you not permit me to hold this dim taper to your feet?"<sup>1</sup>

Mary Gilbert, writing about five weeks before her death, says,—

Sunday, December 13th, 1767, Mr. C[hee]k preached a Sermon on these awful Words, Rev. vi. 17, *For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand.*

When Wesley visited Chester during the term of Taylor and Cheek he found his friends the Gilberts in sore bereavement, for it was very shortly after the sad decease of Mary Gilbert already referred to. His words are:—

Saturday, April 2nd, 1768, I preached at Little Leigh, and in the evening at Chester. At eight in the morning (Easter Day) I took my old stand, in the little Square at St. Martin's Ash. The people were as quiet as in the House. While I stayed here, I corrected Miss Gilbert's Journal, a masterpiece in its kind. What a prodigy of a child! Soon ripe, and soon gone!

Wesley says that her reflections, which are very freely interspersed through the Journal,

are always just, frequently strong and affecting, particularly those on death, or the shortness of life, especially from the

---

1. *Tyerman: Wesley's Designated Successor.*

mouth of a child. And the language wherein they are expressed, although plain and altogether unstudied, is yet pure and terse in the highest degree—yea, frequently elegant; such as the most polite either of our lawyers or divines would not easily alter for the better. (H)

Thomas Taylor, the Chester preacher at the time of her decease, says :—

Here I became acquainted with that amiable pattern to all young females, I mean Miss Gilbert, who was born in the West Indies, and came to England to finish her education, and also to finish her life in the bloom of her days. She kept a daily journal for several years; at the age of seventeen, a fever sent her to Abraham's bosom. I visited her in her illness, and was therefore a witness of that sweet resignation and consolation with which she was favoured. At the request of her friends I preached a funeral sermon on the occasion of her death from the affecting words of our Saviour, Luke xxiii. 28: *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.* The chapel was much crowded, and the congregation much affected. I printed the sermon, which I hope has been a word in season to many a troubled soul.

The piety of this remarkable family; their intimate connection with John Wesley; and the valuable work they accomplished in Chester during their comparatively brief residence in the City, appear in a volume entitled:—*Spiritual Letters by Several Eminent Christians. Chester.—Printed by Read and Huxley, 1767.*

The volume contains within the compass of 232 pages some seventy letters, about thirty of them being from the pen of the excellent widow, Mrs. Mary Leadbetter, whom Francis Gilbert married.

The Editor's preface is well worth quotation.

Most of the following Letters were wrote by a Gentlewoman. Her style is easy, and elegant : I think not unlike, and equal to the late reverend Mr. Hervey. The matter of them is excellent, and I know very few, though multitudes have been published, that are to be compared with them. At the time of her writing these Letters, I may presume, it was far from her thoughts that they would ever appear in public ; and were it left now to herself, I suppose, her exceeding great modesty would prevent the world from profiting by them. What is very extraordinary in this Lady, she writes all her Letters, let them be ever so long, fair at once without the advantage of a rough Draught ; and withal so correct, that when she has finished them, they need little or no amendment ; and as free as if she were writing from a copy. Her friends cannot but admire the beauty of her language, the spirit of devotion, the justness of sentiments, and prodigious depth of Divinity that run through all her Letters ; though she has too mean an opinion of herself to imagine that anything excellent or worthy public notice can proceed from her. However, be that as it will, the Reader shall judge for himself ; and if he's religiously disposed, I doubt not but that he will be as much edified as agreeably entertained. As the Lady is still living, and the book will probably fall into her hands, the Editor is constrained to check his pen, lest in saying too much in commendation of her performances, he should offend her whom he very highly esteems, and should seem to flatter, which is very far from his intention ; tho' he could wish to have the liberty of saying something of her character, wich is truly an amiable one, and worthy of all her sex, both young and old to copy after. . . . A few of these Letters were also wrote by a Clergyman of extraordinary piety [John Fletcher] who has been and still is a faithful labourer in the Lord's vineyard.

One or two of Mrs. Leadbetter's letters are here given. The first in the volume is to Miss L. H. In all probability this is the same young lady as

the Miss H. mentioned in Mary Gilbert's Diary.

DEAR MISS,

I am encouraged to the liberty I am about to take, by the obliging freedom with which you spoke of the state of your mind, at Mr. G's in your late illness; and which, together with your serious inquiry into some particular points of Mr. Wesley's doctrine, has made me to hope, that you will make an impartial search into this important matter: and I have since earnestly pray'd, that when and where-ever you find the Pearl of great Price, you may be enabled to purchase it. . . . Thus has infinite wisdom made happiness [holiness] the only way to happiness; and yet it is a narrow way, the way of holiness, and will admit of no turning aside. Now the religion which the Methodists profess, without a multiplicity of words (which only tends to puzzle the enquirer), may be thus explained: that in order to attain everlasting life, we must first know ourselves to be lost helpless sinners, both originally and actually, and turn to GOD by true repentance; after which we must receive the knowledge of salvation by the remission of our sins, and then press forward after holiness, which is the mark of our high calling in CHRIST JESUS. And all this is not effected by our own strength; for of ourselves we are not sufficient so much as to think a good thought; it is only by the power and grace of the holy spirit of GOD, which our Saviour assures us in the 11th Chapter of St. Luke, and the 13th verse, he will no more with-hold from those who pray for it, than an earthly parent would deny any necessary gift from his child when asked for it. I have made free to select and offer for your consideration, a few among many other texts of Scripture, which, to my apprehension, incontestibly prove these divine truths; and as the great day of our LORD hasteneth apace and our lives upon earth are as a shadow, so soon they pass away, and we are gone, I trust the weightiness of this concern will plead my excuse, who am, with the utmost sincerity and respect, Dear Miss,

Your affectionate humble servant,

M. L.

The eighth letter in the volume is as follows:—

To the Reverend Mr. J. W.,

REV. SIR,

I received with great pleasure the favour of your kind permission to write to you; a liberty I should have taken before, had not a consideration of your many engagements, and the fear of intruding upon your valuable time prevented me. I was the more desirous of this privilege that I might have an opportunity of removing from your mind, the doubt that seemed to be conceived of my not retaining the affectionate respect for you that I once profest, and which I now beg leave to inform my honoured minister is not, nor ever has been in the least diminished. It is true, I have experienced many vicissitudes, have sympathized in the perplexities of the church, and known the plague of my own heart, yet by a miracle of supporting grace, have never lost my shield or varied from the truths you preach, and which I may without boasting say, I received in the love thereof, and not as the word of man, but as it really is, the word of GOD, which I experienced to be productive of spiritual life to my soul. In whatever part of the world I have been cast, I can with truth aver that I have expressed myself to others, esteemed you, and offered up my prayers for you, as my pastor and spiritual father. Such, Rev. Sir, have been invariably my sentiments regarding myself in this relation to you: I have been induced to acquiesce (by Mr. G.'s appointment) in endeavouring to be as useful as possible among the little flock in this place, of which I have the happiness to acquaint you there is an increase, and among whom at present subsist much life and simplicity. The great shepherd exemplifies his love by many encouragements; he unites his children's hearts to me, so that some who were greatly averse to meeting with me at first, seem to love me exceedingly, having experienced the divine presence in the midst when we assemble in his name. I trust, Rev. Sir, to be assisted by your prayers: I shall always pay the utmost deference to your orders and rules, and stem a line from you in some leisure moments among some

of my highest satisfactions and temporal indulgences. That many years of uninterrupted health may be added to you, Rev. Sir, and that all the present and eternal blessings of the new covenant may crown and reward your successful labours, is the sincere prayer of, Rev. Sir, your affectionate tho' unworthy daughter in the gospel,

M. L.

The letters of Mrs. Leadbetter were written from various places, some from Kendal, some from London, some from Antigua, and some from Chester. The one just quoted has no date and no heading, but in all probability it was written from Chester. The twenty-seventh letter in the volume is headed—

Chester, Nov. 15th, 1765.

To the Reverend Mr. J. W.

REVEREND SIR,

The extensive usefulness of your valuable life, renders its continuance with the addition of health, a circumstance of such importance to the Church, that it must be the continual prayer, and earnest wish of all that are so happy, as to have been brought under the joyful sound of your ministry. Permit me, Rev. Sir, who am the least, and perhaps the most unfaithful that ever enjoyed so high a privilege, to assure you, that my heart is truly interested therein, that my prayers are daily offered to the throne of mercy on this behalf, and that with great solicitude and sincerity, and because I believe there subsists a mutual, tho' inexplicable sympathy and affection between a spiritual father, and the children that are given him by the LORD. I take the liberty of intruding myself upon your memory, to give you some account of my state, and to intreat a continuance of your prayers. I hope I may with humility, and just abasement of myself before GOD, inform you that his work has for some months been reviving in my soul, and that my heart is indeed athirst for that holiness, without which I am convinced, I cannot either fully enjoy GOD in this life, or dwell in his beatific presence in eternity. Sometimes I have

been permitted to such sweet communion and near access, and so enabled to plead the promises, that I have well nigh imagined, that I was just entering into the good land: But to my grief and surprise, I have also found my corruption more lively and powerful than ordinary. The grand adversary has thrust at me sore, and my soul has endured severe conflicts; yet I still believe it is for good, and am willing to conclude that the rage of Satan is a token that his power is of short duration, and that ere long the captain of my salvation will bruise him under my feet; though he would often persuade me that he shall prevail, and that I shall never be wholly delivered from his yoke: At such seasons I go on heavily, but soon the LORD breaks [the force of this suggestion, by lifting up the light of his countenance, and then I urge on my way with strength renewed. O how sweet will the rest of perfect love appear to my weary longing soul! Help me, dear Sir, by your prayers, to seize the inestimable prize.

The LORD is graciously pleased to bless me in the little labour of love which his providence and your appointment has engaged me in. The souls of these seem to prosper: One among them has received a clear manifestation of pardoning love, and some are seeking this goodly pearl with great earnestness, and these that have believed through grace are in a measure pressing forward. May this and every part of the vineyard which has been bless'd with your ministry, and nourish'd by your care, be your comfort and crown of rejoicing in that happy day, when labour shall be exchanged for uninterrupted repose, the cross for the victorious palm, and an admittance into the joy of our LORD reward all your toil, and end the dubious strife of, Rev. Sir,

Your affectionate daughter in the Gospel.

M. L.

The forty-fourth letter in the collection was probably written from Chester; for in it Mrs. Leadbetter seems to refer to her forthcoming marriage



which, as already mentioned, took place in that city :—

To the Rev. Mr. J. W.

REV. SIR,

I have often felt a grateful sense of the divine goodness, in instructing the children of men in that pleasing art, which so alleviates the pain of absence, and compensates for the loss of the agreeable and profitable converse of those we particularly esteem and regard, by enabling us to maintain an intercourse, while at the greatest distance, which though imperfect, is productive of much satisfaction, and frequently answers many valuable purposes : And as I highly prize this privilege, especially in your correspondence, I could not but be sensibly concerned at the loss of your last favour ; and the more so, as I flattered myself that as a father to his child, you would have spoke your sentiments freely upon the important step I have been influenced (I trust by the divine guidance) to take ; which if approved of, would have afforded me great pleasure ; but as that failed in coming to hand, I could wish to intrude upon your golden moments for that indulgence to be repeated ; and am more abundantly anxious, Mr. G. having been informed by Mr. F. of your indisposition, from which we truly desire to hear you are perfectly recovered. O that your days may be prolonged, that the pleasure of the LORD may prosper in our hands, and that though late, you may obtain a full reward ; and that among the many children which you may present to him who gave them to you, I may be numbered, is the ardent prayer of, Rev. Sir, Your affectionate Daughter in the Gospel,

M. L.

Later letters in this collection add some melancholy details about the untimely death of Mary Gilbert in Chester. Writing in January, 1768, to Mrs. F. ? P. ?, Mrs. Gilbert says :—

. . . . I am sure you will very tenderly sympathize, when I inform you, that the truly amiable Miss P[olly] G[ilbert], (from whose bright genius and early piety, the most

sanguine expectations might have been indulged) is no more an inhabitant of these dusky regions, but has bid eternally farewell to all the vicissitudes of this fluctuating state, and is now entered into those joys that neither change nor period know. The grisly monarch's harbinger was a putrid fever, which, so soon as it seized her tender frame, brought on an uncommon stupor, a profound deafness, and for some days before her departure sealed up in silence those lips, from which I believe I may assert never proceeded anything but innocence and truth, and with which she was first enabled to witness a good confession, and to leave her friends the most satisfactory testimony of her future bliss. She was interred in that Church where she so lately attended me as a bridesmaid; a silent but pathetic monitor of the short duration, and certain period of all human events! O may my heart be open to its instructive voice!

Writing in the same month to Mrs. M[ary] F[letcher], the sorrowing Aunt says:—

. . . . I have no doubt but you will excuse the delay, and very tenderly sympathize with me and our afflicted family, who are under the trying dispensation of having lost from amongst us, a most amiable and endeared relation, Miss P—G—, aged 17, who was taken from our society in this dreary vale on Thursday last, by a putrid fever, which, from its first approach, resisted all the force of medicine, and cruelly eluded the incessant care of her anxious friends. She was attended twice a day from the beginning to its fatal period, by two of the most eminent physicians of this place, and an apothecary; but the destined hour was come, when she was to attain a dispensation from every mortal woe, be admitted to unite with the spirits of just men made perfect; and we who still remain thus to be admonished of our own approaching change, and of the uncertainty of sub-lunary things. She was a blooming flower, but alas! how has the grisly tyrant's sickle levelled her with the dust! Before she died she gave a clear testimony of JESUS' power to save. Some of her words were, "I have found CHRIST, and have power to love GOD, because I know

he has first loved me; I am entirely delivered from the fear of death, and quite resigned to the divine disposal." All her conduct proved the efficacy of what she profest; for amidst severe sufferings, there was nothing to be discerned, but, steadfast patience and calm composedness even to the last. Great, unspeakably great, is the loss of all that were interested in this jewel! . . . .

At the Bristol Conference of 1768, the preachers appointed to the Cheshire Circuit were **Thomas Olivers**, **William Harry**, **Stephen Proctor**. The number of members in the Circuit was 484, and in the Connexion 26,341.

The two younger of these preachers soon pass away from Methodist records, and have left no mark. Stephen Proctor was received on trial at this Conference and attained the full status of an itinerant the next year. For some cause, which cannot be discerned with certainty, his name (and no other) is enclosed in brackets in the Stations of 1768; possibly it was because the appointment of a third preacher to the Round was merely a tentative arrangement.

The career of Thomas Olivers is one of the most varied and striking recorded in that treasury of heroic experiences, the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*. (See Vol. II). He was a native of Montgomeryshire, and in his wild and turbulent youth distinguished himself for wickedness not only in his own village but in Wrexham, Shrewsbury, and other towns. At length his wanderings brought him to Bristol, where he was converted under the preaching of Whitefield. Removing to Bradford (Wilts) he was active in the pursuit of

religious improvement and ere long became a preacher. After a time he returned to Wales to claim some money held for him by his Uncle. Having possessed himself of this, his first act was to buy a horse and ride all round the neighbourhood paying off old debts and making compensation for some of the frauds of his earlier days. Then he started off on a longer journey and, passing through Chester where he was to reside at a later date as Superintendent Methodist preacher, he worked his way right through to Somersetshire, paying his debts all the way.

As he often went many miles to pay a few shillings for which some means of remittance might have been found, it seems evident that the motive inspiring his method of personal repayment was his desire to preach the Gospel. His purpose was accomplished; for his remarkable visits attracted much attention, the reality of his conversion could not be gainsaid, and the hearts of many were reached. Wesley afterwards pressed him into the ranks of the itinerants, in which he served faithfully until he was called upon to reside in London to sustain what he called "the care of Mr. Wesley's printing."

Strangely enough Olivers has much more to say about his experiences during a preaching tour in his native country, than he has of anything actually occurring within the duly appointed limits of his work. Mrs. Olivers lay ill in Chester for fifteen weeks; the fever being so violent that for eight weeks her life was despaired of. The couple were tenderly attached to one another, and it was with deep though chastened joy that the husband was able to record that his wife now

“lay as on the brink of eternity, quiet and unmoved, like a ship at anchor in the mouth of a harbour, without one blast of wind to disturb her peace.”

Olivers had great gifts and did much to retrieve the wasted opportunities of his early days. He wrote several vigorous pamphlets in exposition of Methodism, and in defence of the Wesleys. When it is stated that the Church is indebted to him for the noble hymn, “The God of Abraham praise,” it will be seen that his was a mind of an uncommon order. This hymn (800 in our collection) was adapted to a celebrated air sung by Leoni in the Jews’ Synagogue. Olivers was also the composer of the tune set to hymn 66, called Helmsley. (J)

Chester received in 1769 another of the visits of Wesley, which by this time must have been looked upon there as an annually recurring privilege. It will be noticed that for a long period of years Wesley passed through Chester about Easter time, a fact which shows the regularity with which his journeys were planned.

Thursday, March 16th, 1769, we rode with a furious wind, full in our faces, to Chester.

Friday, 17th, and the next days, we had a refreshing season, with a loving people, and in a loving family. The congregations were not small in the mornings; in the evenings exceedingly large. And all who attended behaved as if they not only understood, but relished the good word.

Sunday, 19th, Elizabeth Oldham called upon me.

This was the widow of one of the travelling preachers, John Oldham, who had been appointed to the Lancashire North Circuit by the preceding Conference, and had died during the winter.

On the Saturday Wesley wrote an interesting letter to Mrs. Crosby, in which he sets forth his views as to

the limits within which a woman may speak in public.

The Conference of 1769 was held in Leeds. The work at home was marked by an improvement in the arrangement for the support of preachers' wives; ten pounds yearly was to be paid to each married preacher for that purpose. The amount was to be raised by the Circuits in proportion to their ability. Chester was made responsible for £2 10s. per quarter, being the allowance for one wife. The relative strength of the different Methodist centres at this time may be gauged when it is said that Bristol contributed the same amount, London twice as much, and Newcastle as much as London and Bristol together. At this Conference three preachers were appointed to the Cheshire Circuit: — **John Shaw**, **Richard Seed**, and **Samuel Bardsley**. The Assistant was allowed to remain a second year in the Circuit. Indeed in his case we have practically a third year's appointment; for, at the Conference of 1770, the Cheshire Circuit was divided and Mr. Shaw remained in Chester; the following year he removed as Assistant to Macclesfield in charge of Cheshire South, which had formed part of the Circuit to which he had been appointed in 1769. As we learn that six years after he left Macclesfield he returned thither as Assistant and remained there two years it may be concluded that Wesley had discerned in him ability to vary his ministrations. "He laboured for thirty years as a travelling preacher: was useful in every Circuit where he was stationed, and died with unshaken confidence in his GOD."

Richard Seed survived until 1805, when he was suddenly smitten down by apoplexy.

Letters of his are extant. On October 29th, 1769, he writes to a friend from Whitchurch. He is then in his round and talks of going into Wales. Another to an anonymous correspondent is dated Chester, May 22nd, 1770.

The following letter was written by Bardsley to his mother immediately upon his arrival in the Circuit. His attachment to her was a very beautiful feature of his character :—

Chester, Saty, Aug. 12th, 1769.

My Dear Hond Mother,

Because I believe it is my duty And will give you satisfaction, I now write you to inform you that I am got well here Blessed be God for all His mercys. I got to Northwich on Thursday about 2 o'clock and Din'd, the people told me that Bror Seed had promised them that I should stay and preach Among them. I was glad of it and got my Boots off and Rested me before preaching time. I went to see my Cozen Forister he ask'd me how my Brothers did and how you Did. I told him that I was at the preaching House and should be glad if he would come to the preaching. He promised me he would. Some of our friends told me that he has a very masterly wife and they thought she would not let him come. On Friday I set out for Chester and got there about 2 o'clock. I did not preach last night, because we had a stranger here out of Ireland. We have comfortable lodgings and I hope I shall like very well. There are two preachers and their wives here. I expect to stay here till Tuesday. I would have you to be content about me and let both you and me Be thankfull to God for all his mercys. After my dear Bror and Me left you we was both of us very much affected poor dear lad He knows very well he is doing wrong. Give my dear love to him and desire him to take that advice that I gave him. I hope to see him another Creature than what he is. O, God turn thou Him and he shall be turned. You dont need to

write than I write again. Pray give my Dear Love to Bror Wild and peggy I hope he will excuse me not coming to see him. You know I was busy. My Dear love to all Enquiring friends fare well I remain your ever dutyfull son till Death.

Saml Bardsley.

To Mrs Bardsley To be left at Mr Wm. Wilds The Lower end of Jackson's Rowe Manchester. Post Paid.

In another letter to his mother, dated Namptwich, December 3rd, 1769, he says :—

. . . . I wrote to you some time ago from Chester and told you how I was. I had a bad cold, but blessed be the Lord, it left me when I was in Wales, and I had my health very well while I was in Wales, tis a week since I came out of Wales. I desired you to send me a letter to Shrewsbury, and when I was there I asked Mrs. Hatton if any had come . . . I hope to be at Chester next Saturday . . . . I hope to come over as soon as I can after the Quarter Meeting. . . . .

There is an interesting, but most tantalizing, reference to Bardsley's papers in the Rev. Thomas Jackson's *Recollections of my own Life and Times* (p. 169) :—

He left a vast accumulation of manuscripts and other documents relating to Methodism, and illustrative of its history, which came into my hands after his decease. As they were of public interest, and did not properly belong to me, I felt that I ought not to retain them in my possession, greatly as I wished that they were my own; and therefore sent a report concerning them to the Conference Book-Committee in London, asking their advice as to the right disposal of them. They requested me to forward them to London without delay, and with that request I promptly complied. On inquiring afterwards where they had been deposited, I had the mortification to learn that they had been placed in the hands of one of the London preachers, that he might examine and report on upon them; that when he removed from the Circuit he left them in the house he had occupied; that the servant maid of his



successor, regarding them as waste paper, had used them in kindling fires; so that not a scrap remained of the entire load which I had been so anxious to secure for the use of some future historian of Methodism! They consisted of private letters relating mostly to the state of religion in different Circuits, and of printed circulars on Connexional affairs, embracing a period of about half a century; for Mr. Bardsley appears scarcely ever to have destroyed any papers that came into his possession. One of the documents which he left, however, I found that I had retained, and will here insert it as a curiosity of its kind. It is a letter addressed by a Clergyman to "Hannah Damp," a young woman in Chester, who had begun to attend the Methodist meetings, and was thought on that account to be on the very brink of ruin. It shows the estimate that was formed of Methodism in that part of the country a hundred years ago.

"HANNAH,

YOU must allow me to tell you, that I was very much shocked and surprised with the account I had from your good mother yesterday; and the more so to find that religion was made a pretence to justify what every sober Christian must be convinced is absolutely condemned by it. It gives me much concern to hear that you have given any part of the time which ought to be faithfully and conscientiously employed in discharging the common duties of life, to an attendance upon a set of men who call themselves Methodists; though their dangerous delusions never fail to end in confusion and disorder amongst families, and a total neglect of those plain and honest rules and methods, which common sense, under the authority of a sober and reasonable faith, has prescribed to the rest of the world. I am really sorry for your situation, because from the many examples of this kind which have fallen in my way, I am strongly inclined to think it a desperate one. The principles adopted by these enthusiasts are such a disgrace and debasement of the human understanding, as well as the human heart, that when the infection of this poison has once got thorough possession, there is nothing left in the mind for a reasonable

persuasion to take hold of; and indeed, if I really knew you to be far gone in this way, I should not have employed your time or my own so ill, as to have given you this trouble. Instead of running through any other points that might expose these wretched doctrines and their teachers to the contempt and abhorrence they so justly deserve, I shall confine myself to the circumstances of your own case in particular. The common duties of life, mentioned above, which these deceivers affect to despise so much, are most important parts of the religion we profess, absolutely necessary to the salvation of all men, to a degree, that the Gospel, which is so mild and merciful in other respects, speaks with some rigour and severity upon this. St. Paul tells us that if a man will not work, neither must he eat; that those who neglect their own households are worse than infidels and have denied the faith. If, therefore, you should prevail upon yourself, under any pretext whatever, to desert the duties of that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call you, I shall recommend it strongly to your mother not to receive you.

May God Almighty give you a just and sober sense of His most holy religion; and to His good providence I commend you.

J. SHAN,

June 26th, 1770.

Vicar of Arreton."

What effect this epistle produced upon poor "Hannah Damp," we have no means of knowing. That she was taught by those "wretched deceivers," the Methodist preachers, to neglect and despise the common duties of life, was notoriously untrue, such conduct being a direct violation of the rules of the Societies, to the practical observance of which they were pledged. (K).

Towards the close of 1769 a young man in Chester wrote:—

Being thus brought from darkness to light, and experiencing such amazing sweetness in religion, I delayed not to join

the Methodist Society, though I trembled in every joint when good Mr. Bardsley gave me the *Note of Admittance*.

This young man was Samuel Bradburn, destined to be known as the Methodist Demosthenes, one of the most remarkable men that ever entered the Methodist ministry. Dr. Gregory, in his charming little book, "*From Cobbler's Bench to President's Chair*," says:—

Little did Mr. Bardsley think, as he gave that note of admittance into the Methodist Society to that young cobbler's apprentice, that before the end of the century he should see him sitting at the head of the Methodist Conference in John Wesley's seat.

Bradburn always regarded Bardsley as his spiritual father; and the two were lifelong friends. In later years both were familiarly known to the Methodist people as "Sammy." Both developed a considerable rotundity of figure; Bardsley was a regular mountain, and his friend chaffingly used to call him "a great lump of love" and "a heavenly apple dumpling."

The father of the great orator was born in 1719 at Atcham, near Shrewsbury. On reaching his majority he eloped with a gardener's daughter from Wrexham, only in her teens, and was married at Chester. The young bridegroom was shortly hurried away by the barbarous press-gang, and accompanied by his girl wife, passed through the terrible campaigns in Flanders (1744-1748). He was afterwards ordered to Gibraltar, where the future evangelist was born on board a man of war, October 5th, 1751. Methodist influences were contributory to the child's early training. His father had been powerfully impressed by the preaching, conversation, and example of

three brave Methodist soldiers, Haime, Staniforth, and Evans; though never a member of the Methodist Society he became devout and conscientious and tried to teach his children Scripture truth. In 1763, after three and twenty years of military service, Bradburn Senior obtained his discharge, and fixed his home in Chester, apprenticing Sammy to a shoemaker. At the Methodist Chapel to which the lad was regularly taken by his parents, he was brought under the influence of the powerful sermons preached there by the men whose names have been mentioned already. Unhappily, however, evil influences prevailed with him, among which is specially mentioned a visit to the Chester races. Passing from bad to worse he left home so as to be free from all restraint. Dr. Gregory draws a striking picture of the future President when he "alternately slouched and staggered along the streets and Rows and past the Churches and Chapels, and beside the walls and battlements of the fine old City, and on the banks of the ancient Dee, a miserable English version of the hunger-bitten prodigal. He writes:—'To all appearance there was but a step between me and everlasting death.'" At the age of eighteen employment was found for him under a Methodist master, and he was persuaded to return to his parents' house. Bradburn's conversion, which soon followed, is described by him in the following words:—

One evening in the close of the year 1769, while looking at some decayed flowers, I was suddenly carried as it were out of myself with thoughts of death and of eternity. I attempted to banish these ideas, but, like the prodigal, I now came to myself. But my sins were set in full array before me, particularly that of ingratitude to my good and gracious God. This

caused my very bones to tremble. Hell from beneath seemed moved to meet me. I stood motionless for a time, and could scarcely reach home, though but a little way off. I went to bed, but not to rest. My friends concluded I was in a high fever.

This experience was succeeded by a long spiritual struggle, in the different stages of which we read sometimes of strange self-imposed penances, which harassed the body and brought no relief to the soul; sometimes of conversations with the godly master; sometimes of seeking guidance among the Methodists; until we are brought to the point at which we first met the young man—his entrance into the marvellous light of God and the membership of the Methodist Society. The new convert availed himself of the means of grace offered by the Methodists: he soon sought also to do good by his words in these comparatively private gatherings. At the March visitation of the classes in 1770 he received his first ticket of membership from Mr Shaw.

He also served as many others have done a sort of apprenticeship to the work of preaching by frequently accompanying the preacher to the country places on the Sabbath day. His "call to preach" is first mentioned in connection with Wesley's visit to Chester in March, 1771.

At the very moment Mr. Wesley gave me the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the thought came into my mind that I was called to preach and, ascribing it entirely to diabolical agency, I instantly went to prayer . . . I endeavoured to banish this thought, but grew dull and melancholy. My temper also became so morose that I was a trouble to myself and those around me. I therefore went home to work in a room alone.

Wesley had a deep sense of the value of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. Bradburn was not the only one in Chester who felt the influence of such a service conducted by such a man. Of Mrs. M. Parry, who died at Wrexham in 1837, it is recorded that she "received a sense of the Divine favour at Chester while Mr. Wesley was administering the Lord's Supper." She must have entered the Society while very young for one of her tickets bore the date 1770.

The first sermon Bradburn ever preached was in 1773 when, on Sunday, February 7th, the congregation at Wrexham was disappointed by Mr. Gardner of Tattenhall. The name of one of the believers there who then encouraged Bradburn to open his evangelical commission amongst them has been preserved: Mrs. Mary Franceys, who died in the same town in 1826, aged 89.

Step by step the way opened up; Fletcher of Madeley took pains with the gifted lad; the Chester preachers found him abundant opportunities of preaching in their immense Circuit; until in 1774 he was formally appointed to the Liverpool Circuit. In the Allan Library is a piece of glass inscribed, "GOD is love: Samuel Bradburn, Sept. 16th, 1774." This originally formed part of a window in the old preaching house at Preston-on-the-hill, in the Warrington Circuit. (L)

Wesley's visit to Chester in 1770 extended from Saturday, March 31st, to Tuesday, April 3rd. The Journal simply mentions his arrival from Rochdale and his departure to Liverpool.

On April 1st he wrote a letter to Miss Mary Marston of Worcester, which has been printed in the Mag., and in his collected works.

In the course of this year was published a little pamphlet: *A Short Account of the Death of Mary Langson of Taxall, in Cheshire; who died January the 29th, 1769. Printed in the year MDCCLXX.*

Taxall is situated on the extreme Eastern border of the county, about a mile from Chapel-en-le-Frith. The name of the author is not given, but probably it was Thomas Olivers. Two hymns are appended. The first is by Charles Wesley, "Happy soul thy days are ended," being the hymn chosen by the deceased for her funeral. The second, a hymn of praise to CHRIST, may perhaps be attributed to Thomas Olivers. All that is known about this little pamphlet may be read in *Green's Wesley Bibliography* 259. Wesley may have met with this account and furthered its publication, when he went on his way "slowly through Staffordshire and Cheshire to Manchester," in March, 1770. He thought the tract of sufficient importance to be included in the thirteenth volume of his collected works in 1772.

Towards the end of this year the Methodists of Chester, in common with their fellow members throughout the country, were saddened by the tidings from America of the death of George Whitefield, whom many of them had heard to their lasting good.

At the Conference of 1770 the number of Circuits was increased from 46 to 50; the last on the list being 50—*America*. Cheshire was divided into North and South; Chester and Macclesfield being the respective Circuit towns. Lancashire was similarly

divided, with Manchester and Liverpool at the head of the divisions respectively, though they were not yet so mentioned in the *Minutes*. Cheshire was recorded to have 565 members. Forty-three Preachers' wives were to be provided for; Sister Shaw being assigned to the care of Cheshire North. Children were to be maintained by the Societies profiting by the labours of the fathers. £60 8s. 2d. was Chester's share of the money raised towards the reduction of the debt. Two preachers only were appointed to Cheshire North, though it covered the area of more than half a score modern Circuits. John Shaw, the Chester Assistant, remained; his two colleagues, however, were removed, and Joseph Guilford, who had been in Chester at an earlier date, was sent in their place. Of Guilford Wesley said:—"A holy man, and a useful preacher. Surely never before did a man of so weak talents, do so much good."

In the spring of 1771 Wesley was again in Chester, visiting Whitchurch for the first time on his way.

Saturday, March 16th, between nine and ten, I began at Cardinmarsh. I have not seen the bulk of a congregation so melted down since I left London. In the evening we had a Sunday congregation at Chester; and many were filled with consolation. Both on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, all our congregations were uncommonly large; otherwise I should have regretted staying so long, while the weather was pleasant and the wind fair.

Wednesday, 20th, having agreed with a captain who promised to sail immediately, we went down to Parkgate; but the wind turning, I preached in the evening to most of the gentry in the town. I preached likewise, morning and evening, on Thursday.



On March 17th he wrote two letters which appear in his collected works: to Miss Briggs, and to Miss Mary Stokes.

At the Conference of 1771 **Joseph Guilford** was promoted to the position of Assistant, with **Barnabas Thomas** as his colleague, in what was for the first time called the Chester Circuit.

In the course of his next journey to Chester Wesley had the disagreeable experience of sticking fast in the mud on an execrable road between Nantwich and Whitchurch.

Saturday, March 28th, 1772, I rode on to Chester.

Sunday, 29th, there were about forty persons in St. John's Church at the morning service. Our room was pretty well filled in the morning, and crowded in the evening.

The Conference of 1772, the twenty-ninth in the history of Methodism, was held at Leeds. **John Oliver** and **Robert Costerdine** were appointed to Chester. The latter remained in the ranks until 1812 when he passed away at the advanced age of 85. The former was a useful preacher for a time; but subsequently left the Methodist ministry. The tentative character of Methodist finance appears from the fact the wife of one preacher was to be provided for in Chester, while the other had to look to the Manchester Society for support.

In the year 1772 there entered the City a runaway apprentice in absolute destitution, who afterwards became a useful "Helper" in Wesley's work. Matthias Joyce (whose interesting life is fully described in the

fourth volume of "*The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*") was at the time an ignorant and wicked Irish Papist. He ran away from the master to whom he was apprenticed in Dublin to London. There he met at length with a friend who persuaded him to return. On his return journey he passed through Chester; his experiences there are described in his own words:—

When I came within half a mile of Chester, I sat down to rest myself. While I sat my joints stiffened, and I became more sensible of pain. My feet also swelled, and my thighs were raw with walking. Here I sat, a poor forlorn wretch; without money, food, or any visible help. Nor did I know where to turn myself when I entered the City; but I had a hope it would be well with me when I got there. After some time I strove to rise; but it was with the greatest difficulty, I got first on one knee, then on the other. However, by degrees with excessive pain, I got on to my feet and crept on. Just as I came to the River Dee, I saw a man with two pitchers of water, resting himself. I went to him, and asked him to let me drink. He said, if it was sack I should have it, and held the pitcher to my mouth. Having drunk freely he asked me how far I came. I told him. He asked me if I had lodgings. I said "No, neither have I any money to give for one." Then said he, "The LORD succour you! for you are come into a bad place; but come along with me. Accordingly, I went with him to his house, where he set before me hanged beef, bread, and potatoes; and made me eat until I could eat no more. After dinner he went with me to look for work. On showing me a master printer in the street, I went up to him, and asked if he wanted a hand. He looked at me, and seeing me very young (being then about eighteen), he said, "You are a run-away from your master; and therefore if I had room for ten men I would not give you work." "O Sir," said I, "will you give me something, for I am in very great distress." He answered with a degree of sternness, "I will not give you one farthing." As soon as he said this, I turned from him and

was afraid to try anywhere else. On saying to my friend, "I will sell my waistcoat," he said, "Then come with me, and I will show you where you will get as much for it as in any part of the city." Accordingly, he brought me to a woman whose name was Reely, wife to Sergeant Reely, belonging to the Yorkshire Militia, who sold clothes for people and got three pence in the shilling for selling them. When she saw me she pitied my case; and when I stripped off my coat and waistcoat she began to weep, and asked if I had nothing else to sell. I said "No." Then she said she would sell it for as much as she could get and not charge me anything. She did so, and brought me three shillings for it. She also made me stay to supper and washed my feet and my handkerchief. She likewise cleaned my shoes and sent her daughter to get me a lodging; and insisted on my having a bed to myself let it cost what it would and said she would pay for it herself. She also sent her daughter in the morning with my handkerchief and stockings which she had washed, and gave me a loaf when I was going away, and charged me not to change my money until I got to Liverpool.

By slow and painful stages Matthias Joyce was brought into the light of Christian experience and ultimately into the work of a Gospel preacher.

The Conference of 1773 allowed John Oliver to remain in Chester, but appointed as junior preacher **Thomas Brisco**, a Chester man who had left his native place twenty years previously. He and his brother had joined the Society soon after its commencement, at the time when it met in Love Lane. He was a somewhat pensive disciple even in his youth; but his record is that he was a devoted and consistent servant of CHRIST.

In the course of his second year Mr. Oliver was invited to Wrexham, and preached "abroad" to about a thousand serious hearers. He received most arbitrary

and high-handed treatment at the hands of a Justice of the Peace who bore the suggestive name of Boycott. (For particulars see *Mag.* 1779.)

Wesley seems to have accomplished his Irish journey of 1773 without calling at Chester; it was not, therefore, till 1774 that his friends there saw his face again.

Friday, April 8th, 1774, I went on to Chester.

Saturday, 9th, I visited our old friends at Alraham; many of whom are now well nigh worn out, and just ready for the bridegroom.

The following letter, the original of which was presented to the Mission House by Mr. W. T. Davies of Chester, was published in the *Mag.* (1880) by the Rev. Nehemiah Curnock. The words bracketted are conjectural emendations. The circumstances to which Wesley is referring are not known, but in all probability the letter relates to the debt incurred at the erection of the Octagon Chapel.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne,

June 22nd, 1774.

DEAR JONATHAN,

It appears to me, that Mr. Oliver should in a mild and loving manner talk with T. Bennet, and tell him, "Mr. W. will take it exceeding ill, if he does not pay ye money according to his promise." If he urges any, or all the points you mention, Mr. O. may readily make the same answers that you do. I can hardly think T. Bennet, has any design to wr[ong m]e; but he is stout, and stands upon his [honou]r.

Be not weary of well doing. Be glad if you can do a little for GOD. And do what you can, till you can do what you would.

I am,

Dear Jonathan,

Your Aff[ectionate] Brother,

[JOHN] WESLEY.

*Address*—Mr. Jon. Pritchard, at Boughton, near Chester.

The Conference of this year sent to Chester **William Collins** and **Francis Wrigley**, both of them good and strong men. Wrigley was an intimate friend of Samuel Bardsley. When Bardsley died in 1818, being then the oldest preacher in the Connexion, his friend was with him. Wrigley attained to the same honourable distinction before he passed away in 1824.

In 1775 Wrigley was succeeded by **Thomas Carlill**.

A specimen of Bardsley's correspondence has already been given to the reader. The following letters, also characteristic of his style, are transcribed here for the sake of their numerous references to Chester people. Writing to F. Wrigley on Dec. 30th, 1774, he inquires after his Chester friends and sends his dear love to Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith at Whitchurch and their families. Also to Mr. Allwood, near Acton, and his wife. Pray send me word how he and his family do and how my old friend Smith does. Where is my old father Swindells? I hear his wife is dead. . . . My dear love to bro' Collins & wife, to Mr. & Mrs. Bennett, Mr. Thomas Shaw, currier & his wife, and also to bro' Pritchard & his wife and sister, and to my dear old friend Thomas: I hope his grey locks will go down in peace to the house appointed for all living. My dear love to George Shaw & wife, bro' Roberts & wife. He is a carpenter. I hope thou wilt also give my dear love to Mr. and Mrs. Orme and their daughters: they live not far from your house.

Writing from Sheffield, April 7th, 1775, to Mr. Thomas Shaw, Currier, in Chester, Bardsley says ;—

I think it a long time since I saw you. I think I can say with the Apostle "I long to see you" and many more in Chester. I have lately been contriving how I must do to get to Chester. Soon I shall go over to Manchester to see my dear Mother and then I intend to take a day or two that I

should be at home and come over to you. I shall endeavour, please GOD, to reach you on Saturday evening Ap. 29. Please to give my dear love to Bro' Collins and brother Wrigley. I think they will either of them lend me their pulpits. I will do that for them if they come into my Circuit. Please to give my dear love and service to Mr. & Mrs. Bennett, Mr. Holbrooke, Mr. Garner, Mr. Geo. Walker and wife, Richard Jones, Mr. Brackenbury & his wife and to my friend Pritchard and his wife and sister and father-in-law who came from Manchester, if alive. I have so many friends in Chester I cannot name them all . . . Had Mr. Oliver known of my writing he would have sent his love.

It appears from the next letter that Bardsley's intention of visiting Chester was successfully carried out.

Near Rotherham, May the 10th, 1775.

MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

May Grace Mercy and Peace be multiplied unto thee now and for ever Amen. I received the lines thou sent to Manchester and should have been glad to have come to meet thee but my poor mare was almost done, and another reason was I had not seen my dear Chester Friends of a long while made me desirous to stay with them as long as I could. Had it been thy turn in Chester I should have been glad however as Conference is so near I trust I shall have the pleasure to see thee there. I left a Pair of straps in your Kitchin upon the Pewter Shelf do be so kind as to bring them to Leeds. I have blest God for my visit to Chester. The kind behaviour of the People and comfort I found while speaking to them was a cause of thankfulness. Well, "God is not unrighteous to forget their Work, & Labour of Love." O! that they may be steadfast unmovable always abounding in the Work of the Lord so shall they know that their labour is not in vain in the Lord. Give my dear love to Mr. Collins and Wife Mr. & Mrs. Shaw Mr. & Mrs. Walker Mr. Reader Mr. & Mrs. Bennet and their Children Mr. & Mrs Shepherd Bro. Geo. Shaw and

Wife and Daughters Brother Pritchard and wife and Sister and all the Children and to my dear old Friend Thomas Woffenden. To Mr. & Mrs. Orme and their Daughters. To Brother Roberts the Skinner & Wife and Bro'r Roberts the Carpenter & Wife and Daughter To Mr. Hobrow & Wife and Daughter To Abraham near the Preaching House & Wife To Peter Haswell and Wife and asking all friends. It is my desire to go forward, I trust we shall Pray for each other. The Lord enable us to be more than ever devoted to Him and given up to His Work. I trust thy health is better: The Lord give thee an Healthfull Body and Soul. Tell Mr. Bennet I paid the £12 5/- to Mr. Woodcroft the last Saturday for which I got his receipt. Wishing that the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush may be ever with thee; I remain thy Affectionate Bro'r S. Bardsley.

To Mr. F. Wrigley at the Methodist Preaching House Chester.

## CHAPTER IV.

---

### **Extension within the City: Commonhall Street Preaching-Room, 1776—1787.**

---

IN the year 1776 a commodious Room was secured for public services in Commonhall Street, then more commonly called Commonhall Lane, on the same side of the City as St. Martin's Ash. This step was taken in the interests of those who found the Octagon Chapel too remote, situated as it was on the outskirts of the City on the eastern side. Preaching took place in the new Room at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon; this hour was selected in order that public services might not be held in both Methodist preaching places at the same hour; service in Church hours being also avoided in deference to the well-known wishes of Wesley. Though there were in Chester, as elsewhere, some Methodists who were unwilling to acknowledge any allegiance to the Episcopal Church, or to embarrass their evangelistic work by any reference to its services or usages, there was no absolute division of the Society at the time when the Commonhall Lane Room was first engaged; at a later period, however, it became the



rallying place for that portion of the Society which wished to be entirely separate from the Church of England. At its first occupation the Room proved very useful, classes were held there, and the Wednesday evening service was transferred thither from the Octagon.

There is reason to believe that this Room had been already used as a place of worship, and that a good many Methodists had been more or less definitely connected with it for some time ; but the date of its formal adoption by the Society was doubtless that mentioned above. The Rev. H. D. Roberts, in his recently published *Matthew Henry and his Chapel*, unravels the tangled story of an alleged secession from the congregation of Mr. Chidlaw, who became pastor of Matthew Henry's Chapel in 1765. In the course of his inquiries Mr. Roberts investigated a five volume folio manuscript in the collection at Dr. Williams's library, known as *Records of Nonconformity*, written by the Rev. Josiah Thompson. This was drawn up about 1772. Now Mr. Thompson had evidently heard of a congregation in Chester supposed to have been formed by "separation" from the old chapel of Matthew Henry ; and wrote to inquire about it to Mr. Jenkins, a Baptist Minister at Wrexham, who had been concerned in the movement. Mr. Jenkins in his reply repudiated the idea that he had been party to any act of separation, and declared that the merest handful of Mr. Chidlaw's people left at the time. He had been invited to Chester, it is true, by one or two members of the Matthew Henry congregation, but they had assured him that they were not members thereof in the full sense

of the word, and informed him that they had been dissatisfied with the doctrines preached, especially by certain young men who had been supplied from the Warrington Academy during Mr. Chidlaw's illness—

they were deputed to speak to me by several other persons partly Baptists & partly Methodists who had been in connection with Mr. Westley but were now dissatisfied . . . I went accordingly. The place provided was ye Smith's Meeting House in Commonhall Lane . . . There were about 200 People hearing me. I asked what they were and was answered that they were Methodists & Church People who if curiosity had not led them to hear me would have gone nowhere. Numbers thus attending I altered my design of returning to London and at ye desire of the leading People preached to them all ye Winter . . . They have had a Minister 12 months, the Independants (*sic*) are the Majority and are formed into a Church, the Minister's name is Will. Armitage. He is ordained their Pastor—the numbers who attend on his preaching are between 3 & 400 in an Afternoon. The People are much of the Methodist Stamp and their Minister also. They do not understand the dissenting Principles and the Minister profess'd to me to be against the application to Parliament. <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Jenkins further says :—

Time alone must discover whether this Society is likely to be of any continuance, at present they seem to be too heterogeneous a Body ever comfortably to coalesce.

If our interpretation of the course of events is correct the separation into component parts did take place about 1776 when the Independents went to their new Church in Queen Street and the Methodist section of the congregation, with the sanction of the original

---

1. This was an application made at the time for relief from subscription to the Articles of the Church of England; for an enlargement of the Toleration Act with respect to Dissenting Ministers and Schoolmasters. It is interesting to observe how far Methodists were in those days from thoroughgoing Dissent.

Society at the Octagon, availed themselves of the opportunity of making the Room a centre of Methodist operations on that side of the city.

The room first occupied by the Independents was probably part of St. Ursula's Hospital on the south side of the lane. They afterwards removed to a larger room on the north side; both rooms have long since been demolished. The room on the north side was probably that in which Mr. Jonathan Wilcoxon preached for many years from 1808 onwards, some of his congregation having been formerly in connexion with the Rev. Philip Oliver. Mr. Wilcoxon's people erected a Chapel in 1839, which was occupied by those who subsequently founded the Independent Church in Northgate Street.

After they left, the building was used as a British School. It appears that between the departure of the Methodists on the erection of their Chapel in Trinity Lane in 1794 (as described in Chapter V.), and the commencement of Mr. Wilcoxon's work, the room was used by Baptists, their pastor being Mr. Aston. There is another Chapel in the Lane, which was erected in 1820, and used first by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists who migrated to St. John Street, and later on by the Primitive Methodists who removed recently to the City Temple, Hunter Street. <sup>1</sup>

At the Conference of 1776, **John Mason** and **Robert Roberts** were appointed to the circuit. They

---

1. These particulars have been gathered from many sources, including *Walker's MS.*; *History of Chester*, 1815, by Dr. Pigot, illustrated by Cuiitt; *Trevor's Panorama*, 1843; *Robert's Chester Guide*; *Rise of Nonconformity in Chester*, Mr. J. G. Hope, 1889; and the books already mentioned. It should be stated that some think that Rev. H. D. Roberts minimises the doctrinal secession from Matthew Henry's Chapel

had been close friends for many years. Contrary to modern usage the "Assistant" was the younger man; indeed, years before, he had received a note on trial at the hands of the man who was now his "junior" colleague. John Mason was a pious and useful man, well read in philosophy and science, especially botany, of which his knowledge was remarkably extensive. <sup>1</sup>

Robert Roberts was very closely associated with Chester and its neighbourhood during a great part of his life. He was born in 1731 at Upton, near Chester, of farming parents. At the age of sixteen, upon the death of his father, he was apprenticed to a Chester wheel-wright. Young Roberts attended the services of the Established Church, but bears testimony that

the first good impression, as far as I can recollect, that was made upon my mind, was by a few words dropped by Mr. Thomas Brisco, without any seeming design of his; but God sent them home to my heart, and they were as a nail fixed in a sure place. We had been schoolfellows when very young; and when I went to live in Chester, we were intimate companions till he became religious. But then I avoided him, as though he had had the plague, because he was called a Methodist. Nevertheless, I retained a secret respect for him. About two years after his conversion, being in company with him and his brother, he happened to mention some rude usage they had met with that day as they returned from the Church; among other things the people cried out, "There go the sanctified Methodists!" He pitied their ignorance, and with a good deal of fervour wished what they had said were true; adding, "If I was sanctified, I should not be long out of heaven." . . . . When I was about twenty-one years of age, Mr. Brisco invited me to hear Mr. John Hampson.

As a result of such good influences as these Roberts was received into the Society, and before long appointed to lead a class. After some time he began to give a word of exhortation ; first in Chester, then in North Wales, Cheshire, and Lancashire. For two years he lived at Neston and carried on his trade there.

But I had my trials ; for the people agreed not to employ me, because I was a Methodist preacher. I was brought before the justices, at one of their monthly meetings ; but this did not afford my persecutors cause for triumph ; for I had words given to me which confounded them all. <sup>1</sup>

This devoted man made many attempts to get a preaching place in Neston, but without success. After trying other methods in vain, he leased some land there, and being threatened with the press-gang procured a license. Being then threatened with punishment for preaching in an unlicensed place he got the house licensed. Even then his opponents were not foiled, for with threats and promises the man who lived in the house was persuaded to prevent the preaching. Another house was procured at an extravagant rent nearly two miles from the town, and there much blessing was received. At this point the story of Robert Roberts fits in with what has been elsewhere recorded about the preaching place at Leighton. Happily persecution lulled after a while, and Roberts was prospering in business when the divine call to the "full work" reached him. The Conference of 1759 sent him to the Wiltshire Circuit ; his family was supported by a little property of which he was

possessed. It was with a good record behind him and an intimate acquaintance with the Methodism of the locality that Mr. Roberts came to take up his post in the Chester Circuit.

### 1777: John Murlin; Robert Roberts.

John Murlin was a man of renown in early Methodism. He was a native of Cornwall, but his labours had taken him all over the country; he was not an entire stranger to the Chester Methodists, for he had spent a few days with them in July, 1757. His experiences in the Circuit are expressed in the following words:—

After our Conference ended, we set off for the Chester Circuit, where we arrived safe on Monday, August the 18th. This is a trying Circuit to flesh and blood; our journies are very long, and in many places the congregations very small; yet it pleased GOD to bless our labours and increase our number.

Friday, January 16th, 1778, I came to Whitchurch; but my cough and hoarseness were such, that it was with difficulty I could speak so as to be understood. I desired Mr. Brown to supply my place a few days, while I rested at Mr. Sim's at Alperham. But as I was not willing to be idle, I wrote two hymns, one for the morning, and another for the evening. Since that time I have written about sixty more. I find this to be both a pleasing and a profitable exercise: it keeps the mind quite engaged on the subject, and lifted up to GOD in prayer for assistance. (M).

He subsequently published a volume entitled: *Sacred Hymns on Various Subjects, Leeds, 1781.*

He was a very emotional preacher and was widely known as "The Weeping Prophet."

There is not much to record about the visits of Wesley to Chester during this period. It is probable,

but not certain, that he visited Chester in 1775; for he states that on his way to Ireland he preached at many places between Northwich and Liverpool.

In 1776, after a remarkably encouraging visit to Manchester, Wesley writes:—

Tuesday, April 9th, I came to Chester and had the satisfaction to find an earnest, loving, well-established people.

The next year he writes:—

Thursday, April 17th, 1777 [starting from Bolton], I called upon Mr. Barker at Little Leigh, just tottering over the great gulph. Being straightened for time, I rode from thence to Chester. I had not, for some years, rode so far on horseback, but it did me no hurt. After preaching, I took chaise, and came to Middlewich, a little before the Liverpool coach, in which I went to London.

In the autumn of 1777 disputes amongst the Methodists of Dublin caused Wesley to pay them an unexpected visit. After being exposed to more than usual perils on the sea, Wesley passed through Chester on his return journey.

Monday, October 13th, 1777, wanting to be in London as soon as possible, I took chaise at seven [from Holyhead], and hastened to Bangor ferry; but here we were at a full stop; they could not, or would not, carry us over till one the next day; and they then gave us only two miserable horses, although I had paid before hand (fool as I was) for four. At Conway ferry we were stopped again; so that with all the speed we could possibly make, even with a chaise and four, we travelled eight and twenty miles yesterday, and seventeen to-day. Thursday, in the afternoon, we reached Chester: Friday morning, Litchfield: and on Saturday morning, London.

In March 1778, Wesley had arranged to pay his usual spring visit to Chester, on his way to Ireland *via*

Parkgate ; he was diverted therefrom by a letter from Mr. Wagner informing him that a "pacquet" was ready to sail from Liverpool. He sent his horses forward from Manchester and followed them himself in the morning. But before he arrived at his destination, the wind, as he tells us, turned West ; "so I was content." Let us hope that the Methodists of Chester were possessed of like equanimity !

The following letter further explains Wesley's movements.

London, Feb. 14th, 1778.

To Mr. Samuel Bardsley, at the Preaching House, in Liverpool.

Dear Sammy,

So your mother is at rest ! We shall go to her ; though she will not return to us. I am glad you are so agreeably situated, and that you already see some fruit of your labour. About the 27th of March I expect to be at Chester. If a ship be ready at Parkgate, I purpose to embark directly : if not, I shall pay you a visit at Liverpool. I fix upon nothing : let the LORD do as seemeth Him good.

I am, Dear Sammy,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

### 1778 : James Barry ; Robert Costerdine.

On Wednesday, April 7th, 1779, Wesley preached at Chester and Alpraham in the course of an extensive journey throughout the Kingdom.

About this period that wonderful Methodist saint, Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, evidently spent a little time among the Methodists of Chester, for in letters to her cousin at this date she refers to Miss Salmon's kindness to her at Chester ; and "her love for Miss Bennet, and all that family."



**1779: James Barry; William Horner.**

In illustration of the varied experiences of the early Methodist preachers, it may be mentioned that Horner was an Irish Presbyterian by birth; he was however a stranger to converting grace until led to CHRIST by an itinerant preacher named John Smith. John Smith was the first Wesleyan minister of that name, and may be distinguished from all others by two facts both remarkable in their own way: before his conversion he was the most eminent pugilist and cock-fighter in Newry; in the course of his ministry he was privileged to lead to the Saviour no less than twenty young men who subsequently became travelling preachers. Mr. Horner was noted for the regularity with which he filled his appointments; a favourite saying of his was, "When a preacher neglects his appointment, the devil generally supplies his place, and collects a larger congregation than usual to participate in the disappointment and the offence." He was known as a handy man about a house and an excellent gardener.

At the end of March, 1780, Wesley says:—

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I spent at Liverpool, being undetermined whether to proceed or not. At length I yielded to the advice of my friends, and deferred my journey to Ireland; so I preached at Northwich about noon: and in the evening at Alpraham, in the midst of the old Methodists. We had a very different congregation at Nantwich in the evening: but as many as could get into the house or near the door behaved very seriously.

Saturday, April 1st, I returned to Chester, and found many alive to GOD, but scarcely one that retained his pure love.

Sunday 2nd, I reached Warrington about ten : the chapel was well filled with serious hearers; and I believe God confirmed the word of His grace. Hastening back to Chester I found a numerous congregation waiting, and immediately began, *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

In the absence of information it seems impossible to define with precision the state of spiritual experience referred to above.

At this time Wesley published a controversial writing which must have cost him a great deal of labour. It is entitled: *A letter to the Printer of the Public Advertiser, occasioned by the late Act passed in favour of Popery. To which is added, A defence of it, in Two Letters to the Editors of the Freeman's Journal, Dublin. Chester, March 31st, 1780.*

#### **1780 : William Boothby ; Jonathan Hern.**

The former had been an itinerant only four years, and the appointment shows the esteem in which Wesley held him. The work of these brethren was successful.

On Thursday, April 5th, 1781, Wesley says :—

I went to Chester. The house was well filled with deeply attentive hearers. I perceived God had exceedingly blessed the labours of the preachers. The congregations were much larger than they used to be. The Society was increased; and they were not only agreed among themselves, but in peace with all around them.

Friday 6th, I went to Alpraham, and preached the funeral sermon of good old sister Cawley. She has been indeed a mother in Israel; a pattern of all good works.

This was Jane, the wife of Richard Cawley. She passed away on March 30th, at the age of 71 (see

Chap. I.) There can have been few of the old 1749 Methodists remaining at this time.

In the course of a few days Wesley was back again in Chester; for violent weather drove back, into Holyhead, the ship in which he was endeavouring to cross to Ireland, and he was then convinced that it was not the will of GOD that he should undertake an Irish journey at that time.

**1781 : Jonathan Hern ; William Simpson ; William Boothby, Supernumerary.**

In the second and third editions of Wesley's works appears a letter to Miss Loxdale, dated Chester, December 15th, 1781. What can be made of this? Is it probable that Wesley paid a flying visit to Chester in the depth of winter? The Journal shews that he returned to London from Chatham on December 13th. There is nothing recorded to shew how December 13th—21st was spent, but there is no hint of any departure from London. There is evidently some mistake which cannot be corrected without further information.

**1782 : John Fenwick ; John Goodwin ; John Oliver.**

It seems that 1782 was exceptional inasmuch as there is no Wesley visit to record. When again the spring came round and with it the accustomed journey to Ireland, Chester Methodists had once more the privilege of hearing the man they regarded as their religious leader. It is probable that he visited them on his outward journey for he says:—

Tuesday, April 1st, 1783 [From Hinckley], I went through several of the Societies, till I reached Holyhead.

He certainly visited them on his return for he tells us that he met the friends at Chester on May 9th.

One of the hearers of Wesley at the Octagon Chapel about this time speaks of a sermon upon Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. The hearer referred to was Mary, afterwards the wife of Joseph Janion (the historian of Chester Methodism), and mother of the Rev. Charles Janion. Her maiden name was Wharton, and she was born at Stapleford in 1762. Her mother was for many years a worthy Methodist. One of her brothers, who died about 1830, was for upwards of fifty years a leader and local preacher in the Chester Circuit. He was converted in 1784. Mrs. Janion died in 1841.

**1783 : Duncan Wright ; John Goodwin ; George Gibbon.**

The former was a faithful Highlander, who had a military record behind him. (E. M. P. II.)

The visit of Wesley in 1784 is remarkable for the strain of discouragement in which he writes on account of the discontinuance of the early morning service. Though Wesley himself could usually secure a large body of hearers at any hour, it would seem that the attempt to maintain these five o'clock services was breaking down throughout the country. It is grievous to find the good man in such unwonted despondency ; there can be no doubt that there was more evidence of God's grace at this time in Chester than he had ever been privileged to see in Savannah or Georgia. The following is the passage in the Journal :—

Monday, April 5th, 1784. About noon I preached at Alraham, to an unusually large congregation. I was surprised when I came to Chester, to find, that there also,

morning preaching was quite left off, for this worthy reason, "Because the people will not come, or at least, not in the winter." If so, "the Methodists are a fallen people." Here is proof. They have *lost their first love*; and they never will or can recover it till they *do the first works*. As soon as I set foot in Georgia, I began preaching at five in the morning. And every communicant, that is, every serious person in the town, constantly attended throughout the year; I mean, came every morning, winter and summer, unless in case of sickness. They did so till I left the province. In the year 1738, when God began his great work in England, I began preaching at the same hour, winter and summer, and never wanted a congregation. If they will not attend now, they have lost their zeal, and then it cannot be denied, "they are a fallen people." And in the meantime we are labouring to secure the preaching-houses to the next generation: in the name of God, let us, if possible, secure the present generation from drawing back to perdition! Let all the preachers, that are still alive to God, join together as one man, fast and pray, lift up their voice as a trumpet, be instant, in season, out of season, to convince them that they are fallen, and exhort them, instantly to repent, and *do the first works*. This in particular, rising in the morning, without which neither their souls nor bodies can long remain in health.

It is of interest to note the contrast between this reference to Chester and the next paragraph in the Journal describing the state of the work in Liverpool. "Here I found a people much alive to God: one cause of which was, they have preaching several mornings in a week, and prayer-meetings on the rest; all of which they are careful to attend."

The great-grandson of Geo. Lowe (the first) relates the following story, which also shews the tenacity with which Wesley clung to the original practices of Methodism. On one of his later visits, he was

standing by the table in the vestry of the Octagon Chapel, in the presence of several of the leading men, and said, "I hear the Bands are given up; if that is so, I will not come to Chester again." George Lowe, junr., replied, "I and brother — still meet in band." "Then," said Wesley, "I will come."

**1784: Duncan Wright; Thomas Corbett; Edward Jackson.**

In the spring of 1785, Wesley, disappointed of a boat at Liverpool, hurried to Parkgate, was disappointed there again, and hurried on to Holyhead through Chester, apparently without stopping to preach there. The "care of all the Churches" rested upon Wesley wherever he was, and the vicissitudes of travel were never permitted to interrupt his reading or correspondence. In the course of this hurried journey he addressed a letter from Conway to Roger Crane, of the Fylde. In it he says: "I have sent to Derbyshire, and hope Nathaniel Ward will speedily remove to Chester to assist Mr. Wright." <sup>1</sup>

It cannot be said what circumstances rendered desirable Mr. Ward's removal from the Circuit to which the Conference of 1784 had appointed him; or whether he actually came to Chester. At the next Conference he left the work.

On his return from Ireland Wesley records:—

Wednesday, July 13th, 1785, we reached Chester. After preaching there between five and six in the evening, I stepped into the stage coach, which was just setting out, and travelling day and night, was brought safe to London on Friday, in the afternoon.

---

1. This letter is printed by Mr. B. Moore in his *Methodism in East Lancs., etc.*

**1785: John Fletcher; Richard Rodda; Melville Horne;  
James Wray.**

The first name is that of the saintly and illustrious Vicar of Madeley, who had long been a close friend and valued yoke-fellow of John Wesley. This is not the place to speak of his apostolic labours, or of his masterly polemics; they are part of the heritage of the Christian Church, and will never be forgotten. The immediate duty is to explain the appearance of his name upon the plan of the Chester Circuit at this time. John Fletcher's name had appeared in the *Minutes* for 1781, but was then put down for London, after John and Charles Wesley. After the Conference debates of 1784 and 1785 it was the wish of this saintly man to be included again, formally and expressly, among the Methodist preachers; a wish for the gratification of which precedents could be found. Madeley was then regarded as belonging to the Chester Circuit, there being at that time no Shrewsbury or Salop Circuit, no Stafford or Staffordshire Circuit, no Madeley or Wellington Circuit; and John Fletcher was, therefore, put down for Chester. (N.)

The sequel was very touching. The Conference of 1785 closed on Wednesday, August 3rd. Eleven days afterwards Mr. Fletcher, who had been in feeble health for some time, but unremitting in labour, passed away.

Melville Horne had been received on trial at the preceding Conference. When he had been an itinerant for three years he obtained episcopal ordination and became Curate of Madeley. His name, however, is found on the *Minutes* as Supernumerary at Wolverhampton as late as 1788. He published in 1791 a

collection of Fletcher's letters. He went out as a Missionary to Western Africa, and, on his return to England, won considerable distinction. He did not retain any formal connection with Methodism in the latter part of his life.

It was quite in accordance with the views of Wesley that one steeped in evangelical sentiment and trained for the practical work of a preacher should take the oversight of a parish. He was no enemy of the parish system as such; and several entries in his diary shew the high regard he had for this particular parish clergyman.

The following beautiful and modest letter evidently written by Melville Horne was published in the Magazine for 1791 :—

Chester, July 14th, 1783.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

Mr. F. tells me, he means to recommend me to the Conference, as a proper person, to take a Circuit next year; which, although I feel as a great honour; yet for many reasons I must hope for the *present*, may prove ineffectual. After the conversation I had with yourself on this subject, when you were here; I would not now trespass further upon your valuable time; but as such a step may possibly give a turn to my everlasting interests, I think it my duty to write to you upon this occasion, and I trust you will forgive this call upon your pastoral character.

The main objection that occurs to me, is, that I am not yet sufficiently anointed for such a mission. It has ever been my misfortune, to have my gifts and grace over-rated by my friends, which, through the sad effects of self-love, has often well nigh destroyed my soul. My walk is such, that I do not always abide in CHRIST. How unfit then am I to exhort others to abide in Him? How does this deprive a man of that dignity, and humble confidence, that is the strength of a



messenger of the great and holy God? Can a limb out of joint derive nourishment from the nobler parts? A branch severed from its root, have vital sap, bud, blossom, and bear fruit? Yet through grace I am preserved from gross abomination; but I lamentably feel that this is not enough, when I stand up between the living and the dead. Add to this I feel a dreadful and shameful ignorance of the letter of God's word, without the greatest knowledge of which, I am convinced, I labour in vain.

I believe it my duty also to cultivate my little talents to the utmost, in the acquisition of such accessory learning, as may enable me, not barely to affirm each sacred truth, but scripturally and rationally to explain more clearly to the understanding, and press them more forcibly upon the consciences of my hearers; at the same time to vindicate them from unreasonable objections and false glosses of men, that gain-sayers may be convinced or silenced, and the weak and pious strengthened and established. And I conceive I cannot have a more convenient time for such improvement, than the time of my youth, and before I have fully launched out into the main ocean of life. Indeed there are many truths, of which I have not the least doubt, yet dare not speak of them, being convinced how very weakly I can explain, support or defend them. I am also willing to make my coming out a matter of calmest deliberation, strongest conviction and most serious prayer; knowing that nothing less can support me under the various and trying exercises I shall meet with; and conciliate the approbation of the best of parents.

I can appeal to God that I know of no other motives that influence me. Mr. F. has put the supposition to me, that I might be desired to take a Circuit, and asked, in such a case, "What would you do?" I answered, "Endeavour to lay myself in the LORD's hands, seek His will, and *then* act agreeably to the sacred rights of conscience." May God, even the FATHER of JESUS CHRIST, bless you with a fulness of all spiritual blessings in his SON; and I pray you believe me with truest respect, gratitude and love, Rev. and very dear Sir,

Your ever affectionate and obliged Child and Servant,

M. H.

Richard Rodda was a Cornishman, converted to GOD in early life under the influence of the Methodist preachers who visited his father's home. A full account of the signal deliverances of his youth, the toils and perils of his itinerant life, and the triumphant close of his earthly course, may be found in *E.M.P., Vol. II.*

Concerning James Wray, his brethren recorded in 1793:—

A faithful labourer in the LORD'S vineyard. For several years he travelled in England with success. His zealous spirit then led him across the Atlantic Ocean to Nova Scotia, where he was rendered useful in his Master's cause: and, lastly, he closed his steady race in the Island of St. Vincent, resigning his soul into the hands of his faithful Creator, with all that resignation, peace, and holy joy, which might be expected from a Father in CHRIST.

It is much to be regretted that no particulars have been gathered with respect to the parentage, early history, and conversion of John Gaulter, who entered the ministry from Chester in 1785. The Conference obituary, written after his death in 1839, at the age of 74, declared that he was converted "amidst providential visitations of an alarming character which fell upon some of his gay companions." He was an able and successful minister, and was elected President at Sheffield in 1817.

**1786 : Richard Rodda ; Thomas Brisco ; John Beaumont.**

In several of the older local histories it is stated that John Wesley preached in the Octagon Chapel on April 10th and 11th, 1786. What authority there is for the statement does not appear. No doubt the histories

copy from one another, but it is probable that the first author to make the assertion had good ground for it, though the *Journal* does not mention such a visit. Wesley was in the vicinity for some time at this date, and nothing is more probable than that he paid his annual visit of encouragement and inspection to his people in Chester. He was certainly in the City in the spring of 1787.

Wednesday, April 4th, I went to Chester, and preached in the evening on Heb. iii., 12 [Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.] Finding there was no packet at Parkgate, I immediately took places in the mail coach for Holyhead. The porter called us at two in the morning on Thursday, but came again in half an hour to inform us the coach was full: so they returned my money, and at four I took a post chaise. We overtook the coach at Conway, and crossing the ferry with the passengers, went forward without delay.

On his return journey Wesley landed at Parkgate, after deliverance from what had threatened to be a terrible shipwreck.

Wednesday, July 11th, 1787. About three in the afternoon we came safe to Parkgate; and in the evening went on to Chester.

Friday 13th, I spent a quiet day, and in the evening enforced, to a crowded audience, the parable of the sower. I know not that ever I had so large a congregation.

It is of this journey that Hester Ann Rogers writes in her diary:—

In August, 1787, we came over from Dublin to see my mother at Macclesfield. Mr. Wesley and several preachers with families also coming at the same time to England, we took the whole ship. In this passage we were in imminent

danger, by dashing on a rock, called the West-Mouse. But prayer was made; the LORD heard, and wonderfully delivered. We landed at Parkgate, and travelled with Mr. Wesley to Macclesfield. <sup>1</sup>

**1787: Andrew Blair; William Eels; J. Ridall.**

Eels was one of those who expressed their dissatisfaction with Wesley's Deed of Declaration; he speedily withdrew from the work.

In 1784, Blair's station was Cork; in 1785, Birmingham. An interesting reminiscence of work accomplished on the journey from one Circuit to another is contained in the following extract from a letter written from Chester in 1785 by D. Illingworth to Mr. A. Edmondson at Mr. Wetherill's, Churwell, near Leeds:—

. . . The last time I saw you I did not know of coming to Chester. I have had my health very well since I came thro Mercy & I am agreeably situated especially for the means of grace, there are several precious & lively people in Chester, of which you will hear more when I see you. Mr. Blair has been in Chester nearly a fortnight, he is very well received & we think he is such a preacher as has scarce ever been in Chester Octagon before, I am sure if they have any life almost he will find it. Mr. Wesley called at Chester in his road to the Conference. . . .

Very probably the good impression made was reported to Wesley, and brought about Blair's appointment to Chester. A schedule of the Circuit in the handwriting of Andrew Blair is still extant. The MS.

---

x. In the Bookroom edition of *The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers*, from which this extract is taken, 1789 is wrongly given as the date of the perilous journey.

Chester Circuit June						1880	A/B	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm
Chester No.	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm	Wm
G. Walker's chp	2		3	1	25	Chester	17	9	13	4	152	413	0	11	6
J. Sellers	2	2	3	1	24	Kennelton				1	13				6.0
J. Walker			1		14	Southop		2	1		6				
W. Ellis		1			11	Saughal	3				13	66			
J. Parry	1	1	1		14	Stanton	3		1		17	9.0			5.6
M. Briscoe	2	2			16	Haswell	20				20				
M <sup>r</sup> Blair	7		1		15	Calby		2	2		13				
W <sup>m</sup> Hunter					12	Melk	7				14				
H. Ashmole	3	1	1		17	Quincey	1				7				
R. H. Heath		2	3	2	4	Stonew	1	1	1		11				5.0
W <sup>m</sup> 50	17	9	13	2	152	Bebington	3	2			13				
						Dunham				1	15				6.0
						Newport	4				9				
						Wellington	4				16				4.0
						Bradton			1		11	9.8			4.6
						Alpsham	2			1	10	7.10			12.0
						Stollon	2			1	10	4.2			5.0
						Ducan	1	1			19				3.0
						Waxton			3		22	88			1.0
						Hesley	1	1			16	1.0			7.0
						Tipton	10	2			20	7.0			11.6
						Painposton	1				13	3.6			5.0
						Duchinlan	4		2		11	6.2			17.10
						Broomington			7		19	10.0			
						Whitechurch	0				21	10.0			7.0
						Godgreen	1				22	3.0			2.0
						Woo-ntun	2				20	12.0			10.0
						Wooland	1				13	6.0			11.0
						Wantrich	3		1		16	0.8			0.0
						Chumpton			5		0				13.6
							189	20	15	7	60.5				20.0

SCHEDULE OF THE CHESTER CIRCUIT, 1788.



makes it apparent that he was an adept in penmanship; while a marginal note suggests that he was somewhat racy in style.

Amongst the preachers received on trial at the Conference of 1787 was a goodly youth from the neighbourhood of Chester, who was destined to sit at the head of the Conference, and to live to be one of the last survivors of the men brought into the work by Wesley himself. This was Richard Reece, the son of Mr. John Reece of Brereton Park, <sup>1</sup> near Tarporley, whose name is found upon a later page as one of the Octagon Trustees appointed in 1806. Mr. John Reece married Miss Catharine Hodson, of Christleton, whose father was "a man of singular probity, industry, and honour." Their first born son, Richard, was born December 1st, 1765. The family was deemed to be Welsh in its origin; indeed Dr. Gregory assigned them to the princely family of Rhys. But the ingenious Doctor's fancy sometimes ran away with him. John Reece joined the Society in 1773, the non-inclusion of his name in the list for 1790, elsewhere given, being probably due to an oversight. His earliest religious helpers and friends were such men as Guildford, Brisco, Mason, Roberts, Murlin, and Swindells. The last ten years of his life were spent in Chester, where he died in 1831, being then nearly 88 years of age. He is buried in St. John's Churchyard, where also lies his wife who died in 1836 at the age of 93.

Richard Reece seems to have been at the school of Mr. Hobrow, a Chester Methodist, who took him to the

---

1. On the gable end of a farm at Brereton Park, occupied by Mrs. W. Dutton, there is a stone inscribed R.R., I.M., 1717. This was, it appears, the ancestral home of the Reeces.

Octagon. The good influences brought to bear upon the lad were consummated by the preachers who visited Tarvin, and preached in the large kitchen at Brereton. Duncan Wright was a great help to young Richard Reece when he was first turning to God, and induced him to lead a class within a few miles of his father's house.

In 1787, Richard Reece chose his vocation, and went over to Manchester to consult Wesley, with the result already mentioned. In 1796 he married Hannah, the only daughter of Mr. William Marsden of Manchester, thus becoming the brother-in-law of the Rev. George Marsden, who was President in 1821 and 1831. His only son was Richard Marsden Reece, for many years a prominent London Methodist lawyer. In 1821 his only surviving daughter married a Mr. Umlin at the old Parish Church at Leeds. She became the mother of Mr. R. Denny Umlin, of the Middle Temple, who has recently published an interesting little volume, *Father Reece, the old Methodist Minister* (Elliot Stock, 1901.) Many of these particulars are derived from this book, supplemented by scattered references in the Magazine. Mr. Umlin speaks of a number of biographical scraps left by Mr. Reece, and says that it appears that he paid an annual visit to his native neighbourhood. In 1815 he preached anniversary sermons at Chester.

Richard Reece was President in 1816 and 1835. He died in 1850, having travelled 59 years without interruption. A most interesting sketch of his life and character is contained in *Sketches of Wesleyan Preachers, New York, 1848, by Robert A. West*, who



speaks of him as being "like the ancient patriarchs," and "a lovely blending of beauty, authority and courtesy." One brother of Richard Reece, Joseph, lived a long and honoured life at Tarporley, where his labours as a medical man were recognised on his retirement by a handsome testimonial from the inhabitants of a wide district. Another brother, John, passed away at Whitchurch in 1855, after fifty years of service as a local preacher.

## CHAPTER V.

---

### The later visits of John Wesley. The formation of the Methodist New Connexion. 1788—1797.

---

TO the Methodists of the period this history has now reached John Wesley must have appeared as an institution, much in the same way as Queen Victoria, in later days, came to be regarded as one of the permanent forces of the universe. None the less the shadow of the end was over the visits now to be chronicled.

Wesley was greatly affected by the death of his brother Charles, the poet of Methodism, which took place on March 9th, 1788. The work of Charles Wesley as an itinerant was at no time so extensive as that of his brother; and for the latter part of his life he was practically stationary. It does not appear that he ever had any direct contact with the Methodists of Chester, except at a possible visit in 1747. (See John Bennet's letter in Chapter ii.)

The death of his brother did not check the journeyings of the veteran evangelist, and he was soon in Chester again.

Monday, April 14th, 1788, I preached at noon at Northwich to such a congregation as scarcely was ever seen there before; and had a good hope, that after all the storms, good will be done here also. In the evening I preached to the affectionate congregation at Chester, who want nothing but more life and fire.

Tuesday, 15th, I was desired to preach upon the Trinity: the Chapel was sufficiently crowded: and surely God answered for Himself to all candid hearers.

### **1788: Robert Roberts; George Lowe; Thomas Brisco.**

There were 600 members in the Circuit. George Lowe received altogether three appointments to Chester, viz. :—1788, 1791, 1802. His life was a very long one, extending from the reign of George II. into the second year of Queen Victoria (1750—1839). When, in his ninetieth year, he was residing as a Supernumerary in the town of Congleton, his recollections were detailed to the ministers assembling for the District meeting and were put into book form by Alexander Strachan.

Mr. Lowe was born at Levenshulme, whence his father removed to the neighbourhood of Macclesfield. It was from the preachers appointed to the Circuit that Geo. Lowe received the impressions which resulted in his conversion; Samuel Bardsley, then a local preacher, was the direct agent therein. He did not enter the work of the ministry until he had reached maturity; on receiving his first appointment in 1788 he was 38 years of age, a widower with two children. The following quotation from the "*Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*," by Alexander Strachan, bears upon his work in Chester during his first appointment, which only lasted for one year as the Chester people were

under obligation to take a married preacher at the end of the year :—

On arriving in Chester he found himself in somewhat difficult circumstances ; but he entered upon his public duty “determined not to know anything among men, save JESUS CHRIST and him crucified.” On the morning of the first LORD’S day he preached from—“Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” On commencing his sermon, he observed the preceptors of two classical academies, with their pupils, seated before the pulpit. The appearance of so much intelligence and learning almost deprived him of the power of utterance. In a short time, however, he recovered his self-possession ; and poured forth upon his hearers such a stream of evangelical sentiment, and with such rapidity and fervour, that they were both surprised and affected.

He entered the pulpit in the evening painfully apprehensive lest he should not be able to reach the same elevation of feeling, nor enjoy the same liberty of speech nor succeed in producing the same visible effects upon the people as in the morning ; but it seemed to himself, and to those who heard him, as if the LORD had said—“From this day I will bless thee.” He selected John iii., 36, as the subject of his discourse : “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of GOD abideth on him.” While he explained the nature of faith and unbelief and described their effects upon the experience and destiny of man a sacred influence pervaded the congregation and many were constrained to exclaim “what must we do to be saved.” Mr. Lowe’s attention was particularly directed to a young man, whose convictions were so deep, and his distress of mind so great, that he appeared for some time, to be in convulsions. The friends cried to GOD in his behalf ; and he soon found “peace in believing.” This young man was subsequently called to the ministry ; and, after a brief career of fidelity and usefulness, “died in the LORD.”

The labours and successes of this first sabbath gave a fresh impulse to the faith and zeal of the preacher. He renewed his covenant with God, and again consecrated his time and talents to the service of the Church. He carefully considered the number and relative importance of the various duties devolving upon him, on the one hand, and the expectations and claims of God's people on the other, and resolved to be conscientious and punctual in everything. The salvation of men, the primary object of the Christian ministry filled his mind and absorbed all the physical and intellectual capabilities of the man. He continued his practice of early rising and prosecuted his morning studies with such method and judgment, that his "profiting" was as obvious to others, as it was beneficial to himself.

It was under Mr. Lowe's ministry in this year that Mrs. Warren (whose life is referred to at length on another page of this history) was converted and added to the Society.

On his way to Ireland in 1789, Wesley went direct from Shrewsbury to Conway without passing through Chester. On his return he left Dublin in the *Princess Royal*, of Parkgate [Captain Brown], "the neatest and most elegant packet I ever saw."

Tuesday, July 14th, 1789. We landed between four and five in the morning, and after resting an hour I went to Chester. I lodged at T. Brisco's, a lovely family indeed, just such another as Miss B's. at Keynsham. The children indeed are not quite so genteel, but fully as much awakened; and I think the most loving I ever saw. The House was thoroughly filled in the evening (it being fair-time), as well the following morning.

Thursday, 16th. When I took my leave of the family, they came all in tears. It is long since I saw the like. About noon I preached to a large and much affected congregation at

Northwich. A flame is lately broken out here, such as was never seen here before. In the evening I preached at Manchester.

Thomas Brisco was a Chester man, whose name has already been mentioned in these pages, first as a pious lad influencing Robert Roberts for good, and then as a stationed preacher. He was one of the fruits of Methodist preaching; and served the Connexion for about thirty years. At the time now referred to he was a Supernumerary. He died in 1797. He was a man of many afflictions, being subject to extreme nervous debility, so that for many years he could not take a Circuit. His disorder was occasioned by lying in a damp bed, and by poor accommodations in the country parts of Ireland (*Atmore, p. 67.*) In Wesley's will the name of Thomas Brisco appears as one of four persons between whom was to be equally divided "whatever money remains in my bureau and pockets at my decease."

The wife and daughters of T. Brisco established a ladies' boarding school in Chester, which existed in the early part of the nineteenth century. The children who so pleased Wesley did not remain in connection with Methodism after the death of their parents. The sisters in time separated; one conducting her school in Abbey Green, and the other in Stanley Place.

It was in the quiet happy home at Chester that Wesley wrote the following instructive letter to a notable American Methodist: the Rev. Freeborn Garretson, of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.

Chester, July 15th, 1789.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

You are entirely in the right. There can be no manner of doubt, that it was the enemy of souls that hindered your sending me your experience. Many parts both of your inward and outward experience ought by no means to be suppressed. But if you are minded to send anything to me, you have no time to lose. Whatever you do for me, you must do quickly; lest death have quicker wings than love. A great man observes that there is a three-fold leading of the Spirit. Some He leads by giving them, on every occasion, apposite texts of Scripture; some by suggesting reasons for every step they take, the way by which he chiefly leads me; and some by impressions: But he judges the last to be the least desirable way; as it is often impossible to distinguish dark impressions from divine, or even diabolical. I hope you will not long to delay write more particularly to

Your affectionate friend and brother,

JOHN WESLEY. <sup>1</sup>

On this occasion doubtless was written also the letter to Mr. Henry Eames wrongly dated in *Works XII. 441*, as July 5th, 1789.

**1789: Parson Greenwood; Francis Truscott; John Denton, a Probationer.**

Some account must now be given of the references made in the *Minutes* of this period to Methodist work in the Wirral, the peninsula lying between the Mersey and the Dee. In the *Minutes* for 1788 John Hickling is appointed to Wirral. In 1789 the numbers in Chester and Wirral are given as 599.

In Andrew Blair's schedule for 1788, and in the membership lists for 1790, the names of several places

---

1. *Works*, edn. 1830, *XIII.*, 57

in the district are mentioned. The sudden appearance, followed by the equally sudden disappearance, of Wirral in the *Minutes*, and of many of these places in the local registers, is explained in the following account contributed to the *Magazine* (1797), by Miles Martindale, who was born in 1756 near St. Helens, Lancashire. In 1776 he was converted and came to live in Liverpool. A few years later he began to preach, while still in business. He says:—

In the year 1786, I went over into the hundred of Wirral, in the County of Chester; and preached at a place called Storeton, and repeated my visits until a Society was formed. Wirral contains upwards of 60 villages, with one small market town. There are neither Dissenters, Baptists, nor Quakers; and I think very few Catholics, through the whole country. The inhabitants pass for Church-folk; and they know some trifle more of the Bible than of the Alcoran; but I must confess they are the most ignorant people I ever laboured among. They chiefly consist of farmers and labourers; with as many mechanics, as these two descriptions of people stand in need of. Avarice, and drunkenness, are the two demons that undisturbed maintain their sway over this people. I found a great desire to spread the Gospel among them, but this seemed impracticable while I remained in Liverpool. And as I had no money I did not see any probability of maintaining myself and family there. However at length I ventured over, being firmly persuaded my call was from God, and consequently he would provide. The event only can justify such a step. I remained there eight months, following my business and preaching at all opportunities; when Mr. Samuel Hammond paid a visit to Park-Gate. On riding through the country; and beholding their deplorable state, he entered into a resolution with himself to contribute some money towards the support of a Missionary in that place. I neither saw him, nor heard anything of him, till after his return to Birmingham. On his way through Chester, he communicated his design to



Mr. John Sellers, of that city, whom he deputed to procure a person for that purpose. At that time Mr. Sellers and I had no intimacy, but some of my friends making mention of me to him, I was afterwards made choice of for the Missionary. I laboured in Wirral for the space of three years, preaching in a great number of places; sometimes abroad, in barns, or in houses, as Providence pointed out the way. Sunday Schools were also established among them; and many of the children made considerable progress in both reading and writing. In the first fifteen months there were joined in the several respective Societies about one hundred and fifty persons . . . and all things seemed to promise a copious harvest. Those who knew the place, and who read this account, will, perhaps, be ready to inquire into the reasons of the visible alteration which afterwards happened. As no one had so deep a share in the business as myself, so no one can be so competent a judge of the whole affair as I am. I shall therefore simply state my thoughts concerning it. The labour swelling upon my hands, it was deemed expedient for me to have an assistant. The person called to this work, was without my knowledge; the choice was too precipitate as the event fully proved. He never understood the office of a minister of JESUS CHRIST. He loved to hear news, to retail scandal, sow discord, to tell lies, and in short, proved one of the most mischievous creatures on earth. . . . Some few persons are still standing, some are gone to glory, and some are removed to Liverpool and other places, who I trust will continue to pursue the one thing needful; but the far greater part are fallen away. I am fully persuaded that the mission should have been kept up for seven years; changing the person if need had been, every two or three years. . . . I am inclined to think, with submission to my Brethren the Conference, that if they were inclined to expend a small sum there for a few years, it might answer a most valuable purpose. The local situation of Wirral, requires a resident among them, in order to do them any lasting good. And I earnestly recommend it to the lovers of souls, who have

this world's goods, to take it into consideration. But I would observe this falling away did not happen during my residence among them. In the year 1789 I was appointed by the Conference to labour in the Leicester Circuit.

And so Miles Martindale passed into the itinerant ministry in which he won for himself a good degree. The name of the unsatisfactory assistant does not appear. Probably the appointment was not made by the Conference. Certainly the offender cannot have been John Hickling whose long career terminated on November 9th, 1858. He lived to be the last surviving minister of all called into the work by Wesley himself. He was 93 when he died, having remained in harness to the end.

The next year Wesley paid his last visit to Chester. More than half a century had passed away since he first visited Alraham, forty eight years had elapsed since he preached in Mr. Jones' house in Love Lane, and in the open air near St. John's Church. During this period he had visited Chester more than thirty times and had witnessed a remarkable extension of the work of GOD in the district. It can be imagined therefore with what eagerness he would now be welcomed by a large number in Chester as in all parts of Great Britain and Ireland. The tide of obloquy had long turned, and the noble man was honoured by all classes of the community.

The day upon which he entered Chester for the last time was one of activity almost incredible when the age of the preacher is taken into account. It would be a fair day's work for a strong man, even in these days of comfortable trains. The subject on which he preached, in itself appropriate for Easter,

would derive peculiar solemnity for the people from the thought that they could hardly hope to see their aged friend again; and the words would recur to their minds and prove a solace when tidings of his death reached Chester a year later.

Easter Monday, April 5th, 1790, [Setting out from Manchester, where he had preached twice on the Sunday and had helped in a sacramental service at which there were sixteen hundred communicants.] Calling at Altringham, I was desired to speak a few words to the people in the New Chapel: but almost as soon as I got thither, the house was filled, and soon after more than filled, so that I preached on I. Peter, i., 3, and many praised God with joyful lips. About 12 I preached in the Chapel at Northwich, to a large and lively congregation: and in the evening met once more with our old affectionate friends at Chester. I have never seen this Chapel more crowded than to night; but still it could hardly contain the congregation. Both this and the following evening I was greatly assisted to declare the power of CHRIST'S resurrection, and to exhort all that were risen with Him to set their affections on things above. Here I met with one of the most extraordinary phænomena that I ever saw or heard of. Mr. Sellers has in his yard a large Newfoundland dog, and an old raven; these have fallen deeply in love with each other, and never desire to be apart. The bird has learnt the bark of the dog, so that few can distinguish them. She is inconsolable when he goes out, and if he stays out a day or two, she will get up all the bones and scraps she can, and hoard them up for him, till he comes back!

Mr. Sellers was a schoolmaster, who served GOD among the Methodists as a Local Preacher and Class Leader. Although quite a young man, he predeceased the venerable John Wesley; on May 30th, 1790, he passed away, aged 32. It is most instructive to note with what open eyes and receptive mind Wesley looked

upon the world even in these last months of failing strength. The Rev. George Marsden, a President of the Conference, and brother-in-law of Richard Reece, was a pupil of Mr. Sellers. He it was who placed the tablet in St. John Street Chapel to the memory of his instructor. The Rev. W. B. Marsden, Vicar of St. John's Church, Chester, was a nephew of George Marsden. This Church the pupils of Mr. Sellers attended, there being no Methodist service in Church hours until a later period.

Interesting reminiscences of these later visits are furnished by Matthew Harrison—

Wesley's domicile latterly in Chester was with Mr. J. Walker, a silversmith, the grandfather of the present Town Clerk. The late Mr. George Walker, Wine Merchant, had a distinct recollection of Wesley's visits to his father's house, and gave some striking instances of Wesley's determined adherence to method and order. As an instance of this he related that when, as was usual, a company was invited to meet the revered founder, no interest or persuasion could prevail on him to delay his early retiring, but at his usual time, with the greatest ease and politeness, after family worship, he left the company with his patriarchal benediction.

The late Mr. Richard Taylor, senior, was in the habit of leading the singing at the Octagon on Wesley's visits. Mr. Taylor was a member of the Queen Street Independent Church, but always on these occasions gave the Octagon congregation his valuable aid. <sup>1</sup>

A further reference is made to the subject in the obituary of a minister's wife who died in 1847. She was born in Chester about 1776, and was the daughter of Mr. S. Walker, a local preacher. "During her early years the Rev. John Wesley occasionally stayed at her

---

1. *Cheshire Sheaf. Ser. I. Vol. III. p 166, (1891.)*

father's house. On one of these interesting occasions that eminent man who was particularly fond of children, placed his hand on her head, and solemnly invoked a blessing upon her." Rhoda Walker was convinced of sin under the preaching of James Macdonald; she was not however converted in Chester but in Liverpool where she received her first ticket from Henry Moore in 1800. In 1804 she married James B. Holroyd, who subsequently became a minister. In the Chester membership list for 1804, or thereabouts, appear the names of James and Rhoda Holroyd. The name of Walker was common in Chester Methodism, and the relationship between the different families cannot be stated. Unfortunately no memoir of Mr. George Walker, Wine Merchant, the first Steward of St. John Street Chapel, has come to hand. Such would have cleared up several points.

**1790 : Parson Greenwood ; Richard Seed ; John Wilshaw.**

The latter was regarded as eccentric in his preaching but proved a worthy and faithful worker till 1818.

Another Cheshire lad was received into the ranks of the ministry at the Conference of this year; John Dean, who was born at Rowton in 1765. He was a convert of the itinerant preachers who visited his native village. He was made a leader in 1788, and after his call to travel laboured till 1822.

On March 2nd, 1791, occurred the long dreaded but inevitable event: John Wesley passed away in the eighty-eighth year of his age. George Walker says:—  
 "His Societies did uniformly wear mourning for

several months after his decease." This gives a hint as to the feeling in Chester, where Wesley must have been better known than in any other town of the kingdom, except the two or three great Methodist centres. Myles says in his *Chronological History of the Methodists* (1813 edn., p. 187), "Thousands of the people, with all the travelling preachers, went into mourning for him. The pulpits, and many of the chapels, not only in the Methodist Connexion, but in others also, were hung with black cloth. In every place something was said by way of funeral sermon, and in many places discourses were preached on the same subject which were afterwards published."

**1791 : Parson Greenwood ; James Thom ; George Lowe.**

The exceptional nature of the Superintendent's case appears from the resolution passed at this Conference to the effect that "No preacher shall be stationed for any Circuit above two years successively; unless GOD has been pleased to use him as the instrument of a remarkable revival."

The removal of the paternal autocrat of Methodism caused many questions which had been in abeyance during his lifetime to clamour for settlement. The pressure of these problems was keenly felt in Chester, as will appear from the following pages. The three main matters were:—

1. The relation of the Preachers to each other.
2. The relation of Methodism to existing Churches, especially to that established by law.
3. The relation of the Preachers to the people within Methodism.

The first point was already in process of solution. Wesley's Deed of Declaration had constituted one Hundred Preachers the Legal Conference in which were vested the powers wielded by himself for so many years. The restriction of number had given offence to a few who were not included, and there had been four secessions on that account; yet the arrangement seems to have met with general approbation. Wesley foresaw, and tried to prevent, possible usurpation of power on the part of the "Hundred." A letter from him, written six years previously, but delayed by his instructions till the Conference after his death, was produced at the Manchester Conference by Joseph Bradford, who was Wesley's travelling companion for many years and had been with him at the last. The extreme importance of the letter is obvious; its suitability for inclusion here is due to the fact that Wesley wrote it in Chester during his hurried journey to Ireland in the spring of 1785.

Chester, April 7th, 1785.

To the Methodist Conference.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

Some of our travelling Preachers have expressed a fear, That after my Decease you would exclude them, from either preaching in connexion with you, or from some other privileges which they now enjoy. I know no other way to prevent any such inconvenience, than to leave these my last words with you.

I beseech you by the mercies of God, that you never avail yourselves of the Deed of Declaration, to assume any superiority over your Brethren; but let all things go on, among those itinerants who chuse to remain together, exactly in the same manner as when I was with you, so far as Circumstances will permit.

In particular I beseech you, if you ever loved me, and if you now love God and your brethren : to have no respect of persons, in stationing the Preachers, in chusing Children for Kingswood-school, in disposing of the Yearly Contribution and the Preachers' Fund, or any other public Money. But do all things with a single eye, as I have done from the beginning. Go on thus, doing all things without prejudice or partiality, and God will be with you even to the end,

JOHN WESLEY.

“This letter seemed like a voice from heaven. The Conference at once swept away all jealousies by a unanimous resolution, according every privilege conferred by the Deed of Declaration to all preachers in full connexion.”<sup>1</sup>

This decision has been adhered to, without deviation, down to the present time.

Under the second head the chief practical points arising were: the administration of the Sacraments by the Methodist preachers; and the holding of public services during Church hours. The original ideal of John Wesley, so far as he had one, was that his Societies should remain within the pale of the Anglican Church; and, therefore, receive the Sacraments at the hands of the parish Clergy. Before his death, however, such an ideal had become impracticable, largely through the intolerance of the Bishops and Clergy. Yet Wesley desired that there should be no formal and declared separation in his day; the future he would leave to the wisdom of his sons in the Gospel and to the overruling providence of God. The question was passed over by the Conference of 1791; the three Chester preachers of that year, having gained the

---

1. *Telford's John Wesley*, p. 369.



esteem of the people, managed to maintain peace in their Circuit.

The Conference of 1791 divided English Methodism into nineteen districts. Chester, Macclesfield, and Burslem made up the Chester District. Various arrangements took place from time to time. The work in North Wales was at first in the Chester District, Ruthin being one of its component Circuits in 1800-1-2. In 1803 the North Wales District was formed, comprising Welshpool, Wrexham, Ruthin, and Carnarvon. In 1808 a Shrewsbury District was formed, and Wrexham was taken over from the Chester District. In 1813 Chester was still the head of a District containing eleven Circuits and one Mission. In 1814 the distinction of being a District town was taken from Chester and the Circuit was assigned to the Liverpool District, to which it has belonged ever since.

**1792: Francis Wrigley; Richard Condy; James Thom.**

The following rules were passed by the preachers at the Conference:—

Q 21. What rule shall be made concerning the administration of the LORD'S Supper? A. The LORD'S Supper shall not be administered by any person among our Societies in England and Ireland for the ensuing year, on any consideration whatsoever, except in London.

Q 23. What rule shall be made concerning the service in the church hours? A. The service shall not be performed in any new place in the church hours in future, without the consent of the Conference first obtained.

The following remarkable letter was also issued to the Societies:—

To the Members of our Societies, who desire to receive the LORD'S Supper from the hands of their own Preachers.

VERY DEAR BRETHREN,

The Conference desires us to write to you, in their name, in the most tender and affectionate manner, and to inform you of the event of their deliberation concerning the administration of the LORD'S Supper.

After debating the subject time after time, we were greatly divided in sentiment. In short, we knew not what to do, that peace and union might be preserved. At last one of the senior brethren (Mr. Pawson) proposed that we should commit the matter to GOD by putting the question to the lot, considering that the Oracles of GOD declare, that "the Lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty." And again, that "the Lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD." And considering also that we have the example of the Apostles themselves, in a matter, which we thought, all things considered, of less importance. We accordingly prepared the Lots; and four of us prayed.

GOD was surely then present, yea, his glory filled the room. Almost all the Preachers were in tears, and, as they afterwards confessed, felt an undoubted assurance that GOD himself would decide. Mr. Adam Clarke was then called on to draw the Lot, which was, "You shall not administer the Sacrament the ensuing year." All were satisfied. All submitted. All was Peace. Every countenance seemed to testify that every heart said, "It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good." A minute was then formed according to the previous explanation of the Lots, that the Sacrament should not be administered in our Connexion, for the ensuing year, except in London. The prohibition reaches the Clergy of the Church of England as well as the other brethren. We do assure you, dear brethren, we should have been perfectly resigned, if the Lot had fallen on the other side. Yea, we should, as far as Christian prudence and expediency would have justified, have encouraged the administration of the LORD'S Supper by the Preachers; because we had not a doubt but GOD was uncommonly present on this occasion, and did himself decide. Signed, in behalf of the Conference,

ALEXANDER MATHER, President.

THOMAS COKE, Secretary.

The Methodists of Chester were divided into two camps. The three preachers walked by the Conference rules, though probably desiring greater freedom and conscious that its attainment could not long be deferred.

They declined to administer the Sacraments themselves, in the Octagon Chapel, or to allow anyone else to do so ; nor would they hold any public service during Church hours. These restraints were intolerable to those of the Chester Methodists who believed that God had constituted them a Christian Church. There was sharp contention on the points at issue between the two parties. Then appeared the advantage—or disadvantage—of having a “ Room ” not connexionally settled. In Commonhall Street the “ liberal ” party were allowed the privileges denied them at the Octagon.

**1793 : John Booth ; Richard Condry ; Samuel Bardsley.**

**1794 : John Booth ; Owen Davies ; Thomas Hemmins.**

As no concession satisfactory to the “ liberal ” party had been made, and the new preachers carried out the “ Old Plan ” of not administering the Sacrament unless by the *unanimous* request of the Society (which was not forthcoming in Chester), they took a decided step towards making the separation final by the purchase of a site in Trinity Lane for the erection of a building which was known, for a time at least, as an Independent Methodist Chapel. The old account book, still extant, shews James Parry to have been the first Treasurer ; in 1800 he was succeeded by Thomas Lowe ; John Bradford and George Preston also being early holders of that office. The accounts were kept in the same book right down to 1835.

The total cost of the enterprise was £871 16s. 7d. The subscription list only amounted to £183. In addition to the local helpers the following names appear, indicating that these friends were not without sympathisers in high quarters. Dr. Coke : One Guinea. Adam Clark[e] : One Guinea.

On the expenditure side are several items incurred in providing drink, "at the rearing of the gallery," and on other occasions.

**1795: James Macdonald; William Simpson; Joseph Collier.**

**1796: John Goodwin; Robert Crowther; Richard Emmett.**

**1797: John Goodwin; Robert Crowther; Isaac Lilly.**

A regulation was added in the *Minutes*, 1795, to the effect that "the single men in Chester and Liverpool are to change every six weeks."

This year was more peaceful; the new preachers were happily untouched by the personal feelings which had been aroused. The Conference had discussed the "Plan of Pacification"; and the preachers were able to report that the members of the Conference had reached substantial agreement among themselves, and had been able to satisfy the representatives of the Trustees, with whom they had held frequent communication. A *modus vivendi* was arrived at in Chester. It was agreed that there should be no alteration at the Octagon Chapel; but at the Chapel in Trinity Lane the preachers appointed by the Conference should preach, administer the Sacraments, and perform all ministerial offices; and

that the hours of service therein should be determined only by the convenience of the preachers and people.

But peace did not prevail for long. The financial burdens resting upon the Society were much increased by the erection of the new Chapel, and recriminations ensued. These difficulties, it appears, might have been overcome had not the third of the questions mentioned above, exercised its disturbing influence at this stage. In dealing with the controversies of this troublesome time, it should never be forgotten that the lurid flames of the French Revolution coloured everything. The people were afraid lest the preachers might be tempted to imitate the priestly despotism of Rome ; the preachers trembled lest subjection to a multitude should diminish their proper authority as overseers of the Church. The personal matters centreing round Alexander Kilham further complicated the whole affair.

The following extracts from the *Minutes* of 1796 will shew with what results the Chester case came before the Conference. It is to be remembered that Chester was one of the very few places where there was at this early period a Chapel beyond Conference control.

Q. 27. What was the determination of the Conference concerning the various petitions and addresses which they received ?

A. 1. They were all read in full Conference, and a committee appointed to examine them, and make a report to the Conference. The committee consisted of the nine who formed the plan of pacification, except that the president took Dr. Coke's place (the Doctor being gone to America) ; and the preachers of Chester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Bristol, were present when the case of those Circuits was considered.

A. 3. The case of Chester was fully explained, and the assistant declaring, that, "writing to the trustees of the new-chapel would signify nothing, unless they had what they desired," the Committee could proceed no further: but considered them as not under our care or direction at present.

. . . . At the request of the Chester assistant and some other brethren, who had reconsidered the Chester business, the Conference ordered a letter to be written to the trustees of the new-chapel, similar to the one sent to Bristol. But no answer has been received.

From these paragraphs it appears that the supporters of Trinity Lane were placing themselves in opposition not merely to those who wished to avoid acts of separation from the Establishment; but also to the general body of the preachers. When in 1796 Alexander Kilham refused to agree to the "Plan of Pacification," it was finally determined that he could have no place in our Connexion while he continued in his present opinions. At the Conference of 1797 the breach became final, and about 5000 members seceded and formed the New Connexion, in which Mr. Kilham was for some time the leading spirit. The Society and congregation worshipping in the Chapel in Trinity Lane united themselves to the secessionists, and thus, before the end of the eighteenth century, the Methodism of Chester underwent division. Chester was one of the original Seven Circuits of the New Connexion; the other six were Leeds, Sheffield, Hanley, Manchester, Liverpool and North Shields. <sup>1</sup>

The loss of members in the Chester Circuit was, as might have been expected, beyond the average of the Connexion. In 1796, 800 members were reported; 660 only in 1798.

---

1. *The Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion, 1848.*

The remarkable fact has been brought out in the foregoing story that the New Connexion cause in Chester is really older than the New Connexion itself.

The agitation in Chester continued till 1806 when the Sacrament was administered and Church hours adopted at the Octagon.

The above-mentioned Plan of Pacification which was agreed to in 1795 contained the following provisions, amongst others :—

1. The Sacrament of the LORD's Supper shall not be administered in any Chapel except the majority of the Trustees of that Chapel on the one hand, and the majority of the Stewards and Leaders belonging to that Chapel (as the best qualified to give the sense of the people) on the other hand, allow of it. Nevertheless, in all cases, the consent of the Conference shall be obtained before the LORD's Supper be administered.

2. Wherever there is a Society, but no Chapel, if the majority of the Stewards and Leaders of that society testify, that it is the wish of the people that the LORD's Supper should be administered to them, their desire shall be gratified: provided, that the consent of the Conference be previously obtained.

It would seem that at least one of the smaller Societies in the Chester Circuit availed themselves of these provisions before the City congregation did so: for in 1802 it is recorded that Great Saughall petitioned the Conference for the administration of the Sacrament amongst them, and that their request was granted. Horseley (1800), and Leighton (1802), may, perhaps, be the places so named which are referred to in the appendix of this book.

It would be altogether impracticable to endeavour to apportion the rights and wrongs of this protracted

dispute. Several extracts are added here which the reader will probably find of interest, and from which may be seen how many were the cross currents and to what height the feelings of the contending parties rose. Happily all the old heat has long since passed away, and the two communities work side by side in perfect harmony.

The following matter, to the end of the verses, is gathered from Kilham's *Monitor* :—

To the Methodist Societies throughout Great Britain and  
Ireland.

Chester, Nov. 14th, 1796.

DEAR BRETHREN,

Many friends, in a number of places where our printed letter has circulated, are exceeding surprised at the last conference refusing to grant our request, when we were unanimous in our application to the preachers, for service in church hours, and the sacrament. In order to give them all the satisfaction we can upon the subject, we shall just relate the following particulars :—

At the Manchester Conference, the preachers requested we would be satisfied with preaching at nine o'clock in summer, and half past nine in forenoon in winter, and half past one in the afternoon; with the sacrament from a neighbouring assistant. For *the sake of peace* we complied with their request. But the trustees of the Octagon Chapel refused to be connected with us if the sacrament was administered at all, in Trinity Chapel. We received a number of letters from respectable preachers, requesting, *for the sake of peace* that we would, for one year, submit to be without the sacrament. When the district meeting, held on the occasion, determined, it should not be administered the last year, we submitted; being encouraged to hope, by the preachers of the district, and others, that our request would be fully granted at the last conference. At the district meeting, held in Macclesfield, prior to the conference, the preachers recommended to



the conference, for us to have service in church hours, and the sacrament.

In order that the subject might be fully understood, we printed the particulars of our case, and inferred from the pacific plan, that it was impossible for the conference to refuse our lawful request, without violating the rules they had published in Manchester, the year before. As the preachers had an opportunity of examining our case as stated in the printed letter, before the business was brought on in the conference, we were led to hope, that they would at once respect their *own rules*, cheerfully [*sic*] grant the privileges we requested. But, to our astonishment, the following letter entirely destroyed our hopes, and left us in despair of immediate help from that quarter.

To Mr. Parry, and all concerned in the affairs of Trinity  
Chapel, in Chester.

London, August 6th, 1796.

DEAR BRETHREN,

I am ordered by the conference to inform you, that your address was read in the conference, and after some conversation on the subject a committee was appointed to take it into consideration. Mr. M'Donald spoke in your behalf with much earnestness, and a considerable time was spent in debates relative to your circumstances. A proposal was made of writing to you, to know if you would not give up some part of what was contained in your letter. To this Mr. M'Donald replied "that nothing less than all you had requested, would be accepted by you." The committee could proceed no further, but considered you as not under our care or direction at present. But this morning, at the request of Mr. M'Donald it was agreed, in full conference, to write to you for your final answer, whether you will submit to the determination of the conference, or not, whatever it may be? Please to write as soon as possible.

I am, in behalf of the Conference,

Dear Brethren,

Your affectionate servant,

S. BRADBURN.

As this letter gave us no encouragement to hope for the privileges we had been led to expect from the conference, we thought it unnecessary to write any answer, as we could not be trifled with any longer. When the preachers came from London, they had orders not to supply us, unless we would relinquish our claim, and submit to be deprived of our privileges. When we could not in conscience submit to their requisition, they refused to preach in our chapel, and *forced us* to seek help from some other quarter. Being resolved to support the itinerant plan, we resolved not to fix any minister in our chapel for life, but determined to seek supplies from our own local preachers. For several weeks we were kindly assisted by different friends in the neighbourhood. But the winter coming on, and they living at a distance, induced us to seek a more regular supply than they could afford us.

We therefore applied to two persons that had left the connexion, and sought help from them. As nothing, in our judgment, was alleged against their moral character to prevent our encouraging them, we agreed to employ them till the conference, on condition that they should frequently change, and have no power to prevent us from allowing any person to preach in the chapel, which we have reason to believe is called of GOD to the ministry, and is approved by us.

Our situation is such that we wish to unite with the connexion in general, could we but have the privileges which belong to us as christians. And should the conference continue to reject our reasonable requests, when we have not only the majorities the pacific plan requires, but are unanimous as it refers to leaders, stewards, trustees, and members of the Society, we shall hold ourselves in readiness to unite with any part of the connexion that will fix a liberal plan, upon scriptural grounds, to preserve itinerancy among us.

May the Eternal GOD direct our steps in the dark and cloudy day, that we may glorify His most holy name, and be happy for ever ! Brethren, pray for us.

Signed in behalf of a meeting of trustees, &c.,

J. PARRY.

P.S.—The following lines, composed by Mr. S. Bradburn's brother, descriptive of our state, are inserted for the amusement of the reader.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE OCTAGON AND  
TRINITY CHAPELS IN CHESTER,

By *R. Bradburn.*

OCTAGON.

Dear Sister, if such I may venture to call,  
 One that has sought so much to accomplish my fall ;  
 I pay you this visit, to reason the case,  
 And hope to restore you again unto grace.  
 I blame your presumption, yet pity your state,  
 And would have you repent, before it's too late :  
 Then yield to my wishes—again with me dwell,  
 Or the whole host of heav'n can't save you from Hell.  
 But in mercy I come, to reason, not rail,  
 And by justice and kindness I hope to prevail ;  
 There are few in my exalted condition,  
 But would leave you to sink into endless perdition,  
 But now, to be brief, for I would not enlarge,  
 One thing I remember you laid to my charge,  
 Was the keeping of money to no small amount,  
 And refusing to render you any account.  
 How silly are you in this manner to prate,  
 And how small is your knowledge of church and of state,  
 To suppose that the rulers of either will give,  
 An account to the people of what they receive.  
 Grant that more I receiv'd than was wanting for use,  
 Was the keeping of this to you an abuse ;  
 Of each holy thing you had all you could want,  
 Except candle-light—that I own was but scant ;  
 But had there been less, could any evil arise ?  
 For who goes to church to hear with his eyes ?  
 Besides, from temptation it keeps the mind free,  
 For few will be tempted with what they can't see.

Now for what I have said, don't you see you'r to blame,  
 This you surely will own if you have any shame!  
 With regard to my trust, if St. Peter should doubt  
 I vow by St. Paul I would soon turn him out;  
 And lest by his keys he should find a way thro',  
 With bolts I'd accomplish what locks cannot do.  
 And now I beseech you, your error forsake,  
 Accept my free pardon, for J——'s sake,  
 Contradict what you've said—your schism lay by,  
 And then we'll be friendly, if you will comply,

## TRINITY.

And is it, dear Sister, to use your own cant,  
 And is it submission from me that you want?  
 Do you think by your ranting you reason the case?  
 (Which to a poor Bedlamite would be a disgrace.)  
 Let's examine the matter a little more fair,  
 And your actions and language together compare.  
 Now I tell you what first gave me birth in this place,  
 Was neither a want of right reason nor grace;  
 But a firm resolution, with principles pure,  
 Your pride and oppression no more to endure.  
 What else can you term it, but consummate pride,  
 To set up yourself an infallible guide?  
 And what but oppression to stigmatize those,  
 Who dare think for themselves, with the title of foes?  
 To call them schismatic, and deem them untrue,  
 Because they refuse to idolize you?  
 What I said about money you know to be true,  
 Nor do you deny it, to give you your due:  
 You strive in a dull and a pitiful way  
 To act as you please your right to display.  
 From whence came your right to what ne'er was your own,  
 As no part could be your's may clearly be shown?  
 What the people collected, they gave you in trust,  
 What you kept for yourself was surely unjust.

If a steward should say at the end of the year,  
 My lord, by this balance you'll see it quite clear,  
 I've nearly in hand five hundred to spare!  
 But this I intend for my own private use,  
 For the keeping this sum is to you no abuse.  
 I scarcely need say what his lordship would do,  
 He'd put him away—as I would do you.

## OCTAGON.

I suppose now you think you've prov'd all you've said ;  
 And thrown all the blame on my guilty head :  
 But still let me prove to my cause that I'm true,  
 A charge in my turn I'll bring against you ;  
 For you know you've set up a sacramenteering,  
 Despising the church—at her ministers sneering,  
 And said (O the thought, how it tortures my breast),  
 That a layman might give it as well as a priest.  
 Now I grant that some priests may be wickedly led,  
 But remember, the prophet by ravens was fed !  
 Why may we not, then, in a spiritual case,  
 By these ravens receive the true manna of grace ?  
 What tho' as a chapel from the church I am free,  
 Yet the church—the dear church ! answers all things to me.  
 Thro' the church I'm receiv'd by the heads of the city,  
 Thro' the church I'm oft filled by the gay and the witty ;  
 Thro' my faith in the church, by her sons I'm esteemed,  
 Nor am I a Dissenter, or Jacobine deem'd.  
 You all by your new-plan are left in the lurch,  
 Condemned in yourself for despising the church.  
 Nay, the heads and the rulers of each absolute sect,  
 Will venture, with me, your new plan to reject !

## TRINITY.

You talk about rulers in church and in state,  
 But who did the rulers in Christ's church create ?  
 Not himself—for he solemnly declares in his word,  
 That his church is without any ruler or lord :

Except he himself, who is Lord over all,  
 By whose grand decision we must stand or fall.  
 Did he not appoint, as an emblem most pure,  
 Of the sufferings and death he was to endure  
 For the sins of the world? that in love we might join,  
 And by eating of bread and drinking of wine,  
 Reflect on his merit, and have our souls fed,  
 With light, life, and love—the true heavenly bread?  
 Did he ever ordain the time or the place,  
 When we in this means should partake of his grace?  
 Some term it a supper, and some as devout,  
 May deem it a dinner, without any doubt—  
 Whether breakfast, or dinner, or supper it be,  
 Our Lord says, “This do in remembrance of me.”  
 With respect to the place I defy you to find,  
 Any place upon earth to which he’s confin’d;  
 A house, or a field, he deems not a disgrace,  
 Pure worshipping hearts will make sacred the place.  
 Then what is the church, pray, for which you contend?  
 To the furtherance of truth does it serve any end?  
 Your leaning upon it only proves you are lame,  
 To Jehovah all places and times are the same.  
 A true church of his, is a number of people,  
 Whether met in a street, or a place with a steeple,  
 United together their homage to pay,  
 To the Giver of Life, and the Author of Day.  
 You grant that a layman the Gospel may preach,  
 And be truly inspired salvation to teach;  
 And yet be not deemed a sufficient divine,  
 To give you some bread, or hand you some wine.  
 Does not the apostle this doctrine teach?  
 That faith comes by hearing—and to hear one must preach;  
 That all faithful ministers are properly sent,  
 Not by man—but by God, for that very intent.  
 Now reason will teach you this truth to express,  
 That he who does great things, may do what is less:

And it surely is greater, by the power of the word,  
 To raise up a church to the praise of the Lord,  
 Than when it is raised any duty to do,  
 That is farther required the ministry through.

## OCTAGON.

But you know the sanhedrim in a council select,  
 Did your plan and yourself together reject !  
 Are those the laymen for whom you contend,  
 Who in Christ's church may answer to serve any end ?  
 And because that they preach the word of the Lord,  
 You suppos'd you might safely rely on their word ;  
 And as they had promis'd last year you should be  
 This year from your bonds and fetters set free,  
 You seem'd to rejoice e'er the Conference began,  
 Surely trusting they'd grant you your favourite plan ;  
 But I, who am older, knew better than you,  
 And the ways that would gain them did wisely pursue ;  
 And tho' with yourself, they revile mother church,  
 Yet I knew for all that you'd be left in the lurch :  
 Not for want of conviction that you acted well,  
 But for reasons I am not at leisure to tell,  
 But will leave you to guess—and bid you farewell.

## TRINITY.

In the number of preachers at conference join'd,  
 Whom you call the Sanhedrim I think you will find,  
 Not the voice of the people, or preachers at all,  
 But a few that bear rule—the rest are in thrall.  
 And in a committee, these powerful few,  
 Shewed injustice to me, and their kindness to you :  
 But their kindness, however, when well understood,  
 Will neither do them nor you any good.  
 With respect to their justice, and dealing so fair,  
 I refer you to *Kilham*, only hear him declare,  
 In language of truth what he has to reveal,  
 And their uprightness to him, and others you'll feel.

Read over his tracts with an unprejudic'd mind,  
 And the mistery of all their proceedings you'll find ;  
 Now to him I refer you, for this very end,  
 Because I believe him to be such a friend,  
 That will teach you such lessons by which you may mend.

## FINIS.

A letter written by Samuel Bradburn to Richard Rodda, from Manchester, April 19th, 1792, deals with the question of the administration of the Sacrament by Methodist preachers ordained for that purpose, and speaks of proceedings in Manchester and Liverpool. Incidentally, Bradburn says:—

I have been at Chester, where Mr. Bennet [query, Thomas Bennett, trustee of the Octagon Chapel] is by no means too calm. However, Mr. Parry, the steward, means to petition Conference for one ordained preacher to be sent there to administer the LORD'S Supper to all who wish to receive it, leaving the rest to go to the Steeple House for it. <sup>1</sup>

There is a further instructive reference to the state of affairs in Chester in the memoir of the Rev. Owen Davies.

In the year 1794 he was stationed at Chester, with Mr. John Booth, and his own son-in-law, Mr. Hemans; a man of genuine piety and amiable manners; but one who was unable to bear the fatigue of the itinerant life. While Mr. Davies was at Chester, his conciliating spirit was put to the test; as the disputes which then prevailed in various parts of the Connexion were beginning to run high at Chester; and he was of opinion, on a review of things, that the party that had the management of affairs did not act with due candour towards those who wished for a more liberal plan. Some worthy persons by a kind of necessity, as they deemed it, joined a

---

1. *Proceedings, W.H.S., II., 96.*



party in hostility to the Connexion, for want of those concessions, which, in a few years subsequent to those events, would have been readily made. These warm disputes led to the erection of a new chapel in that city; and in the year 1796 while Bristol and Leeds were accommodated, the Conference was influenced to adopt rather a rigorous proceeding with regard to Chester. In the *Minutes* it is said, "The case of Chester was fully explained; and the Superintendent declaring, 'That writing to the trustees of the new chapel would signify nothing, unless they had what they desired'; the committee could proceed no further, but considered them as not under our care or direction at present." Though this was a hard case, as it regarded some worthy characters, those inflexible spirits they had to contend with were to be censured and not the Conference. <sup>1</sup>

John Gaulter, in his memoir of George Walker, the earlier, says:—

It is well known that a considerable controversy took place after the death of Wesley on the propriety of the sacraments of the LORD'S Supper and Baptism being administered in the connexion by the regular preachers. To any alteration of the ancient practice he strongly objected. He was not alone in deprecating the most remote departure from our relation to the Established Church. Several of the best and wisest of the people, both in Chester and other places, were of a similar judgment. This produced a severe conflict of opinion. The mode which at present prevails was the issue. At the period when this subject was highly debated, Mr. Walker suffered no inconsiderable degree of abuse, as unmerited as it was acrimonious. Certainly we may differ with innocence, but angry language is equally unsupported by our reason as men, and our creed as Christians. That benevolence of temper which led him to forgive insult, induced him to bear with the author of this memoir who, for once in his life, had entertained different views. But that contrariety neither violated friendship nor interrupted affection. <sup>2</sup>

---

1. *Mag.*, 1832, p. 394.

2. *Mag.*, 1813, p. 491.

From the standard histories of Methodism it appears that Chester shared to the full the unrest of the Connexion.

The Trustees of Chester are included amongst those who approved the proposition of the Trustees to the Conference. Chester was represented by George Walker among the Trustees' Delegates who assembled to the number of nearly 100 at the Conference of 1795.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter written at this period it is stated that "Manchester, Liverpool, and Chester are in a distracted state."<sup>2</sup>

It is not possible to give a complete list of the members who cast in their lot with the new Connexion. But the old records of Trinity Lane reveal some of the names. The old Baptism Register, dated 1794, is the most interesting of these records. The first entry relates to the baptism of an infant daughter of James Parry, who was probably the most notable loss sustained by the "old body."

Martha Ann Parry, born August 7th, 1794, baptised August 30th. The second daughter of James Parry, Hosier, Parish of St. Peter's, Chester, by Susannah Wright, daughter of John Wright, Breeches Maker, Parish of Nantwich, Cheshire.

The officiating minister was Richard Cundy or Condry, then just about to complete his term of service in the Chester Circuit.

The youngest son of this family, James Parry, Junior, was a preacher of brilliant promise. The new Connexion Conference of 1804 appointed him to

1. *Dr. Smith's History of Methodism, II., pp. 120 & 705.*

2. *Life of Joseph Entwistle, p. 147.*

travel. He laboured in several N. C. Circuits, but was cut off at an early age, dying in 1808 at the house of Mr. Hine, in Ince, "a respectable friend who receives the preachers, and has preaching at his house." The Rev. Richard Watson, during the period of his ministry in the New Connexion, was stationed at Liverpool and seems to have been on friendly terms with this Chester family. He contributed a memoir to the N. C. Magazine for 1810.

The next three baptisms were by James Lyons, who had ceased to be a Methodist minister in 1792, and was one of the persons who had left the Connexion and were employed by the friends at Trinity Lane. In 1808, if the identification is correct, he came back to Chester as an avowed Unitarian to be pastor of Matthew Henry's Chapel. The parents mentioned in these entries were John and Margaret Charles, Richard and Mary Orme, Thomas and Jane Roden.

The next baptism is that of the third daughter of James Parry, the minister being Thomas Brisco, in all probability the Supernumerary with whom Wesley lodged in 1789.

The next entry is of great interest—

Sarah Lowe, born December 30th, 1795, baptised May 12th, 1796, second daughter of Thomas Lowe, Gunmaker, Parish of St. Oswald's, Chester, by Ann Taylor, daughter of John Taylor, Brassfounder, Parish of St. Mary's, Chester.

The officiating minister was Thomas Coke, in all probability Dr. Coke, the noted Missionary pioneer, the date falling within the period of one of his visits to England.

Thomas Lowe was born at Hollow Moor Heath, parish of Great Barrow. In 1781 he was bound

apprentice in Chester, and in 1788 joined the Methodists. His son William, born in 1799, died in 1872. He was also a gunsmith. It is evident that the father went over to the New Connexion at its formation, and a tablet in Pepper Street Chapel proclaims the son to have been a prominent member of the same till his death in 1872.

The next infants mentioned were baptised by James McPherson, who was evidently one of the ministers called out by the Trinity Lane people; for in the following entry, recording the baptism of his own child, he is described as "minister," and the child is stated to have been buried in the Independent Methodist Chapel in Trinity Lane, April, 1797. Then follow records down to 1831, in which the officiating ministers appear all to have been regular ministers of the New Connexion.

The first return made to the New Connexion Conference from Chester was in 1799, when 147 members were reported. A detailed list of 1801 is extant:— Chester 48, Bradley 9, Northwood 11, Oldcastle 19, Huxley 7, Hawarden 22, Frodsham 8, Tarvin and Oscroft 12, Undecipherable 11, Pickton 6. Total 153.

In 1835 the New Connexion erected a large and handsome new Chapel in Pepper Street, near to the Wesleyan Chapel in St. John Street. The estate was often seriously embarrassed, as the Connexional papers shew, but the great efforts exerted to clear it were finally successful.

## CHAPTER VI.

---

### The Octagon Chapel : Last Years, 1798—1811.

---

1798-9: Thomas Hutton; James Riddall; George Morley.

THE third preacher, then in the seventh year of his ministry and the twenty-seventh of his age, married one of the daughters of Mr. Richard Williams of Rackery. He was a man of force and worth, and rendered most valuable service to his Church. "His name stands in the first rank of those who have served the great cause of Missions, by their exertions at home. . . . He adopted measures which led to the organization of the Methodist Auxiliary Missionary Society for the Leeds District, and thus introduced an entirely new era in the history of our Foreign Missions." <sup>1</sup>

Having laboured strenuously as Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, he was in 1830 elected to the Presidency of the Conference. In 1831 he was appointed to the Governorship of Woodhouse Grove School, in which office he remained until within a fortnight of his decease in 1843.

---

1. *Mag.*, Oct., 1844.

In 1800 an appointment was made which had considerable effect upon the Chester Circuit. By the influence of Dr. Coke two well known and highly suitable ministers were withheld from their designated Circuits in Cornwall and the Potteries respectively, and appointed to Ruthin, a Circuit which properly speaking did not exist. Their names were Owen Davies and John Hughes. The former was a native of Wrexham, where he was born in 1752, and had travelled in Chester.

To some extent, indeed, the work had been already begun. An amiable young man, named Edward Jones, of Bathafarn, the vale of Clwyd, had been converted to God in Manchester, and having there joined the Methodist Society, was, some time afterward, induced by the age and infirmity of his parents, and his own delicate health, to return to his native place. To leave Manchester, where he enjoyed so many religious advantages, he felt to be a sore trial. Before his departure he called upon Mr. Bradburn, the Superintendent, to ask his advice. Mr. Bradburn received him with all kindness, and advised him, on his way home, to call on the preacher at Chester, and request him to come over occasionally to Ruthin to preach. In compliance with this advice, Mr. Jones called upon Mr. Hutton at Chester, who, in reply to the request, said, "I shall be glad to come if you can get me an open door." Mr. Jones assured him that this should be done, and, having returned home, he went to Ruthin and hired a room. Mr. Ridall, one of the Chester preachers, shortly afterwards paid him a visit, and preached to an attentive congregation on the 3rd January, 1800. From this time one of the Chester preachers came there once a fortnight; and in the absence of a preacher, Mr. Jones himself held prayer meetings which were encouragingly attended.

It is said that Edward Jones in August, 1800, was so depressed by failing health and by isolation that he

left home to climb Moel Fammau that he might lie down and die there. But a farm servant cried out after him that a letter had come. He returned to read, and his hopes revived as he read of the appointment of Owen Davies and John Hughes. <sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to say when the work actually began in North Wales; for, in addition to the facts already mentioned, it has to be taken into account that there were enrolled in the Chester Circuit in 1793, 7 members at Denbigh, as well as members at Mold, Penymynydd, Caergwrle, and Wrexham. The members at Denbigh were: Evan and Judith Roberts, Henry and Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Wynn, Phœbe Wilkinson, Elizabeth Jones.

The following Societies were handed over to the pioneers soon after their arrival: Wrexham, Rackery (Caergwrle), and Northop. In 1803 a further cession of territory was made, when Wrexham was taken from Ruthin and made the head of a Circuit. Whitchurch and the surrounding villages were then taken from Chester and allotted to Wrexham, the Chester staff of preachers being reduced from three to two.

Owen Davies remained at Ruthin for four years, and was then appointed to the newly formed Circuit of Denbigh, with authority over North Wales work in general. It was on the first of January, 1802, that the two Missionaries opened the first Wesleyan Chapel in Denbigh, and in May, 1804, that the first Welsh District Meeting was held in the same town. This extension of

---

1. The particulars in this section are derived from the following sources:—  
*Life of the Rev. Owen Davies, Mag.*, 1832.  
 An article by Rev. Isaac Jenkins (*City Road Mag.*, 1871, p. 513.)  
*The Methodist Recorder, Xmas number, 1892, p. 76.*

Methodism in North Wales, though it curtailed the territory of the Chester Circuit, proved the commencement of a great work for GOD in the wide area reaching from Chester to Holyhead. In seven years no fewer than twenty-five young Welshmen were called out into the itinerant work. One whom GOD greatly blessed was John Bryan. He had been an assistant to the Misses Williams in their business, and had received much spiritual help from George Morley. He was converted in Chester in 1798. He entered the ministry in 1801, and was spared for long service. He preached in St. John Street Chapel in the year 1855.

It was not long before a Chapel was opened in Wrexham. The opening sermon was published, the title page reading as follows:—

*God shining forth from between the Cherubim. A Sermon preached at the Opening of the Methodist-Chapel, Bridge Street, Bolton, On Sunday, September 30th, 1804; and at the Opening of the Methodist-Chapel in Wrexham, on Tuesday, January 1st, 1805, by Samuel Bradburn. (T. Garner, Minerva Printing Works, Bolton, 1805.)*

At this same period the work of GOD was extended upon the other side of the Circuit. In 1798 Mr. Joseph Janion, afterwards the historian of Chester Methodism, came to reside at Mouldsworth. He was then in his prime, for he was born on October 16th, 1750, at Parkside Farm, within a quarter of a mile of Aston Hall near Frodsham. The family, always reverent and well-ordered, learned vital religion from Mr. John Gardner, the well-known preacher who afterwards became Mr. Janion's brother-in-law. In 1773 Mr. Joseph Janion joined the Society at Little Leigh, then in the



Liverpool Circuit. Rev. John Hampson, senior, was the leader of the class and amongst the members were Daniel Barker and Ralph Kinsey. His actual conversion took place in 1774, at a prayer meeting held by William Shone of Northwich. In 1774 Mr. Janion began to lead a class at Preston Brook, and in 1775 gathered a dozen members at Overton, and two years afterwards formed a class at Norley, where a chapel was erected in 1779. In 1780, Mr. Janion married and settled upon a farm at Weston near Runcorn, where he was visited by Thomas Hanby, travelling preacher from Liverpool. In 1787 a Chapel was commenced at Kingsley; when the friends there were involved in difficulties Mr. Janion and Mr. Pugh, of New Pale, came to the rescue and finished it at their joint expense. In 1790 he removed to Bradley Orchard, whither the Methodist preachers again followed him. When there he gave land and assisted in the erection of a Chapel in Frodsham, whereby Methodism, which had been more or less in evidence since 1774, became established in the place. In this good work he was joined by his highly esteemed friend Mr. Hayes, of the Salt Works.

It is not surprising that with such a record behind him, Joseph Janion should open his house for preaching at Mouldsworth upon removing thither. The good accomplished by Mr. Janion's labours in connection with country Methodism is illustrated in a contemporary pamphlet. *An account of the Life, Christian Experience and Happy Death of Miss Harbridge, of Mouldsworth, in the County of Chester, who died March 21st, 1804, aged 17 years. Written chiefly by herself, and compiled and arranged by Theophilus Lessey. Chester: Printed by J. Hemingway, 1804.* The preachers specially mentioned

by Miss Harbridge as being helpful to her were John Goodwin and Alexander Suter. Amongst fellow-members she mentioned Sister Buxton and Ralph Rawlinson. She was brought to GOD at the early age of fourteen, but her piety, which was deep and fervent, had only three years in which to manifest itself; for GOD soon called her home. Her funeral sermon was preached at Mr. Janion's by Mr. Lessey. He had frequently visited her and this arrangement was her own choice. Mouldsworth was then in the Northwich Circuit, of which Mr. Lessey was superintendent. This was Theophilus Lessey, *Senior*. His son, afterwards so famous in Methodism, laboured in the same Circuit a few years later. It was not till 1818 that Mouldsworth, with 32 members and a Chapel three years old, passed into the Tarporley section of the Chester Circuit. The old arrangement, geographically unnatural, was no doubt owing to the fact that the little Society was kept up by Mr. Janion, who had no wish to sever his connection with the Circuit of his youth.

Bound up with the pamphlet mentioned are two leaflets:—

*Elegy on the Death of Miss Mary Harbridge, written by Miss E. Brown.*

*Poems on Moral and Divine Subjects, written by the late Miss Mary Harbridge, and found amongst her papers after her decease. Corrected and arranged by Miss E. Brown, of Tarvin.*

From the latter are taken the following lines:—

NIGHT.

See! the dark clouds begin to fly,  
And hover o'er the western sky,  
And night in sable robes array'd  
Doth the fair realms of day invade:

The Sun hath shut its glories in,  
 And gloom pervades each pleasing scene ;  
 Thick darkness creeps along the ground,  
 And awful stillness reigns around :  
 Bright Sun of righteousness, O may  
 No horrors shade our mental day ;  
 No darkness intercept thy light,  
 Or plunge us in eternal night.  
 Conduct by thine all-cheering rays  
 Our souls to glory's cloudless blaze,  
 Where no thick glooms infest the skies ;  
 But day, uninterrupted day,  
 Shall chase the shades of night away.

Miss E. Brown is in all probability to be identified with the Elizabeth Brown who married Joseph Robinson (Wesleyan Minister), at Tarvin, May 28th, 1814. Her husband says of her parents that "they were known to many of the preachers who have travelled in the Chester Circuit, in whose house they have published the Gospel of JESUS for several years."

Another convert of the Mouldsworth services, under a sermon preached by John Reece, brother of Rev. R. Reece, was Elizabeth Done who was born at Marton Lodge, near Over, in 1798. She was then visiting the Janion family, to which she soon became closely attached as the wife of Charles Janion, the historian's son. The latter was born at Bradley Orchard, July 5th, 1796. The first nine years of his ministry were spent in the West Indies. He died in 1871 after a long period of supernumeraryship, several years of which were usefully spent in Chester.

In the later years of his life Mr. Joseph Janion also resided in Chester. He found great delight in telling the new generation about the many privileges

he had enjoyed of hearing Wesley, and in recounting his experiences at some of the great centres of early Methodism. It is said that he was in the company of Wesley and others when the building of Oldham Street Chapel, Manchester, was determined. He lived to a patriarchal age, dying in 1838 in his 88th year. It was in 1833 that he published a little book so often referred to in these pages.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting and valuable, but one cannot help feeling that if Mr. Janion had only taken up the work ten years earlier he might have left us a book of the greatest importance.

**1800: Samuel Botts; James Gill; James Penman.**

Under the ministry of Mr. Gill a gracious revival took place. One of the converts was Roger L. Phillips, in whom the work of grace was apparent throughout a period of seventy years. He passed away in Chester in 1864.

**1801: Alexander Suter; John Kershaw; James Gill.**

Removal expenses were more than the Circuit could bear. In the *Minutes* of 1802 a grant appears for the removal of Mr. Kershaw from Edinburgh to Chester £8 8s. od.; and Mr. Gill from Chester to Lynn, £5 14s. od.

**1802: Alexander Suter; Joseph Cooke; George Lowe.**

Suter had literary ambitions, and during his residence in Chester the following was published,

---

1. Its full title is:—

*Some account of the Introduction of Methodism into the City, and some parts of the County of Chester; together with brief biographical sketches of several eminent characters connected therewith. By J. Janion, Senior, of Chester. Chester: Printed by Evans & Son, Foregate Street.*

with a preface dated Alpraham, November 22nd, 1802:—

*Death, Judgment, and Eternity! A Poem, in three parts. By Alex. Suter.*

A verse may find him who a sermon flies,  
And turn delight into a sacrifice. Herbert.

*Chester: Printed by Broster and Son, 1803.  
(Price Sixpence.)*

This poem of some thirty pages deals with the weighty matters enumerated on the title page in vivid and realistic fashion. Amongst the saints John Wesley has a place, and is honoured as the author's spiritual guide.

The day be bless'd my wand'ring feet were led,  
Within the house of prayer, thy house to tread.  
'Twas in thine absence, when a worthy son,  
By Heav'n instructed, and by thee led on,  
Who truth proclaimed, and offered mercy free,  
That won my youthful heart to God and thee;  
Informed my soul the fatal snare to shun,  
And taught my feet the race of life to run.  
By thee encouraged what to be and do,  
And how my own and others' good pursue;  
A social charge to me at first assigned,  
Engaged my docile, free, but timid mind,  
Then at thy pleasure I was called abroad,  
The will to publish of our dying God.  
My sphere enlarged more good to do and get,  
Amongst thy favour'd sons my humble name was set.

Mr Strachan, in the book already referred to, says:

To Mr. Lowe this was a year of much discouragement. The circuit enjoyed peace, the congregations were good, the lay-officers were united and zealous, yet there seemed to be no increase of religion and few converts from the world. Everything moved on heavily. There did not seem to be remissness

anywhere: and yet there was obviously a great want of power and vitality. Before the end of the year it was discovered that Mr. Joseph Cooke, one of Mr. Lowe's colleagues, had been cautiously, but effectually, counteracting the work of God, and subverting the faith of the people. He had embraced peculiar views of Justification by Faith, and the Witness of the Spirit: and under the pretext of defending these cardinal doctrines, as expounded by Mr. Wesley and incorporated in his writings, he virtually denied them. . . . The late Rev. Edward Hare published a volume in the epistolary form, in which the theological errors of Mr. Cooke were fully exposed and ably refuted. . . . Mr. Hare showed that Mr. Wesley and Mr. Cooke were at issue on all the points embraced in their respective definitions. . . . Mr. Hare then proves, that Mr. Cooke's sentiments, on this doctrine, were as much opposed to Scripture as they were to the writings of Mr. Wesley. . . . While Mr. Cooke was associated with Mr. Lowe, in the Chester Circuit, he acted with considerable reserve; but, subsequently, he publicly avowed and defended his principles, which led to his expulsion from the Wesleyan Connexion. <sup>1</sup>

#### 1803-4: Francis West; James Townley.

In a letter written from Chester on the 6th July, 1805, to a young preacher named Daniel Isaac, Dr. Townley refers to an illness from which he was then recovering, and incidentally makes some significant remarks about the state of the work in Chester.

Disputes still run high in Chester. Many are determined not to be the dupes of two or three rich men who would not scruple to sacrifice the cause of God to retain their power. May the Lord direct us!

---

1. Materials exist sufficient to give a fairly full account of the points at issue; but such discussions are little to the taste of modern Methodists, and lie beyond the scope of this book. For Cooke's later course see Jessop's *Methodism in Rossendale*, p. 186.

Dr. Townley rose to considerable eminence in Methodism and enriched the literature of his Church.

That Francis West was a ready writer appears from his numerous contributions to the Methodist Magazine of his time. The records of Methodists dying in the LORD within the bounds of the Circuit were never so faithfully transmitted to the editor as during his superintendency. Some of these may also be read in Mr. West's own handwriting in the old Circuit register. During his residence in Chester he brought to fruition a more ambitious literary enterprise. *An historical and practical Discourse on the Sabbath Day, wherein the Origin and End of its Institution are considered; with directions to keep it holy. By Francis West, Preacher of the Gospel. Chester: Printed for the Author by J. Hemingway; and sold by W. Baines, no. 54, Paternoster Row, London; and by E. Bayley, Macclesfield. Price Two Shillings and Threepence, in Board, 1805.*

The preface is dated Chester, April 9th, 1805. The book contains 204 pages and consists of extracts, classified, from 200 authors, ancient and modern. It is now very rare. The copy quoted is in the Birkenhead Public Library.

#### **1805—6: Robert Miller; Thomas Preston.**

One of the most remarkable revivals of religion ever experienced in the neighbourhood rewarded the work of these men. Public attention was aroused, and numbers flocked to the Octagon Chapel to hear the word of GOD. The fire extended to other parts of the Circuit, and it was afterwards computed that during the progress of this revival nearly three hundred persons were added to the various Societies within its

borders. The *Minutes* of subsequent years shew that the work of GOD had been permanently extended by these showers of blessing.

The following pamphlet was doubtless written to meet the case of those who were impressed by the revival, but were ignorant of the Methodist system of doctrine. *A Small Sketch of several Scriptural Doctrines, which are taught amongst the Methodists; addressed to Penitent Sinners of every Denomination. To which is added, A Letter to a Deist. By Robert Miller, Chester: Printed by J. Hemingway, 1807.*

With this spiritual progress was associated material prosperity, and the increased zeal of the Society made practicable a building scheme which had long been desirable. In 1806 a school was erected on the west side of the passage leading from Foregate Street to the Chapel, on land belonging to the Trustees. A new house was built for the second preacher, and the house of the Superintendent was enlarged. A new deed was executed on the nineteenth of July, 1806, appointing the following Trustees:—

- (a) From the old Trust: George Lowe, senior; Richard Bruce; John Gardner; James Wooldridge.
- (b) New Trustees resident in Chester: George Lowe, junior, Goldsmith; Edward Jones, Brazier; Thomas Jones, Pawnbroker; Samuel Beckett, Waggoner; Robert Parry, Carrier; Samuel Williams, Linen Draper.
- (c) New Trustees from the country: Samuel Hitchen, Farmer, Alpraham; Joseph Janion, Gentleman, Mouldsworth: John Reece,



Farmer, Brereton Park, Tarporley ; Thomas Shone, Gentleman, Kinnerton ; Daniel Lea, Gentleman, Kinnerton ; George Pugh, Farmer, New Pale, Delamere Forest ; Samuel Wilkinson ; John Lea ; Matthew Tutin, Cheese Factor, Tarporley.

Each of these nineteen Trustees, was, when the deed was executed, a member of Society.

The new deed did not contain the provision embodied in the old one against the holding of service during Church hours. There was nothing therefore to prevent the gratification of the wish of the majority of the members ; the hours of service were accordingly changed from 8 to 10-30 in the morning, the evening service remained at 6 as before, and an additional service was arranged for at 2 in the afternoon. The privilege of receiving the Sacrament at the hands of their own preachers in their own place of worship was also accorded to the members ; and they had now no longer to repair to the Parish Church, the Independent Chapel, or the New Connexion Chapel, for that means of grace.

**1807 : Matthew Lumb ; Anthony Seckerson ; John Reynolds, Junr.**

**1808-9 : John Ogilvie ; Samuel Warren.**

**1810-11 : John Braithwaite ; Isaac Muff.**

It was probably in 1808 that Dr. Adam Clarke, the great Bible scholar, wrote as follows at Chester, on his return from the Irish Conference :—

. . . from Bangor Ferry to St. Asaph, and thence to Holywell and this city, where we arrived after one. Never have I felt myself so exhausted. In the last two stages I was

nearly knocked up. My whole vital energy seems nearly gone; and I would sacrifice not a little to be in London, as I have seriously feared whether I shall not be laid up. I suppose it is the effect of fatigue and anxiety and that a day or two of rest will restore me. But where should I get rest? Here am I among perfect strangers; and the cry is Preach, Preach. I have promised to preach to-morrow morning.

Perhaps it was on this occasion that young Thomas Hulse of Winsford, hearing that Dr. Clarke was advertised to preach in Chester on a certain Sunday, was seen trudging in the small hours of the Sunday morning across Delamere Forest, with his old umbrella under his arm, though he had been hard at work till late on the Saturday night. His journey of seventeen miles to Chester seemed a trifle. He heard the Doctor, walked home at night, and at midnight went straight to work again rejoicing, without an hour of rest.

Dr. Clarke does not seem to have visited Chester often, but he was through the city in 1832 shortly before his death.

In 1808 Neston was made a separate station, the following entries appearing in the *Minutes*:—

1808: Neston, Thomas Biggins; James Holroyd, Missionary.

The former retired the next year for want of health, and soon died.

1809: Neston, James Hyde; Edward Hollis.

1810: Neston, a Missionary to be sent. The Neston Missionary to act under the Chester Superintendent, and to change occasionally with the Chester Preachers. 107 members were reported for the previous year. These, no doubt, belonged in part to the villages adjacent to Neston.





THE OLD CHAPEL AT NESTON.  
Indicated by Arrow.

1811: Neston Mission, Porteus Haswell. (The directions repeated.) Mr. Haswell did not fulfil this appointment, for though it was given him on the recommendation of the preachers of the Newcastle District, he had not finally made up his mind to be a Methodist preacher. His date in Methodist records will be seen to be 1812. He had a very long and useful career in the work. It should be mentioned that Mr. Haswell's christian name was Partis, to which John was often prefixed though it did not belong to him.

1812: Neston Mission, Thomas Morton. (The directions repeated). (97 members).

1813: Neston Mission, Francis C. Reed, who is to be under the direction of the Chester Superintendent. (92 members.) <sup>1</sup>

---

1. The following facts may conveniently be added here:—In 1814 the Neston Mission ceased to appear as such in the *Minutes*; but an additional preacher, Joseph Roberts, was sent to the Chester Circuit. His name has been already mentioned as marrying one of the Williams family. The next year this third preacher is dropped. On the earliest plan of the Circuit which has been available for this history (1817), Neston was supplied on alternate Sundays from Chester and Liverpool. From the plan of the Liverpool North Circuit for 1848 it appears that the same arrangement was still in operation then. On the formation of the Birkenhead Circuit in 1851 Neston was included therein. Unhappily, however, the work did not prosper; in 1858 the old Chapel passed into Presbyterian hands, and for many years Wesleyan Methodism was not represented in the neighbourhood. In 1899 the Rock Ferry Circuit acquired an iron Church in a commanding position and there is now good prospect of a strong cause being established there. The old Chapel, now sadly out of repair, is no longer devoted to religious purposes. It will save the reader from possible confusion to note that it is situated between Neston and Parkgate, and is identical with "the small house just built" mentioned on page 53.

## Some Family Histories, and Notable Conversions.

---

During these last years at the Octagon Chapel Methodism in the City of Chester received several valuable accessions from the Methodist Church which had been founded in the house of Richard and Elizabeth Williams at Rackery. A brief account of this worthy couple, their children and descendants, is all that can be attempted here; but in this will appear some of the most notable names in the annals of our Church. The first member of the family coming within the purview of this work is Mr. John Williams. Bereft of both parents at an early age, he was, when old enough, put to service; the place found for him being, happily, in a home where GOD was worshipped and feared. Subsequently he resided with a Presbyterian family at Newmarket (Flints.), and eventually returned to Cheshire, where he first heard the Methodists. After his doubts and fears concerning them were overcome he became a steady adherent, and was one of the first in the County to give in his name as a member of the Methodist Society. He was so eager to hear the word, that he would frequently travel fifteen or twenty miles after a hard day's labour to hear a sermon.

Richard Williams, born about 1737, was a son of the foregoing John Williams, and was another of the early triumphs of grace in Tattenhall. His conversion was on this wise:—being one day in the smith's shop when but a lad, a neighbour jeeringly asked him whether his father still “went to pray dark prayers with Dr Smith,” referring to the Mr. Samuel Smith of

whose labours mention has been made on an earlier page. Mr. Bruce, the neighbour in question, affected to despise him for his want of a classical education. Young Williams had no idea what was meant by "dark prayers," but the words excited his curiosity and were remembered. One day he was passing a cockpit surrounded by a great concourse of people on their knees vehemently cursing and swearing. This, he thought, must be what Mr. Bruce meant by "praying dark prayers"; on his return he told his father all about it, and received a deeply impressive lesson on spiritual prayer. After this incident, though under religious concern, he was prevailed upon to accompany some acquaintances to Chester Races. The ungodliness and vice he saw there made him wretched and he escaped as soon as he could. Not long after this he became a member, being brought in with many others in a remarkable revival. It is interesting to note that Mr. Bruce was afterwards converted through the preaching of the very man he had so despised.

When about twenty-five years of age Richard Williams removed to Rackery, near Gresford, on the borders of Wales, between Chester and Wrexham. Within three years of settling there he married Elizabeth, younger daughter of Mr. Richard Gardner, of Yew Tree House, Tattenhall Wood, thus becoming the brother-in-law of the valiant local preacher, John Gardner, whose labours have already been described. The marriage took place at Clapham, where Miss Gardner was then residing, the officiating Clergyman being the Rev. William Romaine. At Rackery Mr. Williams soon established preaching on his own

premises, and was a class leader in his own house for over half a century. He never preached in the strict sense of the term, but he sometimes exhorted. The home was hospitable in the extreme, and Mr. Williams supported the Wesleyan preachers for one day in every fortnight, though his resources were at one time taxed by the support of his uncle and mother.

Mrs. Williams, who was born February 23rd, 1746, had been the last of her family to join the Methodists. Her choice gifts of song had won for her much social recognition, especially from the clergyman and his family; and whenever there was a party at the parsonage Miss Elizabeth Gardner was sure to be of the number and was generally honoured to dance with the clergyman. But the pious influences of the home prevailed at length with her also, and she was but seventeen when she renounced the friendship of the world. At the age of twenty-one she entered upon the duties of married life and proved a most valuable helpmeet to her husband for many years. Her life was full of devoted labour for the material and spiritual prosperity of her husband and the large family she bore him, distance from school causing the chief care of the children to devolve upon their mother. Mr. Williams died in 1816 in his 79th year. Mrs. Williams was also spared to a good old age and passed away at Radcliffe in 1824. An obituary notice in the Magazine, signed G. M., said:—"Few persons have been more uniform in their walk with GOD; and her end was in perfect correspondence with her life. Having lived to see her children and her children's children planted in the house of the LORD she died in perfect peace."



Mr. and Mrs. Williams were happy in their children and were amply repaid for any labour they bestowed upon them. Of the ten children born to them one died in infancy; but the others were all spared and all rose to positions of honour and usefulness in the Christian Church.

*Margaret* was selected by her parents to commence a drapery business in Shoemakers' Row, Northgate Street, Chester. There she followed the example of the home at Rackery, and appropriated one room in the house for the purpose of public prayer and weekly meetings for the spiritual good of her neighbours: an act the moral courage of which under all circumstances cannot be too highly praised. It is gratifying to know that the enterprise, in which afterwards others of the sisters were also engaged, was attended with remarkable success, and the establishment of the Misses Williams was for many years well known and respected in the city. In 1796 Miss Margaret Williams married Mr. John Copner Williams, a lawyer, of Denbigh. To them was born one son, and one daughter, who married the Rev. Thomas Wynne Edwards, a clergyman of Rhuddlan. Dr. Warren, in the book referred to below, gives a full account of the happy death of Mrs. J. C. Williams, which took place in 1799.

*Anne* was born at Rackery in 1778, and early learned to love the way of godliness, finding in the frequent visits of the preachers a means of intellectual and religious improvement. The hospitable home of Mr. Williams, situated in the midst of a group of villages, undertook more than its fair share of the burdens of hospitality,

and received in consequence more of the light which these devoted men diffused wherever they went. As the business in Northgate Street developed Anne was sent to help her sisters. Under their influence the work of grace went on and she soon received the spirit of adoption. It was in Chester that she became acquainted with the remarkable man who afterwards became her husband. The later doings of Mr. Warren are well known to all students of Methodist controversies, and need not be described here. He was at this time entering upon his ministerial career, and in marrying him Anne Williams renounced the comforts of a settled home and bright commercial prospects. Her course as a preacher's wife was marked by much faithfulness and devotion. In 1812 at Macclesfield she was visited with a severe bodily affliction which brought her to the very gates of death. Her recovery constituted "as remarkable an answer to prayer as perhaps can be equalled in modern days." After residence in Glasgow, Chester, and Sunderland, Dr. and Mrs. Warren removed to London, where the latter died in great peace on December 2nd, 1823. A funeral sermon was preached at Chelsea by her brother-in-law, the Rev. George Morley. <sup>1</sup>

*Mary* married Mr. Richard Bealey, a bleacher, of Radcliffe, near Manchester. When a widow she built at her own cost what was considered to be at the time the prettiest Chapel in Methodism. She was the first

---

1. Dr. Warren paid his wife's memory a noble and eloquent tribute in a little volume from which many particulars about the family have been gathered; *Memoirs and Select Letters of Mrs. Anne Warren*. (Second Edition, 1832.) The celebrated author of *The Diary of a late Physician*, and *Ten Thousand a Year*, was a son of Dr. Warren.

person to give as much as a thousand pounds in one sum to the Foreign Missionary Society. Dr. Osborn says :—" I have seldom, if ever, known a Christian rich in this world more observant of St. Paul's rule, ' Ready to distribute ; Willing to communicate,' or one whose conduct in this respect has been so influential." Mrs. T. Percival Bunting of Manchester was Mrs. Bealey's only daughter. The Bealeys were related to the celebrated Marsden family, which gave a President to the Methodist Connexion and several useful Clergymen to the Establishment. Richard Reece and Dr. Townley found their wives in that family.

*Elizabeth* married the Rev. George Morley of whom mention has been made already in connection with his appointment to the Chester Circuit. Her husband's last appointment was to the pastoral and domestic oversight of the school at Woodhouse Grove, a position in which Mrs. Morley's gifts found full scope. It is said that when she went there she found great waste of milk, so she went to Rackery to find out how to convert it into cheese, and in this way saved much for the school. The late Dr. Gregory, whose facility in characterization the Methodist people know so well, was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Morley and said :—" She was truly a fine character, well worthy of her three famous Methodist sisters, the saintly Mrs. Dr. Warren, the majestic and munificent Mrs. Bealey of Radcliffe Close, and Mrs. Joseph Roberts, the happy, loving, ever-working, ever-rejoicing, Methodist minister's wife." (From a letter published in the biography of Mr. H. B. Harrison of Manchester.) George Morley and Elizabeth Williams were married at

the Parish Church of Wrexham. Their choice of a wedding trip was highly characteristic of them both. They chartered a post chaise to Madeley to see Mrs. Fletcher, and had helpful spiritual converse with her. Mrs. Morley's daughter Eliza was born in one of the top rooms of the shop in Northgate Street, and was employed by her Aunts until she married Matthew Harrison, who was in the same employment and eventually succeeded to the business. Of the husband and son of Mrs. Harrison more is said on another page. She died in Chester in 1861. Her daughter Eliza married a good Methodist over the border, Mr. John Gittins, who was born at Cefn, near Wrexham, in 1822. He did much to help local Methodism and was steward of the Wrexham Circuit when he passed away in 1887. Mrs. Gittins survived till September, 1902, when she passed away at the age of 77 leaving behind her in the Wrexham Circuit a consistent reputation for kindness and hospitality extending over half a century. Three of her daughters were married to Wesleyan Ministers, and another is the wife of a distinguished agent of the London Missionary Society. Mrs. Gittins' eldest daughter married the Rev. Dr. Wenyon, and her death, which took place about twelve months before her mother's, was a great blow to her.

*Martha* was married on August 11th, 1818, to the Rev. Joseph Roberts, whose first appointment was to Neston in 1814. Mrs. Roberts died in 1859 at Bradford-on-Avon, aged 71. Her husband, who must be carefully distinguished from the notable Indian Missionary and Oriental scholar of the same name (1818-1849), survived till 1874. A daughter of theirs, Mrs. Edmund Hill, is now passing a quiet eventide at Ealing.

*Phyllis* married Mr. John Downes, and died at her own residence, Islington Square, Manchester, aged 57. A tablet to her memory may be seen in St. John Street Chapel.

*Samuel* was an influential Methodist in Chester, where he was in business as a draper, apparently with his sisters. His son John was a draper in Frodsham, and there Mrs. Samuel Williams resided in her widowhood. Two of the sons of Mr. John Williams, of Frodsham, are clergymen of the Established Church, and have acquired the old home at Rackery.

*John* was a draper in Wrexham, and was largely instrumental in founding or consolidating Methodism in Wrexham and district, especially in Oswestry. His daughter Mary became the first wife of Mr. T. C. Jones of Wrexham, and was the mother of the late wife of the Rev. Richard Harding, whose son, the Rev. R. Winboulton Harding, is also a Wesleyan minister.

*Richard* was a farmer, first at Rackery, and then at Greenwalls, near Dodleston. He had several children: Dutton, his son, was on the St. John Street trust; Richard, another son, had the shop which is now in the name of Hodges in Eastgate Row. Of the daughters, Phyllis became the second wife of Mr. T. C. Jones, and died in 1899 leaving three daughters; another, Elizabeth, married Rev. William Wilson (b), often known as Captain Wilson. She left two daughters: Mrs. William Walker of Whitehaven; and Mrs. Peter Thompson of Keswick.

Yet another daughter of Mr. Richard Williams of Greenwalls married a Mr. Moss. His son Samuel, who

died at Rowton in 1900, married a daughter of Mr. Ambrose Williams, draper of Eastgate Street, whose shop was subsequently taken over by Oakes & Griffiths. This marriage brought together two families of the name of Williams which were otherwise quite distinct except for some distant connexion through the Gardners. The private house of Mr. Ambrose Williams was situated in Boughton and was known as Vine House. There is a persistent tradition in the family that Wesley used to stay at the next house. Mr. T. H. Williams, the brother of Mrs. Samuel Moss, with some companions, used to conduct cottage services in the villages around Chester. He afterwards settled in Sligo and did much for his adopted town, of which he was at one time Mayor. He was faithful to Methodism and refused a bribe of £3000 to vote on the wrong side, as he considered it, at a Parliamentary election. One of the companions of his early evangelistic tours was the son of a Cheshire farmer, and was then serving his time with Mr. Dean, woollen draper, Eastgate Row. He afterwards went to College, entered the Church, went abroad, married the daughter of a Dean, and eventually became a Colonial Bishop. (O)

The following letters will be read with interest. Mrs. Warren, writing from Chester on February 2nd, 1809, to her sister, Mrs. Bealey, said:—

Many awful visitations of Providence have occurred in this city lately; especially, two fires; one of them, of which you have perhaps heard, was in the sugar-house, in Cuppins Lane: the other in Hop-pole yard, which is one of the most disastrous that has happened for many years. Many tradesmen in the city are sufferers. Providentially my sisters have sustained no loss by it, Only two days ago Gresford Mills

also were burned down; the particulars of which have not yet transpired. Whilst the judgments of the LORD are abroad in the earth, you will rejoice to know that the work of GOD is prospering here. I, at present, occupy your place in Mr. Howie's class, which is now so crowded that the place in which it meets is too small to contain us. Mr. H. is more alive to GOD than ever.

Writing to the same sister from Macclesfield, December 2nd, 1810, she said:—

I received a letter from my sister Martha, in which she gives an account of the conversion of our dear Eliza. She is now rejoicing in a sense of the pardoning love of GOD! The particulars which led to so blessed a result will, no doubt, be communicated to you soon. She was enabled to believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, to the justification of her soul, at a meeting for prayer in our house at Chester; after having attended the ministry of the Rev. Owen Davies, at the Octagon Chapel. How GOD still honours that house in the conversion of sinners!

Prominent in all this evangelistic activity was George Walker the earlier, who had joined the Methodist Society in Chester in 1763. He must be carefully distinguished from the gentleman of the same name who was the first Steward of St. John Street Chapel, whose manuscript account of the beginnings of Chester Methodism is often referred to in these pages. The two were contemporary for some time, but the first was much older than the second, and died two years before the erection of the present Chapel. George Walker the earlier was a native of Chester, the son of well-to-do parents. He served his time with Mr. Richardson, then the principal Goldsmith in the City. During a subsequent period of residence in the Metropolis he was brought to conviction under the stirring ministry

of the Rev. William Romaine, M.A. His return journey to Chester was broken at Birmingham by a visit to his brother John who was a member of the Methodist Society. Acting under the advice he received in Birmingham, George lost no time in connecting himself with the Methodist Society on his return to Chester. It was not, however, until he had enjoyed Methodist fellowship for some time that the young man entered into conscious peace with God. The circumstances attending his deliverance from doubt and fear have been left on record. A deep impression was made upon him by John Hampson's sermon at the opening of the Octagon Chapel. A little later during a service of praise and prayer held at the house occupied by a daughter of Mr. Owen Williams the words were sung:—

“Yes, LORD, I shall see the bliss of Thine own,  
 Thy secret to me shall soon be made known;  
 For sorrow and sadness, I joy shall receive,  
 And share in the gladness of all that believe.”

At that moment the heart of George Walker was filled with joy and peace, and he received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. He cried aloud:—He is come, He is come, My Beloved is mine, and I am His.

The subsequent career of George Walker was highly honourable. In due time he entered into business as a Goldsmith and eventually succeeded his old master Mr. Richardson. He became a Local Preacher and did much good in the neighbourhood. In later years, when his business was well established, he went further afield and preached in many parts of



Wales, in Manchester, Liverpool, Burslem, and other places. In the prosecution of the work he underwent much toil and often encountered the rage of evil men. Mr. Walker obtained a very honourable position in the public life of the City; he would not however allow himself to be nominated as Mayor. In 1767 he married Miss Sarah Bagg. His children and friends could not persuade him to sit for his portrait until they were able to plead the claims of charity in the case of a gifted, but needy, artist. The painting of the picture was attended by a very remarkable incident. The veteran Local Preacher spoke to the painter during the first sitting about the value of true religion. So far from being offended the artist introduced the subject himself at the second sitting and listened attentively to what Mr. Walker had to say. Suddenly a change passed over the artist's face. Mr. Walker exclaimed, "Are you well, Sir"? He had scarcely uttered the words when the pencil flew from the painter's hand, the palette fell to the ground, and the man sank helpless on the floor. Medical assistance was obtained, but the artist passed away in a few hours. Mr. Walker was deeply impressed by this event and was thankful that he had made such good use of the opportunity of pointing this man to the Saviour. The picture, unfinished, and disfigured by a mark from the pencil as it flew from the artist's hand, remained in Mr. Walker's possession.

Mr. Walker passed away March 8th, 1809. His testimony in his last illness was:—

I consider it a very great mercy that I am free from all pain. As to everything else, I am well persuaded, that his covenant with me is well ordered and sure. I can say nothing of my life, but that my best performances needed washing in the

Blood of the Redeemer: but I hope, and am sure, God will accept of my feeble endeavours to glorify His name. I can say with the Royal Psalmist, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." My whole dependence is upon the Atonement CHRIST has made for me. There I rest.

Sincere affection existed between Mr. Walker and the Rev. John Gaulter, who entered the ministry from Chester, and in 1817 rose to the chair of the Conference. Mr. Gaulter preached his friend's funeral sermon at the Octagon Chapel, which was crowded for the occasion by one of the largest congregations ever assembled in it, comprehending some of the first inhabitants in the city. He also wrote a three-chapter obituary in the Magazine for 1813. Of Mr. Walker's distinguished services as a preacher many records remain. Again and again in the old Magazines testimonies come to light as to his power as a preacher at the Octagon and elsewhere.

On the Thursday before George Walker died an aged Methodist awoke at three in the morning and said: "My friend Mr. Walker is either gone or going, for I have been with him in a very spacious and delightful place! We shall soon be together." And so it came to pass. For this was old Colin Robinson who died on March 16th, 1809, after a most remarkable career. Born in Scotland about 1729, in 1751 he enlisted, and was ordered to North America, and continued there and in the West Indies till the end of the war with France. In 1757 he was made a serjeant and remained so for 46 years. He passed unscathed through a great many battles and sieges till at New Orleans he was so severely wounded as to be fit for

active service no longer. This led to his appointment as a serjeant in the garrison at Chester, where he became very useful to the Methodist Society. His last years were spent in civil life and he gained the reputation of being generous and self denying to a degree.

In 1789 Mrs. Jordan, the celebrated actress, was fulfilling a professional engagement in Chester. A curious incident brought her into contact with this eccentric old pensioner who then kept a flour warehouse at the bottom of Bridge Street. The lady was taking shelter from a shower of rain in Pemberton's Parlour on the Walls. A poor widow, the mother of three children, followed her there, and kneeling down profusely thanked her for her benevolence for having a few days before paid her debt and secured her release from prison. Old Robinson witnessed the scene and addressed the actress, saying he wished all the world was like her. At first Mrs. Jordan refused to shake hands with him: "Well, well, you are a good old soul, I daresay, but—ah—I don't like fanatics; and you will not like me when I tell you who I am, I am a player." An understanding of mutual respect was arrived at and the two walked away together.

*Mrs. Jordan and the Methodist* is the name given to a *Drama in Two Acts*, contained in a volume of *Original Dramas* by James Plumptre, B.D., Vicar of Great Gransden, Hunts., and formerly Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, 1818.<sup>1</sup> The author has nothing but praise for the characters who give their names to the play, for

---

1. See article by Rev. F. C. Wright in *W. H. S. Proceedings*, ii., 45.

Boaden's *Life of Mrs. Jordan* confirms the above story. The statement that Robinson was the Methodist concerned in it rests on the authority of Hemingway's *History of Chester*.

the incidents of which he is indebted to a celebrated old book called *Ryley's Itinerant*. The author "admires the charity and generosity of the player, and the charity and liberality of sentiment of the Methodist teacher." The words of Scripture which he adopts as the motto to the piece he considers may have a two-fold application. They may be considered as being spoken by the Methodist, "Can any good thing come out of the theatre"? Or by a friend of the theatre, "Can anything liberal be expected from a Methodist"? To each party it is replied, "Come and see." Mr. Robinson, who seems occasionally to have acted as a local preacher, appears as Mr. Faithful, whose "countenance" and "suit of sable" proclaimed his calling.

One of the last conversions which took place during the Methodist occupancy of the building has been preserved and was on this wise. Two apprentices agreed to spend one Sunday evening in walking about, but happening to pass by the Octagon Chapel they thought they would just go in to hear the text, so as to be provided with proof of their attendance at a place of worship. The lads were duly conducted to a pew, the occupier of which passed them on to the further end and kept them from escaping. The preacher was Isaac Muff, and his text, "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." One of the lads, William Carman, was so impressed that he became a regular attendant and was converted under Braithwaite. He showed the reality of his conversion by such diligence in business that his employer's wife said William was the best apprentice they had ever had. On one occasion he earned eighteen pence by extra work, and

at his class promptly handed over one shilling for his ticket, and sixpence for the "yearly collection," though some one had kindly said he was an apprentice and could not afford it. Removing before long to Wrexham he was there a consistent supporter of the cause till his death in 1844.

Another convert of this period was Mrs. Edwards who was deeply impressed by a sermon at the Octagon by John Braithwaite and became a member of the class led by Henry Bowers. She died in 1872 at the age of 85, having been a missionary collector for 52 years, during which time it is computed she had collected about one thousand pounds.

One conversion which took place in the Octagon Chapel at this period, and may be attributed in the main to the work of George Walker, was destined to have a vital influence upon the evangelistic and educational work of Methodism right down into the twentieth century. One day a youth who had been brought up in the Established Church wandered casually into the Methodist Chapel and was so impressed that he repeated his visit. Before long a sermon by George Walker induced him to attend the class of which he was the leader. The good influences thus brought to bear upon him reached their culminating point in the watchnight service of 1786 when William Moulton gave his heart to God. His parents were at the first astonished and somewhat indignant at their son's union with the Methodists, but in the space of a few years they are both to be found meeting in the class to the leadership of which he had been appointed on the death of John Sellers, Wesley's friend. In 1794

William Moulton entered the itinerant ranks in which he laboured faithfully till his death in 1835. An appointment to London brought about his marriage to Miss Egan, daughter of James Egan, L.L.D., of Greenwich, then an eminent member of the scholastic profession. Mrs. Moulton's mother was the daughter of John Bakewell, a noted early Methodist who died in 1819 aged 98, a tablet to whose memory may be seen in City Road Chapel, London. William Moulton was blessed with more than a dozen children, three of whom entered the ministry., viz. :—

*John Bakewell Moulton, 1830-1837.*

*James Egan Moulton, 1828-1866.*

*Ebenezer Moulton, (A) 1835-1885.* The first of these sons was cut off in the prime of his manhood; the second became the father of the following notable men :—

*Dr. James Egan Moulton*, Principal of Newington College, Sydney, N.S.W., and Ex-President of the New South Wales Conference.

*Dr. William Fiddian Moulton*, President of the Conference, 1890; Tutor at Richmond College; Headmaster of the Leys College; Member of the New Testament Revision Company. Died 1898.

*John Fletcher Moulton, K.C., M.P.* Senior Wrangler.

*Dr. R. G. Moulton*, Professor of English Literature in the University of Chicago. Author of the "Literary Study of the Bible" and several kindred works.

Nor does this complete the list; for Dr. W. F. Moulton's two sons have both entered the ministry:—

*James Hope Moulton, M.A., D. Lit. (Lond.)*

*William Fiddian Moulton, M.A.* <sup>1</sup>

Surely this incident teaches vividly that no service is to be lightly regarded, and that a single conversion may lead to incalculable results.

The last few months in which the Methodists worshipped in the Octagon were rendered noteworthy by the conversion of Henry Bowers, the first Methodist in a family which was to be prominent in Chester Methodism throughout the century. He was a man well-known in the City, being a member of the Corporation, the Captain of a Company in a Regiment of Volunteers, a proprietor of the Theatre, and a manager of the festivities of the trade assembly. Mr. Bowers and his wife had the form of religion without the power of godliness and were engrossed in worldly things until ten months of suffering brought serious thought and anxiety about the things of GOD. As in countless other instances, restored health brought back the old indifference, and it was not for several years that any real change took place. Mr. Bowers then began to attend evangelical preaching wherever he could hear it. The preaching of a Prebendary at the Cathedral was especially blessed to him, but his attachment to the Methodist ministry became the strongest. Much outward improvement was happily associated with this search for light.

---

1. *Magazine*, 1837.

Slugg *Woodhouse Grove, Memorials and Reminiscences*. 1885.

W. F. Moulton: *W. F. Moulton, a Memoir*, 1899.

The visits of Mr. Bowers to the Octagon were made as secretly as possible so as to avoid attracting the attention of the public and of the Methodists themselves. His own expressive phrase was that he practised "Nicodemusing." At length by a providential incident he was brought into the company of Mrs. Samuel Warren (née Ann Williams of Rackery) whose husband was the second preacher on the Circuit. Mrs. Bowers had an apprentice from the country named Burgess. The lad's mother was a Methodist, but the opposition of her husband was so violent that frequent attendance at the means of grace was impossible for her. She, therefore, arranged to come from time to time to Chester to visit her son. Mr. Burgess was furious when he found that she did so in order to attend Methodist services, and before long inserted an advertisement in a local paper to warn tradesmen not to give his wife any credit, stating that she had absconded. Mr. Bowers happened to read this and, wishing to ascertain the address in order to help if possible, set off to inquire from one of the preachers. He took his usual circuitous route to the Octagon premises, on which both of the preachers' houses were then situated.

He sought the younger preacher, probably because Mrs. Warren was a Chester lady with whom he could hardly fail to be acquainted. Mr. Warren was holding a band meeting with Howie, a gunner from the castle, a zealous class leader. The very name "Band Meeting" is unfamiliar to many modern Methodists; but it should not be forgotten that these little gatherings for prayer and intercourse more confidential than even the class meeting permitted, played a great part in







THE METHODIST MAYOR OF 1817 AND 1827.

early Methodism. Mrs. Warren was at home, and to her Mr. Bowers addressed his query. The answer, and the succeeding fortunes of the Burgess family do not concern us, for the visit proved to be the crisis of Mr. Bowers' experience. What took place is thus described by the Rev. John Bowers.

He seized the opportunity in order to disclose the struggle which was then passing within him betwixt light and darkness; the claims of religion and the allurements of the World. "Mr. Bowers," said that excellent woman, "God claims the whole heart, He will not share it with the World." In a lengthened conversation with equal kindness and fidelity, she endeavoured to conduct his mind to that great moment of decision, in which he should become a new Creature in CHRIST JESUS. The momentous crisis was at hand: addressing Mr. Warren, who with other friends had now entered the room, my Father said, "Your excellent wife has been telling me that GOD requires the whole heart, and by His grace, from henceforth He shall have mine." And so effectually did the operation of the grace of GOD overcome every opposing principle, that he added, "I entreat you all to pray for me." The scene which followed shall be described by himself:—I was soon brought to tears, and whilst each in turn wrestled mightily with GOD for me, I roared out for the disquietude of my soul, the powers of Hell seemed to be leagued against me and I knew not what to do to escape their snares and be saved. They urged on me to believe on CHRIST and I endeavoured to do so but Satan hindered me. I became still more excited and struggled until my strength seemed exhausted. But when human aid failed me, GOD worked in me more powerfully. At first peace gently flowed into my soul, but afterwards divine light poured in like a mighty torrent. I was filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I sprang from my knees and exclaimed, "You have all been praying for me, and now I feel that I can praise GOD together with you. I have been ashamed of the Cross of CHRIST, but now I could go to the most public place in the City and tell the people what GOD

hath done for my soul." This concluded this most extraordinary scene. On the next morning another scene followed scarcely less impressive than that of the preceding evening. The family was as usual convened for the purpose of prayer; and after a portion of the Sacred Scriptures had been read, my dear Father, in the most affecting manner, declared to us the great and blessed change which he had experienced. He endeavoured to convince us that it was as necessary for us as for him, and with many tears he exhorted us to seek it. He had been accustomed to use a form of prayer, but now his book was thrown aside, and, to adopt his own language, "I opened my mouth to GOD: the LORD filled it, and gave me great liberty of speech." We all mingled our tears with his; and on that memorable morning impressions were produced upon the minds of several members of the family, which at no distant period issued in their conversion to God.

Dr. Osborn<sup>1</sup> transcribes the entry from the family Bible:—

Henry Bowers, born again of the Spirit, July 16th, 1810.

John Bowers, born again of the Spirit, July 19th, 1810.

Elizabeth Bowers, Jun., died December, 1811, aged 11 years.

Thomas Bowers, received a strong conviction of sin at the time of his brother's conversion; but cannot exactly ascertain when GOD manifested Himself to his soul.

Elizabeth Bowers [afterwards Mrs. Janion]. Her heart was gently opened, as Lydia's.

Soon after his conversion Mr. Bowers was made a class leader; nor was it long before he began to preach, his labours being especially bestowed on various parts of North Wales where an English sermon was rarely heard. His first sermon in Chester attracted many who were not accustomed to attend the Chapel, the spectacle of an alderman occupying a Methodist pulpit being then a great novelty. Faithful to the truth so recently revealed to him, Mr. Bowers adopted as his

---

1. *Memoir of Rev. John Bowers, Mag., 1870.*

text the great saying, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of GOD." Now it was in those days necessary, or at least desirable, that local preachers should take out licences under the Toleration Act. Consequently Mr. Bowers appeared at the Quarter Sessions to obtain the certificate. The ordeal, severe enough in itself, was rendered the harder to bear by the fact that the Alderman had to produce a plan shewing himself to be only "on trial."

Twice did the honours of the Mayoralty of the City fail to Mr. Henry Bowers, in 1817 and 1827; there was some hesitation in his mind about this important matter, but he deemed the office to be one which duty called him to accept. There was much unworthy opposition to his election on the ground that he was a Methodist; it was proposed to him that this would be waived if he would content himself with private membership and leave off preaching. Mr. Bowers made the honourable reply, "No, I esteem it a much greater honour to preach the Gospel than to be Mayor of Chester, and I will make no such stipulation." Dr. Osborn says in his article that, as far as he could learn, Mr. Henry Bowers was the only Methodist thus re-elected, before the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835.<sup>1</sup> The figures in the contest of 1817 were: Seller 271; Bowers 268; Bradford 58. The Aldermen having the right to choose one of the two highest, elected Bowers.

---

1. The earliest instance of a Methodist Mayor seems to have been that of William Parker, at Bedford, 1757 (*W.H.S. Proceedings*, ii., 123). Henry Bowers seems to have been the only Wesleyan Mayor Chester ever had, with the exception of Richard Buckley, who died from cholera during his year of office 1832. See *Magazine*, 1832; and Dyson's *Congleton Methodism*.

The religion to which Mr. Bowers consecrated his years of strength supported him when they were succeeded by years of painful disease, and his faith in GOD never wavered.

It is an interesting circumstance, that to the very close of his life he was permitted to engage in those exercises of piety, and of Christian love, whence through a period of twenty years, he had derived his chief happiness. On the evening preceding his decease he met his class. The fervour and elevation of his feelings, and the energy and fidelity of his addresses, were more than usually impressive. It is remarked by an individual present:—He spake as one standing on the threshold of Heaven, and concluded the description of his own feelings by observing with unusual pathos: I feel most sensibly, and this is what I want each of you to feel,

Every moment, LORD, I need

The merit of the SAVIOUR'S death.

After performing the devotions of the family he retired, intending on the following day to unite with his Christian brethren in the service of public prayer: but at the hour at which they were met to pour forth their supplications in the courts of an earthly sanctuary, he passed to mingle with a more glorious assembly, and to unite in the pure and exalted services of that Temple not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

In St. John Street Chapel is a tablet inscribed as under:—

This tablet is erected in memory of Alderman Henry Bowers, who in the vigorous maturity of his days, renounced the vanities of the world, for the service and reproach of CHRIST. Having twice served his fellowcitizens as Mayor of Chester and accomplished a long period of useful service as a class leader and local preacher in the Methodist Society, and as an assiduous and faithful guardian of the interests of this chapel, he finished his course with joy on the eighth day of January in the year of our LORD 1830, and in the 60th year of

his age. He is remembered with affectionate veneration as a zealous, consistent and devout Christian, as an able active and upright magistrate, as a father wisely kind and eminently successful, as a man in whom great benevolence was combined with quick discernment, and extraordinary ardour with invincible perseverance.

In the same grave repose the earthly remains of Elizabeth his wife, whose amiable character and sterling piety justly endeared her to her family and friends. She died in the LORD on the 26th day of April, 1824, aged 53 years.

Ann Bowers, the sister of Henry Bowers, died August 20th, 1836, aged 74 years.

Of Mr. Bowers as a class leader Mr. W. E. Whitehouse of Birmingham tells the following interesting reminiscence:—

“The Rev. Josiah Goodwin told me that on a visit to Chester in one of the early years of this century, he attended a class meeting led by Mr. Henry Bowers. The leader stood in a desk, and from thence gave his exhortations to the members, in a manner so able, authoritative, and impressive that his youthful hearer never forgot it.”

Mrs. Henry Bowers was at the first chagrined at her husband's Methodism, but she too soon came to know the SAVIOUR. She was converted under the ministry of the Rev. John Braithwaite, and for many years was a devoted class leader.

The Rev. John Bowers was born at Chester on the 19th of June, 1796. It was, therefore, on his fourteenth birthday that his conversion, already recorded, took place, he being then a school-boy spending the summer vacation at home. Opportunity was soon afforded for Christian service, and John Bowers was received as a probationer for the ministry at an unprecedentedly early age. In those days candidates were stationed

immediately on being received, and in the Minutes of 1813 John Bowers appears as the junior preacher in the Northwich Circuit with his father's old friend Samuel Warren as superintendent. The Rev. John Bowers rose to the front rank of Methodist preachers of his day, and after serving his Church in a number of important Circuits, spent the last twenty years of his active ministry as the Governor of the Theological Institution at Didsbury. In 1858 the Conference elected him President. On May the 30th, 1866, he passed peacefully away at Southport whither he retired as Supernumerary in 1864.

It will be convenient to give here a list of certain members of the Bowers family.

*The children of Alderman Henry Bowers were :—*

The Rev. John Bowers.

Elizabeth, who died as a child in 1811.

Thomas Bowers, Steward of St. John Street for a short period when quite a young man (1816), and subsequently from 1831 to his death January 28th, 1848, at the age of 50.

Elizabeth, who married Joseph Janion, junr., died January 5th, 1847, aged 46 years.

*The children of Thomas Bowers were :—*

Thomas Bowers, junr., known as Alderman Bowers, who was Steward at St. John Street from 1848 till his death in 1878.

James Done Bowers, who was Steward at St. John Street from 1878 till his death in 1895.

Henry Richard Bowers, actively associated with the St. John Street Trust, and of later years



with City Road, passed away in his 81st year on May 20th, 1902.

The conversion of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bowers soon led to the conversion of a young lady who had acted as bridesmaid at their marriage, and is described as a beloved and confidential friend, Miss Sarah Broster, daughter of Alderman Peter Broster (Mayor 1791), and granddaughter of a Mayor of Chester already referred to. Her first serious impressions were derived from reading the writings of Mrs. H. A. Rogers, and were confirmed by the influence of her writing master, a Methodist, who had singing and prayer with his pupils. Soon after she began to attend the Octagon some waggish friends, as they were teasing her, begged her to defer preaching until the new chapel was built so as not to endanger lives in the old one. The ministry of Mr. Braithwaite was a blessing to her; a sermon on Nicodemus, Henry Bowers' favourite text, being specially mentioned. In 1813 Miss Broster became a member and was brought into happy association with the devoted Williams sisters. She died in March, 1837, at the age of 66, having never married. A tablet to her memory may be seen in St. John Street Chapel. <sup>1</sup>

On a previous page it has been mentioned that the Rev. George Lowe was perturbed at the sight of two "classical academies" in the congregation; and reference has been made to Mr. John Sellers, local preacher and "instructor of youth"; also to Mr. Hobrow. These educational establishments played a

---

1. Rev. P. C. Turner: *Memoirs of Miss Sarah Broster of Chester*. 1839.

considerable part in the Methodist life of the City, and several conversions more or less closely connected with them are on record. About this period Robert Bentham (minister 1812-1843) was converted in one of them. "He was designed by his parents for the ministry of the Established Church, and enjoyed the benefit of a liberal education. When about twenty years of age, he undertook the duties of Classical Tutor in a private school [presumably in Chester] in which the Rev. John Bowers, at that time a youth, who, together with his parents, had recently been brought to a saving knowledge of GOD by means of the Methodist ministry, was placed as a pupil. The youth became the religious guide of his tutor." He was soon afterwards converted, joined the Methodist Society, and began to preach.

Mr. George Burton, a Methodist of the Manchester District, who died in 1852, often adverted in his later years to the sacred opportunities he enjoyed as a pupil at an academy in Chester. The principal was a local preacher, and the boys committed to his care shared largely in his prayerful anxiety.

Yet another convert may be claimed for the academies. Mr. Charles Simpson who was born at Wilmslow in 1797, was sent to Chester to continue his studies. Under the influence of Alderman Bowers he became a Methodist. He filled many useful positions, and in the course of his career, was a local preacher, class reader, and trustee, residing at Runcorn and at Lymm. He came to Chester in 1837. He died at Bowdon in 1871. Mr. Simpson suffered during the latter part of his life from lameness due to a horse-kick

received when returning from a country appointment.

Full of interest is the following extract from the *Life of John Birchenall, M.R.C.S., of Macclesfield*, by the Rev. A. J. French, B.A.

Dr. Birchenall, who was born at Macclesfield in 1800, says:—

In my fifteenth year my father took me and a younger brother to a respectable commercial and classical school in Chester. . . . Of the gentlemen who had the direction of this establishment and their associates in the tutorship I have a respectful and affectionate remembrance. . . . Twice in the week my evenings were devoted to the acquisition of Hebrew Grammar, under the tuition of a professor of Oriental languages. He was a member of the Independent Congregation in Queen Street, and a capital Hebraist. . . . The most important advantages, however, accruing to me from my sojourn in Chester were of a religious character. My father, in his solicitude for our well being in a moral point of view, had engaged on our behalf the kindly interest of the Misses Williams, and of Mr. Bowers' family, from whom we received tokens of Christian kindness which made a deep impression on our youthful minds; indeed I may say, the conversations, the affectionate counsels, the exemplary walk, the urbanity, the prayers of my new friends were the means, under the divine blessing, of forming my religious character. By the ladies named first I was taken to the class of Mr. Howie, an aged pensioner, and the gunner of the castle, and moreover a valiant soldier of the LORD JESUS. He had a numerous array of members, many of them from the more respectable walks of life, others ship artisans, or persons of kindred occupations; but the simplicity; the pious fervour, the perfect fellowship, which pervaded the whole, could not fail to remind a thoughtful person on his first visits of the primitive forms of Christianity, and to awaken gracious emotions. Of the leader I may just observe, that though I have since known many excellent men, and some who were deeply devoted to GOD, one who lived so much "within the veil" as did Mr. Howie, I have not yet had the happiness to find.

Two of the most notable families mentioned in previous chapters were brought into association when in 1792 George Lowe, junior, married Miss Cawley, the granddaughter of Mr. Stephen Cawley, of the Moat House, Alpraham. It is recorded that Mary Cawley had profited much under the ministry of Costerdine and Fenwick. Mr. Lowe long survived his wife, and passed his later years in fellowship with the New Connexion. A tablet in Pepper Street Chapel is erected in memory of *George Lowe, of this city, Assay Master, who died December 28th, 1841, aged 73. Also Mary Lowe, wife of the above, who died June 22nd, 1819, aged 58. They are both interred at Bunbury.* The youngest of the four daughters of this worthy couple was a convert of the Rev. J. S. Pipe, whose words were blessed to her when he was meeting the class of Miss Martha Williams to which she belonged. She married Mr. J. F. Wathew, and was an active class leader for a long period; for a time at Tipton, and afterwards at Chester. She died Feb. 8th, 1858.<sup>1</sup> It will not be deemed an improper departure from the reticence of this book about living persons to say that the old names appear once more in the case of a recent steward of the Chester Circuit: Mr. Alfred Wathew Butt, son of the late Mr. Alderman Francis Butt and Mrs. Mary Cawley Butt. This devoted Methodist lady last mentioned was the daughter of Mr. J. F. Wathew, and was born at Tipton in 1831, and after a long life of great usefulness passed away in Chester on February 19th, 1898.

---

1. *Mag.* 1861. *A century of family religion: Some Memorials of the late Mrs. Wathew of Chester; with notices of her Mother and Grandmother.* By the Rev. Thomas Brookes.

An older daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Lowe, junior, lived to the remarkable age of 92, and is well remembered by many of the present generation. From a memorial sketch contributed to the Magazine at the time of her death by the Rev. John M. Bamford it is gathered that Mrs. Jane Moss was born in Chester in 1797, and in 1810 was meeting in the class of Miss Martha Williams. She states however that she served GOD as a servant rather than as an adopted child till 1816, when a service conducted by the Rev. G. Smith was greatly blessed to her. Mrs. Moss records that in 1817 the Rev. Elliot Jones, a returned West Indian Missionary, visited his native city, and was the instrument of a wonderful revival in the course of which she received a blessing that abode with her through life. In 1818 Mrs. Moss succeeded Miss Martha Williams as class leader. Her own words are "my beloved leader died"; but Mrs. Moss was writing in extreme age when memory is often treacherous, and at this point she certainly goes astray; for in 1818 Miss Martha Williams married the Rev. Joseph Roberts. It was not long before the class was again robbed of its leader by a minister, the Rev. Thomas Moss, with whom this devoted lady lived till in 1859 she returned to her native city a widow. She there became a leader once more and maintained an interest more than usually alert and active in Christian work until her peaceable departure in 1889.

It is now time to mention some of the members belonging to the country parts of the Circuit at this period. Obituaries of some of these are preserved in the old Circuit register, most of them in the

hand-writing of Francis West. Each of these brief records narrates a triumph of grace; each name, forgotten on earth, is forever registered on high

John Dutton, father-in-law of John Gregory, of Rowton, was admitted by F. West and shortly after passed away. Ann Williams, a widow, of the same village, is also mentioned. The covenant service for 1803 at the Octagon brought good to John Baker, Shoemaker. In October of the same year he lost his wife Harriet who was the daughter of James Barry a travelling preacher whose widow and family had settled in Chester.

Peter Dickinson, of Eaton, was converted through the words of three friends who visited him to converse about the forgiveness of sins. Mr. West called on him the day before he died.

A strange thing is narrated in the memoir of Elizabeth Garner, a member who died at Tarporley in 1803. "It is something remarkable" says her husband, "the same night in which my wife died my son James at Macclesfield, thirty miles distant, dreamed his mother was dead, and saw her spirit come to him and kissed him and said to him weep not, thy mother is not dead but living."

John Jones, of Holywell, was an Octagon convert. He received the sacrament at the hands of F. West shortly before he died.

A good Christian was Mary Roberts at Eaton, who told Dr. Townley she had known the love of GOD about forty years, "I never was weary of his service, nor had a desire to turn back, but fears lest I should."

## The Post-Methodist History of the Octagon Chapel.

The Octagon Chapel was the centre of Chester Methodist life from 1765 to 1811. It is stated in Walker's MS. that when the site was procured for a new Chapel, the old property near the Bars was offered for sale, having been previously valued by Mr. John Fletcher, and Mr. John Bedward (builder), both of Chester, with the following results:—

Lots 1, 2, 3. The first three houses on the western side of the passage leading from the street to the chapel, £352.

Lot 4. The school adjoining the last houses, £214 4s.

Lot 5. The preacher's house, with its appurtenances, adjoining the school, £270.

Lot 6. The chapel, the preacher's house behind the chapel, with the garden and stable, but not including the seats, pews, and other furniture in the chapel, £914.

Lot 7. A garden or yard with a shed, on the eastern side of the passage leading from the street to the chapel, £50.

Lots 8, 9, 10. The three houses adjoining the last yard and shed, £368, making a total of £2168 4s.—the Saint John of Jerusalem rent, and the land tax upon the whole, being affixed in this valuation taken on the eighth day of June, upon the lot in which the chapel is included,

The auctioneer's announcement was in the following terms:—

### Valuable Freehold Property

To be sold by Auction.

At the house of Mr. Daniel Williams, the Hop-Pole Inn, in the City of Chester, on Wednesday, the twelveth [sic] day of June, 1811, between the hours of four and six o'clock in the afternoon, in lots, subject to such conditions as will be then and there produced, —

All that extensive brick building, called or known by the name of the Octagon Chapel, in Foregate Street, in the City

of Chester, together with an excellent dwelling house thereunto adjoining, on the north side thereof, and also a stable [£2 10s.], and good garden, thirty-six feet by seventeen, and now in the occupation of the reverend John Braithwaite £15.]

Likewise, all those several Messuages or Dwelling houses, and a large new building, now occupied as a Sunday school, [which may at a trifling expence be converted into two dwellings) leading to the said chapel, in the several holdings of the reverend Isaac Muff [£15], Mr. Richard Jones [£15], Mrs. Mary Cookson [£4 4s.], Mrs. Ann Pritchard [£4 4s.], Mr. John Dutton [£4], Mr. Roberts [£15], Mrs. Chantler £4 4s.], and Mrs. Susan Duke [£4 4s.] The above premises are well supplied with water, and admirably calculated for any establishment requiring extent of room.

For particulars enquire of Mr. John Garner, Junior, Solicitor, or of Messrs. Powell and Son, Auctioneers, Eastgate Street.

This announcement was absolutely without result. It was a time of great depression, the winter having been marked by many failures; no one appeared at the sale, and not a single bid was made for any one part of the property. Such facts as these should be borne in mind when the enterprises of the Methodists of those days are contemplated. Their boldness under all the circumstances was marvellous; the old property at the Octagon, the site in Foregate Street, and the extensive purchase in St. John Street were all on hand at once, as will appear from the later pages of this history.

In November of the same year a notice in similar terms was issued offering the property for sale by private contract. From this we learn that the annual rents of the houses, etc., were the amounts inserted in square brackets in the notice above.

Mr. Walker's long and closely written MS. comes to a close when he has recorded this notice, and the



transactions by which the Octagon property finally passed out of Methodist possession have to be sought in other quarters. On March 12th, 1814, a balance of £338 was carried over from the Octagon concern to the credit of St. John Street.

As far as can be gathered the chapel passed in 1813 into the hands of the successors of the Rev. Philip Oliver, of whose career a few explanatory words may be said here. He was born in 1763, and belonged to a good Chester family. For some time after the completion of his studies he was Curate at Churton Heath, Cheshire, though probably without any deep religious convictions. In his twenty-eighth year a severe illness was the means of his awakening. Removing to Birmingham he became Curate to the Rev. E. Burn, at St. Mary's, where he found full scope for his gifts. His health however was not good, and he shortly returned to Chester, taking up his residence with his mother, a widow lady living in her own house at Boughton. There he preached in a place of worship extemporised in the garden and coach house (circa 1793). Multitudes attended his ministry, and the consequent inconvenience and disorder caused him to incur the disapprobation of his ecclesiastical superiors. Mr. Janion, (p. 66 of his book), describes the preaching of Mr. Oliver in high terms. He heard him preach at Boughton; also at Tarvin, where his first sermon was a "masterpiece of oratory."

Mr. Oliver died in 1800, and was interred at St. John's Church in the presence of thousands who crowded together from all parts of the City and neighbourhood. This brief notice by no means tells the full story of

Mr. Oliver's evangelistic work, for at his death no less than six chapels were left by will to the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala and two other friends. As the chapel in Boughton was not conveniently situated for worshippers residing in Chester itself the provisions of the will made it competent for the trustees to hand over the Boughton estate to Mr. Oliver's surviving brother on receipt of a money payment wherewith to erect a new chapel in a more suitable place.

Mr. Oliver's trustees, in the exercise of these powers, purchased the Octagon chapel. For a period two ministers of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion carried on the work. In 1852 the Rev. Philip Oliver's chapels were legally transferred to the Calvinistic Methodist, or Presbyterian, Church of Wales, two ministers of that denomination being at that time in charge of the work in the city and country. In 1864, precisely one hundred years after its erection, came the end of the Octagon Chapel. There was a great rallying of the Methodists of the city to attend the final service in the renowned sanctuary. A handsome new building was erected by the Presbyterians nearly on the same site.<sup>1</sup> The important thoroughfare of City Road was at that time laid out; the old chapel had to come down because it obstructed the building line. The modern Wesleyan Chapel in City Road is on the opposite side of the way and some fifty yards nearer the General Station.

---

1. The Pastor in 1900 was the Rev. D. Treborth Jones, by whom some of these particulars were kindly supplied.



# CELEBRATION OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR SAVIOUR.

On SUNDAY Evening, December 29, 1798, a SELECTION of MUSIC, on the *Incarnation of our Redeemer ... the revolving Year ... and the Sunday-schools ...* will be sung in the OCTAGON Chapel, Chester.

The Pieces chosen from the Works of G. F. HANDEL, Mr. R. TAYLOR, and Mr. J. LEACH.

Service to begin at Six o'Clock.

BEFORE PRAYER;

*Hymn*

The Mission of Christ

**H**ARK! hark what soul-transpiring strains  
Burst from the empyrean plains! (string,  
All Heaven's bright harpers strike the And seraphs blissful tidings sing,  
T'as is born th' incarnate Word,  
Jesus, the glory of the Lord.  
Him shall all flesh with rapture view,  
Bow the glad knee, and worship too.  
He comes! by prophets long foretold,  
To gather Israel to his fold:  
And the poor Gentiles, from afar,  
Shall hail with joy the Morning Star,  
This is the glorious Child, that shall  
Break down sin's separating wall,  
Redeem with blood the fallen race,  
'T' exalt his all-victorious grace.  
This is the woman's promis'd Seed:  
'Tis He shall bring th' old serpent's head,  
Despoil Hell's Conqueror of his sting,  
And many sons to glory bring.  
Triumph and reign, redeeming Lord—  
Gird on thy Gospel's conqu'ring word—  
Till to thy throne all lands shall raise  
The praises of eternal praise.

BEFORE

READING THE SCRIPTURES:

*Hymn*

On the changing Seasons:

To be sung by the Congregation.

**E**THERNAL Source of every joy,  
Well may thy praise our lips employ,  
While in thy temple we appear,  
Whose goodness crosses the circling year.  
While, as the wheels of nature roll,  
Thy hand supports the steady pole,  
The sun is taught by Thee to rise,  
And darkness when to veil the skies.  
Seasons renew'd, and years and days,  
Demand successive songs of praise:  
Still be the grateful homage paid,  
With up'ring light, and ev'ning shade.  
And may we, with harmonious tongue,  
In realms unknown pursue the song:  
T'as in those brighter courts adore,  
Whole days and years resolve to more.

BEFORE SERMON:

*An Ode,*

For the Sunday-schools.

[In this piece, the children of the charity will take a principal part.]

CHORUS.

**C**OME, let us join the hosts above,  
'T' now in our youngest days,  
Remember our Creator's love,  
And hup our Father's praise.

SONG.

His majesty will not despise  
The day of feeble things:  
Grateful the songs of children rise,  
And praise the King of Kings.

CHORUS.

We all his kind protection share—  
Within his arms we rest:

DUET.

The sucklings are his tender care,  
While hanging on the breast.

CHORUS.

We praise him with a stamm'ring tongue,  
While under his defence:

AIR.

He smiles to hear the artless song  
Of childish innocence.

DUET.

He loves to be remember'd thus,  
And honor'd for his grace:  
Out of the mouths of babes like us  
His wisdom perfects praise.

CHORUS.

Glory to God, and praise, and power,  
Honor and thanks be given!  
Children and cherubim adore  
The Lord of Earth and Heaven.

AFTER SERMON:

*The Messiah.*

DUET AND RECITATIVE.

**C**OMFORT ye, comfort ye my people,  
with your God. Speak ye comfortably  
to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her  
warfare is accomplished, that her in-  
iquity is pardoned.

The voice of him that crieth in the wil-  
derness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for  
our God.

CHORUS.

And the glory of the Lord shall be re-  
vealed, and all flesh shall see it together;  
for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

RECITATIVE.

For, behold! darkness shall cover the  
earth, and gross darkness the people: but  
the Lord shall arise upon earth, and his  
glory shall be seen upon thee: and the  
Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings  
to the brightness of thy rising.

AIR.

How beautiful are the feet of them that  
preach the Gospel of peace, and bring  
glad tidings of good things!

Their sound is gone out into all lands,  
and their words unto the ends of the world.

CHORUS.

The Lord gave the word: great was the  
company of the preachers.

RECITATIVE AND CHORUS.

Ye symphs of Solyma! begin the song:  
T'as heavenly themes soldier strains be-  
long.

Rapt into future times, the bard begun,  
A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.

AIR.

Ye heavens! from high the dew shall  
fall,  
And in soft silence shed the kindly shower:  
The sick and weak the healing balm shall  
find,  
From stumps a slacker, and from hear a  
seed.

CHORUS.

Swift fly the years, and use th' expected  
morn!  
O'ping to light, auspicious shall be born!

TRIO.

See nature hastes her earliest wreaths to  
bring,  
With all the increase of the budding  
spring.

CHORUS.

See lofty Lebanon his head advance—  
See nodding forests on the mountains  
dance:  
See spire clouds from lonely Sharon rise—  
And Carmel's flowery top persuades the  
skies.

RECITATIVE.

Hark! a glad voice the lonely desert  
ethers;  
Prepare the way, a God, a God appear!

CHORUS.

A God! a God! the vocal hills repeat—  
T'he rocks proclaim th' approaching Deity.

AIR.

Lo, earth receives him from the bending  
skies! (line, rise)  
Sink down, ye mountains! and, ye val-  
With heads declin'd, ye cedars, homage  
pay! (give way)  
Be smooth, ye rocks! ye rapid floods,

RECITATIVE.

No sigh, no murmur, the wide world shall  
hear;  
From earth's face he wipes off every tear.

SONG.

In adamantine chains shall he be  
bound,  
And Hell's grim Tyrant feel th'  
controul.

CHORUS.

Rise, crown'd with light—supercilious  
rise!  
Exalt thy tow'ry head, and lift thine eyes  
up!

TRIO.

See Heaven its sparkling portals wide dis-  
play—  
And break upon thee in a flood of day!  
O'erflow thy courts: the lions th' self  
shall shun.

Reveal'd, and God's eternal day be thine!  
FULL, SEMI, AND FULL CHORUS.

The seas shall waste, the snows in smoke  
decay, (away)  
Rocks fall to dust, and mountains melt  
But fix'd his word—his saving pow'r re-  
mains!

Thy realm for ever lasts—thy own  
MESSIAH REIGNS!  
Hallelujah. Amen.

A CHARITY SERMON will be preached, by the Rev. Mr. G. MORLEY, for the benefit of the SUNDAY-SCHOOL, in-  
stituted by the aid of voluntary subscription, in 1782, and continued in this chapel by an annual collection.

## CHAPTER VII.

---

### The Commencement of Methodist Sunday School and Day School Work in Chester.

---

THE Methodists in Chester began their work on behalf of poor and neglected children when the Sunday School movement was in its infancy, and it may fairly be claimed for them that they were the first promoters of such work in their own City. The following sketch of the beginnings of Wesleyan Sunday School work in Chester was written early in the century in the original Journal of the School, which bears on its brass clasp the date 1782. On the flyleaf is inscribed *Journal of the St. John Street Sunday School, City of Chester, instituted in the year 1782 by Thomas Bennett and George Lowe, Superintendents* :—

Respecting the commencement of the Octagon Sunday School which was the first Sunday School that was established in the City of Chester.

It is much to be regretted that no proper Memorandum was ever made of the Commencement of the Sunday School, the neglect cannot be attributed so much to want of interest in the cause, as from a natural propensity of the mind which arises from having a perfect knowledge of the event at the time such an event takes place which produces an indifference

on our part as to perpetuating the knowledge in such a manner as will secure to posterity the exact period of time, which can only be accomplished by written documents penned at the time of such an event, for if it be left to treacherous Memory alone the knowledge will become fainter and fainter till at last like the snuff of a waisting candle it expires. Then "Shadows Clouds and Darkness rest upon it."

I have, however, been fortunate enough to procure from faint Memory's glimmering torch that light which enables me with some degree of accuracy to ascertain the precise period of the commencement of Sunday School Labours in this Ancient City. (This memoradum taken from Mr. Fernal, 20th September, 1824.) Mr. George Lowe, Miller; Mr. Thomas Bennett, Ironfounder; Mr. Seller; Mr. George Lowe, Goldsmith; Mr. Fernal, Watchmaker; commenced Sunday Schools in Handbridge and Flookersbrook when Mr. Fernal had attained the age of 23 years. Mr. Fernal was born in the year 1758, which makes the period 1781, and when Mr. Fernal had left the City the aforesaid persons commenced the Octagon Sunday School in the year 1781, which was taught in the Chapel from 9 to 12 o'clock in the morning, and from  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 1 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon. They were afterwards taught in the new School which was built on the West side of the Octagon Yard in 1806, consisting of a ground and Upper Floor 16ft 3in. by 36ft. 9in. within and furnished with Writing Desks, Benches and every requisite, for which was paid a yearly rent of Ten Pounds or more properly speaking to defray the interest of the money laid out upon the property. The New School situate on the South side of St. John Street Chapel Yard was entered upon March 25th, 1813, for which was paid the sum of £12 10s. to defray the interest of the money laid out upon the property. For the space of Fourteen Years the institution was supported by voluntary contributions obtained by personal application to the friends of the cause, once in every year, which finally became so irksome both to contributors and collectors that a less objectionable method was needful, therefore that of making an annual collection in the Chapel was adopted in 1796, when Anthems

were sung in the Chapel on the Evening of Christmas Day in honour of that festival. The first selection of sacred music was sung in 1795, which led to its repetition in 1796. The Sermon on this occasion was preached by Mr. George Walker, Goldsmith, agreeable to notice given in Bills delivered to the public. The Receipt of this Collection, although a few shillings under Six pounds, gratified the Managers and friends of the School. The Collection in 1797 exceeded that in 1796.

An additional note as follows is appended to this historical sketch :—

Sundry Remarks.—

George Lowe, Goldsmith, is of opinion that the Octagon Sunday School was commenced at the same time as the Handbridge and Commonhall Lane Schools which was in the year 1782, when George Lowe was 14 years of age, and he was born in 1768. This may appear to contradict Mr. Fernal's statement, but by examination it will only tend to confirm it, as Mr. Fernal might have been in the 24th year of his age though he had not attained to the completion of the year. The children were in the habit of attending the Church of St. John the Baptist every Sabbath day when the weather permitted, the hour of attendance at school on such occasion was from nine o'clock until Church hours, but if the weather was unfavourable the School was not open until 10 o'clock, and was closed at 12 o'clock.

The date 1782, appearing on the clasp of the original Journal, is given also, as already stated, in the historical sketch contained within that book, and also on the anniversary programme for 1799. The same date moreover is assigned on an old printed copy of the *Rules of the Methodist Sunday School, St. John Street, Chester, instituted in the year 1782: Thomas Bennett and George Lowe, Superintendents*, which is now framed and suspended in the Pepper Street Schoolroom. There seems to be no ground for doubting this date. Nevertheless there are some records which speak of 1786 as the date of the establishment of a Sunday School. From an

article by Thomas Marriott is taken the following statement of Richard Rodda (Chester preacher 1785—6).

In this year (1786) in conjunction with the leading members of our Society, we formed a Sunday School in the City of Chester. We presented the rules to the Bishop, who approved of them without the slightest alteration. We soon had nearly seven hundred children under regular masters, and, with these, several Assistants, who taught the children gratis, having nothing in view but the good of the rising generation. We had no intention (as some persons represented) to make disciples to Methodism, but to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD, that they might be useful members of civil and religious Society. Under the care of their different masters and teachers, they were taken once every LORD's day to the Church; and the regularity of their behaviour attracted the notice of many of the citizens. GOD blessed our school for many years, and I hope thousands will have reason to praise Him forever for this institution. <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Marriott prints a letter of John Wesley which also refers to this enterprise.

London, January 17th, 1787.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I am glad you have taken in hand that blessed work of setting up Sunday Schools in Chester. It seems to me that these will be one great means of reviving religion throughout the nation. I wonder Satan has not yet sent out some able champion against them.

It is a good thing to stop Mr. Salmons; but it would be a far greater to reclaim him. And why should we suppose it to be impossible? Who knows the power of mighty prayer?

As I must take Plymouth Dock in my way to Bristol, I must make as swift a journey as I can from Bristol to Dublin; so I shall have little time to halt by the way.

I am,

Your affectionate friend and brother,

J. WESLEY.

To Mr. Rodda, at the Octagon, in Chester.

---

1. *Mag.*, June, 1846.



Wesley's familiarity with Methodist work in Chester was so intimate that he cannot have been in error as to the commencement of the Sunday School labour. Careful study of the following pieces of information which have come to hand from various sources seems to point to the conclusion that there were two efforts of a Sunday School character. If this be so, then the earlier one was in all probability distinctively Methodist, only slightly organised, and possibly not at first designated by the now familiar title of Sunday School. The school referred to by Mr. Rodda was probably "general," though in the main promoted by Methodists. Possibly this later work was an extension of that already in operation; possibly entirely distinct. In the latter case, the Methodists, who do not appear to have been treated quite fairly, must have withdrawn from this wider work as others took it up, and as their own school developed. But it is a tangled story, and more information is required to make all quite clear.

Mr. W. E. Whitehouse of Birmingham says:—

I have often heard it stated that Mr. Walker and my great grandfather, Geo. Lowe, senr., began this school in a room said once to have been a hermitage, at the south side of St. John's Churchyard, and that the boys and girls were regularly marched to the Sunday morning service at St. John's Church. I have also heard it repeatedly affirmed that Messrs. Walker and Lowe knew nothing of the same purpose being entertained, or put into practice by any other persons, as for instance, Raikes of Gloucester, but that it arose in their minds without any external prompting whatever. Was it not this school which induced Wesley to use the phrase (since a classical one) "the nursery of the Church"?

Some light is obtained from *A Sermon preached in the Cathedral Church of Chester, February 4th, 1787, for*

*the benefit of the Charity Schools in that City : and with a view of recommending the establishment of General Sunday Schools there : by Beilby, Lord Bishop of Chester. Chester : printed by J. Fletcher. [The Bishop was Dr. Beilby Porteus, installed Chester 1777, translated to London 1787.]*

The Bishop advocates the establishment of a general Sunday School, and a new day school for females to supplement the work already being carried out by the present girls' school, the Blue Coat Hospital, and the 120 out-scholars lately annexed to it. After defending Sunday Schools from the charge that education would unfit the poor for their laborious station in life, the Bishop says :—

Thus much I thought it necessary to say on the subject of Sunday Schools, in order to excite a general attention here to that important object. I say a *general* attention ; because in one particular parish of this city a school of this sort has been already established, and is carried on and supported with a very laudable spirit.

The following extract from one of the Chester newspapers evidently deals with the same movement, and is interesting reading. Probably Richard Rodda was the writer.

Octagon, Chester, March, 8th, 1787.

#### SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

The Committee of the Sunday Schools, instituted at the Octagon in this city on the 7th January last, think themselves under a necessity of laying before the public a few particulars relative to their conduct in the above institution. From a deep concern for the neglected state of the children in this city, a few humane persons met together in the beginning of the present year to consult what plan they could adopt most likely to render some service to the rising generation. General Sunday Schools were what appeared most likely to

bring about the end they had in view. For the management of these they drew up rules, which they laid before the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of the diocese, who fully approved of them, and applauded the institution: the rules were then printed, and made public thro' the city. Schools were immediately opened, and a number of serious persons both men and women, chearfully (sic) and voluntarily engaged themselves to teach and train up the children, who came, in the nurture and admonition of the LORD. The number of children soon amounted to upwards of 700, and these have been instructed, and the whole business exactly conducted, conformably to the printed rules. Whether their labour has been in vain, the inhabitants of this city are able to determine. To defray the expenses of this institution, benefactions and subscriptions have been generally solicited, in the public papers, but no personal application has yet been made. A few persons have voluntarily thrown in their assistance, but this has fallen far short of defraying the expenses of books, rooms, etc.

A few weeks ago the Bishop called a meeting of the clergy and gentlemen of Chester, to take into consideration a plan for establishing Sunday Schools in the city, at which meeting a few of the above Committee attended, and signified to his Lordship and the gentlemen then present, that it was the earnest wish of the members of that Committee which they represented, that the institution should be enlarged and established upon the most useful and extensive plan; they having no end in view, but the advantage of the rising generation; to which his Lordship paid the highest encomiums and expressed his wish and design, that the concern should be united and general, and added that at a subsequent meeting such a plan as was then proposed should be converted and adopted; in the meanwhile it was ordered that the inhabitants should be solicited for a subscription of 5s. apiece to establish an annual fund, for the defraying of the expenses attending the institution. Some time after the above meeting another was held, at the Pentice, of which the Hon. Mr. Grey was chairman; it was then asked by the Octagon Committee,

whether it was the intention of the clergy and gentlemen, that the schools intended to be instituted by them should be united with those already formed, and whether the persons who had from principle, gratuitously laboured in the care of the schools, should be permitted to take any active part in the carrying on of the institution? To this it was said, that they were not then prepared to give an answer. At a meeting held 7th inst., at the Exchange, Mr. Chancellor Briggs in the Chair, the Octagon Committee again attended, and repeated the request they had before made; to which they begged the gentlemen would give them a plain and ingenuous answer. They answered, that the persons concerned in the schools already established, should not be permitted to any share in the concern of those intended to be by them established! The gentlemen were then asked whether they would appropriate any part of the monies in their hands towards providing books for the schools already instituted; and were told, that many persons who had given them subscriptions, had contributed with a view to the support of the schools under the care of the above Committee: To this it was answered, that no part of the money in their hands should be so applied! These are facts which are thought necessary to be submitted to the consideration discerning public. The above Committee, finding they must stand alone in that undertaking which they alone began, are unitedly determined to persevere, and to labour, by every possible means, to render service to the rising generation.

Their conduct shall still be regulated by their printed rules. Their end in all their exertions will be, the universal reformation of manners, the propagation of Christian Knowledge, the due observation of the Sabbath-day, and the increase of valuable members to church and state, to religious and civil society. While these are their designs, and these their labours, they with humble confidence look for the blessing of that God who has so conspicuously crowned this divine institution, throughout the kingdom with such abundant success. They rest assured too they shall not want the good wishes, the prayers, and the assistance, of many in this city. Their

wants are small; £20 per annum will enable them to instruct and train up one thousand children; and they doubt not many in this city will cheerfully contribute to raise so inconsiderable a sum. Messrs. Shaw, Walker, and Sellers continue to receive donations, and subscriptions, and should this public solicitation fail, a personal application will soon be made to the inhabitants, when they will have an opportunity of expressing their approbation or disapprobation of this important undertaking.



It will be of interest to say a little more about the early finances of the school. In the earliest years of the century the collections ranged from £8 to £12 per annum. In 1805 a great change was made. An attractive and elaborate musical programme was arranged; two grand pianofortes were hired; the most celebrated singers of the neighbourhood engaged; and the popular Samuel Bradburn brought over expressly from Bolton on November 17th, a date fixed to meet his convenience. Permission was given by the Octagon Trustees to take a silver collection at the doors. A note in the old book says:—

The persons appointed to stand at the doors to receive the collection at the coming into the service were—

G. Lowe, senr., Gallery right side.

Bro. Howie, at the same side below.

S. Smith, Gallery left side.

R. Phillips, same side below. To attend at  $\frac{1}{4}$  past 5.

There was a great crowd and a gross collection of £41 7s. 1d., out of which, however, no less than £24 5s. 2d. had to be taken for expenses. And there were other drawbacks. An uneasy feeling was aroused in the minds of many Methodists that the younger members had been brought into undesirable association with worldly musicians; and that Methodism, once

deemed so strict in its discipline, had been brought before the inhabitants of Chester in an unedifying light. When wrong doing is successful a reprovcr will find it difficult to secure a hearing; when wrong doing is unsuccessful his offices are hardly needed. It is probable that the fact of the nett financial result being incommensurate with the effort involved had quite as much to do with the modifications introduced the next year, as the consideration already mentioned. It may be noted in passing that these performances were contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the following resolution which had been passed by the Conference in 1800.

Q. 14. Can anything be done to prevent, what appears to us a great evil, namely, *bands of music* and *theatrical singers* being brought into our chapels, when charity sermons are to be preached?

A. Let none in our connexion preach charity sermons, where such persons and such music are introduced. And let the stewards, trustees, and leaders, be informed that such a practice is offensive to the conference, who believe it has been hurtful to the minds of many pious people.

In 1806 the sermon was preached by the Rev. Thomas Taylor from Liverpool. The service was much simpler in character, but in essential respects more effective. There were then 115 boys and 130 girls. In 1808 the services of the well-known Dr. Thomas Coke were secured, and the handbill stated that there were 115 boys and 118 girls. In 1810 there were scarcely as many.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. The hymn paper for 1799, photographically reproduced in this book, and that for 1808, are in the Minute book of the St. John Street Trust.

A member of the Wesley Historical Society has a copy of the hymn sheet for 1810, when the sermon was preached by Rev. John Braithwaite. The number of scholars was about 200. The school is then said to have been conducted for more than 26 years, which is in agreement with what is said above.

The following statement of Sunday School collections in the early part of the century will be read with interest.

Date.	Preachers.	Collections.		
		£	s.	d.
1808 ..	Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D. ..	24	4	7½
1809 ..	Rev. J. Bramwell ..	25	0	4
1810 ..	Rev. John Braithwaite ..	22	8	3
1811 ..	The Kilhamites took our turn ..	—		
1812 ..	Rev. John Braithwaite ..	22	7	7
1813 ..	Rev. John Sutcliffe ..	24	8	6
1814 ..	Rev. John Braithwaite ..	29	0	0
1815 ..	Rev. Edward Oakes ..	29	3	0
1816 ..	Private Subscription ..	32	5	0
1817 ..	Rev. James Everett ..	23	17	6
1818 ..	Rev. William Bramwell ..	23	16	6
1819 ..	Rev. Samuel Drew ..	25	0	3
1820 ..	Rev. T. H. Walker ..	20	0	1
1821 ..	Rev. Robert Wood ..	20	3	2½
1822 ..	Rev. Wm. Naylor ..	23	1	0
1823 ..	Rev. Theophilus Lessey ..	32	15	6
1824 ..	Do. Do. ..	35	2	3
1825 ..	Rev. William Atherton ..	41	0	0
1826 ..	Private Subscription ..	54	2	3

—o—

Here follow some facts which will prove of interest with respect to early Sunday School work.

The Journal gives a list of Superintendents :—

1782.	Thomas Bennett ;	George Lowe.
1810.	George Walker ;	John Jones.
1815.	George Lowe ;	Thomas Bowers.
1817.	Do.	Robert Lowe.
1819	Do.	J. T. Hankey.
Do.	Do.	Joseph Jackson Phillips.
1820.	Do.	Owen Bent Jones.
1821.	Do.	William Lowe.

1822. William Lowe ; Thomas Dean.  
 1823. Thomas Dean ; Peter Williams.  
 Do. Peter Williams ; William Haywood.  
 1824. Do. John Lowe.



The earliest complete list of teachers, together with the classes assigned to them is dated March 24th, 1815.

UPSTAIRS.	BELOW.
<i>First Bible Company—</i> Miss Jane Lowe.	<i>First Bible Company—</i> Robert Lowe.
<i>Second do.</i> Miss Roberts. Miss Speed.	<i>Second do.</i> Joseph Janion, morning. Robert Parry, afternoon.
<i>First Testament Company—</i> Miss Jones. Miss M. Lowe.	<i>First Testament Company—</i> G. Latham.
<i>Second do.</i> Miss S. Lowe. Miss Bowers.	<i>Second do.</i> Walter Hussey.
<i>Spelling Class—</i> Miss Barrington.	<i>Third do.</i> Peter Hankey.
<i>Card Class, etc.—</i> Miss Hancock.	<i>Spelling Class—</i> Joseph Phillips. Thomas Lloyd.
	<i>Reading made easy—</i> William Dentith. Francis Teggins. Thomas Grey.



The division of time proposed to be adopted in 1824 will be read with interest by modern Sunday School workers ; also one or two miscellaneous resolutions.—

	Minutes.
1. Singing and Prayer .. ..	10
2. Call over Teacher's Roll .. ..	5
3. Deliver Books .. ..	5
4. Tasks .. ..	20
5. Read .. ..	45
6. Call in Books .. ..	5
7. Spell and Catechise .. ..	20
8. Mark class paper .. ..	5
9. Dismiss .. ..	5
	120



In 1807 it was resolved that the children should go to Divine Service in the Octagon every Sunday morning and once a quarter to St. John's Church.

July 19th, 1815.—Resolved that greater strictness be observed in the school, as it respects corporeal punishment.

Sept. 13th.—That no teacher be permitted to use a cain (*sic!*) in the school.

October 24th, 1815. That every scholar at entering in or going out of the school must make a Bow or Courtesy.

In 1816 writing on the LORD'S day was discontinued and provision made for it on week days.

1823. The children to be detained after the morning service and reprimanded by the preacher if they have misbehaved.



Amongst remarkable items of expenditure are:—  
Eboney Rooler, 10d. Spanish Juice for the Singers, 1/1.



In *Hemingway's Chester*, in a paragraph relating to St. John Street Chapel, the statement is made:—

Attached to the society is also a good brick building in Back Brook Street in which there is a flourishing Sunday School comprising not less than 320 children. The ground for this building and a liberal sum of money were given by an opulent and benevolent individual of the city, and by the public liberality the whole debt has now been extinguished, so that the school now stands without any other incumbrance than what arises from the purchase of books and in teaching.

The new branch School in Back Brook Street was opened by the Rev. Joseph Fowler on Sunday, July 20th, 1823. But there was work in that neighbourhood

before that date; for in 1822 it was resolved that the Bridge Street branch and the Brook Street branch should be united with St. John Street parent School. The numbers reported in 1823 were: St. John Street, 210; Bridge Street, 99; Brook Street, 66; Christleton, 55; Total, 430.

On April 20th, 1828, the Bridge Street School was given up and the teachers brought the children to St. John Street prior to the commencement of the Boughton School. On April 27th, the Boughton Sunday School was opened, when there were 43 children present in the morning and 69 in the afternoon.

Sunday School work in Handbridge calls for a word. It has been stated that such work was commenced in Handbridge at the same time as at the Octagon. It is said in the old Journal to have been conducted "on the Rock," and that George Lowe, senr., was the first Superintendent.

In 1807 George Lowe, junr., became the Superintendent and Treasurer.

In 1823 Thomas Moreland and Thomas Carter were Superintendents "in the barn in Brown Street." In this year Messrs. Janion, E. Hankey, and John Lanceley were appointed to carry out a scheme for the establishment of a School in Handbridge, there having apparently been a lapse in the work. In 1827 ground in the upper part of Brown Street, Handbridge, was purchased, the dimensions being 8 yards by 20. Thomas Carter was instructed to build according to the specification of Mr. Latham at an estimated cost of £153.

George Lowe and John Williams became the Superintendents at the new school, with John Lowe as general secretary; Edward Hankey as Teachers' secretary; and Thomas Lowe as librarian. The new building was transferred to the Methodist New Connexion after the disputes of 1830. (So *Hemingway's Chester*).

It would not be edifying to dwell upon these old disputes, of which a fairly full account could be gathered from the records; it will suffice to say that a great many disagreements unhappily arose among the Methodist Sunday School workers of the city. In 1826 a Wesleyan Sunday School Union was formed including the schools at St. John Street, Bridge Street and Christleton, leaving the Brook Street school to the management of its own affairs. The disagreement came to a height over the matter of the annual collection in 1830. The school at St. John Street was removed, and was held for a time in Harrison's Buildings, and in Mr. Tilston's Room over Watergate Row for a week or so; then in the Upper Room on the East Side of the Union Hall; then, compelled to remove by the business requirements of the Hall proprietors, it assembled in the house of Mr. Lowe, 5, Bridge Street. Shortly after this, invitations were sent to the travelling preachers of Trinity Lane to make arrangements to preach the anniversary sermons; and almost the last entry in the old Journal records an invitation to Mr. Seals, New Connexion Minister, to preach a sermon for the clothing society at the Handbridge school. The "old body" lost at this time many useful members and officers; and the St. John Street school together with the new school in Handbridge were transferred to the

New Connexion. What became of the Boughton School does not appear. <sup>1</sup>



### Library Records.

The oldest record of a library bears date August 22nd, 1785. It does not appear whether this was a school library or not; probably not. The Committee for 1786 included: George Lowe, Richard Clithro, James Forest, Moses Ithill, Matthias Horner, Daniel Chesters, Samuel Smith, John Williams; with James Parry as librarian, assisted by Thomas Aven and Thomas Rathbone. The fortunes of this library cannot be traced.

The library which was strictly connected with the Sunday School was instituted in 1817, extended in 1822, restored in 1825; William Lowe, John Lowe, Edward Hankey, George Lloyd, and Samuel Meacock being among the earlier officials.

In March, 1830, a resolution was passed empowering the officers and Committee to remove the cupboard with its contents, should they think fit, "owing to the unsettled state of the schools." On the 19th of that month it was resolved that the books and case be removed to Mr. T. Moreland's until an eligible situation could be procured for the same. On the 7th April was determined to remove the books and case to No. 6, Bridge Street Row. A little later, March, 1831, it was resolved that "this library be denominated the Wesleyan Sunday School Teachers' Library, Goss

---

1. Rev. T. Allin, in *Letters to the Rev. John Maclean, containing an exposition of the Government of Wesleyan Methodism with the practical illustrations of its effects, etc.*, 2nd Edn., 1835, quotes a long and interesting letter written to Dr. Townley about these Chester disputes. See also Stokoe: *Life of Rev. Andrew Lynn*, p. 223.

Street, Chester." "That the books kept at Trinity Street Chapel may be united to the late St. John Street Library, and that the whole of the books and cupboard be removed to Goss Street." This library at Goss Street is something of a mystery. A catalogue was issued in 1833. The designation *Wesleyan* Sunday School Teachers' Library is still maintained. But the proprietors are stated to be the teachers of Goss Street and Brown Street Sabbath Schools (fulfilling certain conditions) and the preachers of Trinity Street Society, Methodist New Connexion, were ex-officio members of the Committee, and the Wesleyan ministers do not appear at all. On the whole it may be concluded that the library followed the schools.

### **Methodist Day School work in Chester.**

As the Methodists of Chester were early in the field with their Sunday School work so they were not slow to undertake secular education when opportunity afforded. It was as early as March 20th, 1839, that it was resolved "that a Day School be established in connexion with the Sunday School, to be under the control of the Sunday School Committee."

On March 26th, 1839, *Mr. and Mrs. Serjeant*, of London, were engaged as teachers at £80 per annum, the work to commence on July 1st. This date was subsequently changed to April 22nd to suit the convenience of Mr Serjeant. The boys were to be taught in Brook Street, and the girls in St. John Street.

A curious old minute of the early days contains a—

Query.—Did Mr. Serjeant on the 4th inst. (— 1841) give a holiday to the children, and, if so, by whose authority?

Ans.—In consequence of the teetotallers perambulating the town, Mr. Serjeant had so few children he did not see the propriety of keeping the school open.

*Mr. George Cross* succeeded Mr. Serjeant, January, 1869. He died in April, 1877, and was succeeded on June 1st, 1877, by *Mr. A. W. Lucas, F.G.S.*, who has remained in the position ever since. The school was reorganized as a Higher Grade School in April, 1886. The pupils of the Higher Grade School have gained 28 scholarships at the King's School, 46 at the Technical Day School, 8 at the School of Science and Art, and 2 Scholarships at the Queen's School.

On the girl's side Mrs. Serjeant was succeeded on June 25th, 1840, by *Miss Boulton*. There is no record of the other ladies who have taught in the school until we come down to the appointment of the present head-mistress, *Miss Rosterne*, and the head of the Junior School *Miss Henri*.<sup>1</sup>

The day schools for boys and girls are now conducted in premises in St. John Street which were erected in 1845. These premises are situated on the north side of the houses which were once occupied by the preachers.

The Sunday School in connection with St. John Street Chapel is now carried on in the beautiful modern and commodious building which appears on the left in the picture of the exterior of the Chapel.

---

1. The Journal referred to at the beginning of this Chapter is at the Methodist New Connexion Chapel in Pepper Street, along with several other most interesting School and Library records which have all been consulted. Walker's MS. has also been used; and several volumes of Minute Books in the hands of Wesleyan officials. The extract from Bishop Porteus was kindly furnished by the Rev. T. E. Bridgen.

## CHAPTER VIII.

---

### The Erection of St. John Street Chapel, 1810 onwards.

---

1810—11: John Braithwaite; Isaac Muff.

1812: John Braithwaite; William Hill.

1813: John Doncaster; do.

1814: Thomas Pinder; Edward Oakes.

IN the year 1810 it was evident, despite the money expended upon the Octagon premises some four years previously, that a new chapel was an imperative necessity, and the Methodists bravely made up their minds to undertake this serious responsibility. A large plot of ground, with two houses on the front of it, was on sale at a reasonable price. It was situated on the north side of Foregate Street, a few yards to the west of Queen Street. After some delay Messrs. George Lowe and Samuel Williams, with the consent of the Quarterly Meeting, purchased the property from the proprietor, Daniel Aldersey, Esq., for £1,600, the vendor at his own expense being engaged to provide the title deeds.

There were several objections to this site. Firstly, it would be necessary to recess the building considerably. For twenty-five yards from the street the plot of

land was only fifteen yards wide : at the back it opened into an orchard which gave plenty of room. Secondly, it was feared that numerous tanpits in an adjoining yard, occupied by Mr. John Bradford, would prove a great nuisance. Thirdly, the development of this site would involve the removal of a capital house occupied by Colonel Bonnor.

Mr. Walker, commenting on the first objection, tells us he would not like a chapel hiddeu away, but at the same time it is well to have a Methodist chapel reasonably recessed from the street, "to avoid the noise of the traffic ; and also to prevent the enthusiastic warmth which so frequently manifests itself in the private meetings of the Society from attracting the notice and possibly the disturbance of passengers." One wonders how many years it is since such a consideration was taken into account by a building committee !

In deference to the wishes of many of the Society it was resolved not to build the chapel until greater unanimity should prevail. After a little time had been spent in fruitless inquiries the following advertisement appeared in the local press.

Valuable Freehold Property in Chester.

To be sold by auction.

At the Blossoms Inn, in the city of Chester, on Thursday, the thirty-first day of January instant, at six o'clock in the evening, subject to conditions then to be produced, the following premises in one lot. All that elegant and capital Mansion House, with a coach house and two stables adjoining, situate in Saint John Street, in the said city of Chester, and late the residence of Alexander Eaton, Esquire, deceased.

This house is in every respect fit for the residence of a genteel family, and has every possible convenience to render it desirable.—It consists on the ground floor, of two large



parlours to the front, one twenty-two feet by eighteen, the other twenty-four feet by eighteen, a study, a breakfast parlour, a butler's pantry, and servants' hall, two excellent kitchens, dry cellars, etc.—There is a very good garden, and a spacious court, and two rooms or offices adjoining the City Walls; the out-offices are excellent and very convenient. There is on the second floor a drawing room, twenty-four feet by eighteen, and a lodging room adjoining eighteen feet square, with a dressing room attached, and nine other lodging rooms.

A dwelling house adjoining the above, in the possession of Mr. Robert Fearnall.

A dwelling house adjoining the stables, in the possession of Mr. John Saunders, and a cottage adjoining that in the possession of William Jones. The above premises are in depth one hundred and nineteen feet, and in breadth one hundred and fifty feet.

The tenants will shew the premises (except the large house) and tickets may be had to see that, and further particulars at the office of Mr. Humphreys, Solicitor, Chester, or Mr. Smith, Warrington. <sup>1</sup>

A few of the building committee attended the sale; the property was however bought in by the proprietor for £2,700. On the following day, February 1st, 1811, it was purchased for the committee by John Fletcher, Esq., for £2,500, saving by the private contract the auction duty. This step did not at the first commend itself to all the Society, for many preferred the site already acquired in Foregate Street. After much discussion the advocates of the new site prevailed, and at a meeting held on February 4th, at the house of Mr. Samuel Williams, Linendraper, it was unanimously resolved to commence operations in St. John Street without further delay.

---

1. *Chester Chronicle*, January 25th, 1811.

At the same meeting it was resolved to offer the Foregate Street property for sale. The result was very satisfactory; upon the morning of the day appointed it was sold to Mr. John Bradford, the occupier of the adjoining tanyard, for £1,600. The Trustees, therefore, got out of the transaction without losing anything except what was consumed by interest, legal expenses, and advertising. The resolutions passed at the meeting referred to above, were signed by \*George Lowe, Esq.; \*George Walker, Wine Merchant; \*Samuel Williams, Linen Draper; Thomas Shone, Gentleman; \*Henry Bowers, Esq.; Robert Shearing, Druggist; \*Samuel Beckett, Waggoner; David Lewis, Linen Draper; Robert Parry, Currier. Those whose names are marked with an asterisk were constituted a building committee; George Lowe was appointed Treasurer; and George Walker, Secretary.

It is now well that the important site acquired on the west side of St. John Street should be more fully described, together with the operations contemplated by the purchasers. At the north end, i.e., nearest to the Eastgate, was the house occupied by Mr. Robert Fearnall, behind which were two rooms or offices adjoining the walls and opening on to the same by a private way. Southward from Mr. Fearnall's house was a passage, three feet wide, communicating with the two rooms aforesaid. It was determined to retain this house as a residence for the superintendent preacher, and to convert the premises behind into a stable for the preacher's horse, reserving a right of road from the street to the stable and the back of the preacher's house. Beyond the passage was situated the

large house, extending backwards with its offices right up to the walls. This it was determined to offer for sale. Next to the large house was another passage, three feet wide, leading to the garden behind the dwelling house (Saunders), cottage (Jones), two stables and coach house. It was proposed to erect the Chapel upon the plot of land occupied by these last mentioned properties. This ended the frontage of the site acquired by the Trustees. Their purchase, however, included at its southern extremity, a vacant piece of land about thirty feet square, adjoining the walls. Between this and the street were six cottages owned by one Tyrer, a shoemaker. They were occupied by his tenants and brought in about forty pounds a year. He would not part with them under £1,000, at which price the Trustees declined to purchase. On this plot, notwithstanding its want of frontage to the street, the Trustees proposed to erect a school for the instruction of poor children on the LORD'S day. By great exertions on the part of the committee, who deemed no sacrifice of time and private business too great to be made if only they could expedite the all-important work, the tenants of the doomed properties were suitably provided for elsewhere and removed before their notices expired. Mr. Thomas Lunt bought the materials, to be taken down within fourteen days at his own expense, for £95. The Trustees were most fortunate in disposing of the large house. It was purchased by Mrs. Slaughter of Eccleston on April 22nd, for £1,200; it being agreed that the Chapel should not be built within nine feet of the southern wall of her house. The first secretary took an immense pains to

describe everything fully, and in the following passage a clearer idea of the original condition of the site will be given to those familiar with the modern St. John Street, than in anything mentioned up to this point:—

The right of private road on to the City Walls had all along been considered of considerable advantage to the concern, as it would prove of great convenience to the congregations regularly attending the chapel to have a road so near to it from the Walls, and also be an inducement to strangers passing in the time of service to descend down to the chapel, but it happened that the flight from the Walls was in that part of the property furthest from the intended building, descending through the rooms or offices adjoining to the Walls, behind the first dwelling house on the northern end of the property; so that the large house would stand between the stairs from the Walls and the chapel, persons going that way would have, after descending the steps, to go through the passage which ran between the first house on the northern end, and the large house, away into the street, then turning upon the right come upon the chapel, after passing by the front of the large house. The stairs going through the offices to the Walls, it was also found would interfere with the design of the committee to convert those offices into a stable for the preacher's horse, it was therefore resolved to petition the body corporate of the City to give to the committee permission to open another road from the Walls, in a part of the property where the congregation might descend directly down to the chapel, and which would also open a pleasant and convenient passage for the public, from the Walls into the street, between the chapel and the large house, through the passage of nine feet wide which ran between them, proposing to the body corporate, the intention of the Committee to make up the road they then had through the offices, if permission might be had to open the new one.

The request was granted, and the Town Clerk recommended the Trustees to retain their right over

the road by erecting a gate which should occasionally be closed to the public. In 1898 a fatal fall from the steps led the Trustees to lock the door at the head of the stairway from the Walls.

The architect of the Chapel was Mr. Thomas Harrison, architect of the County Goal, and of the beautiful Grosvenor Bridge spanning the river Dee. Mr. Harrison only gave the plan, which fact will account for the smallness of the fee recorded in the accounts. The specifications and sections were drawn up by Mr. B. Gommer, Architect, of Ruabon.

Mr. Walker's record contains the full text of the specifications for the different kinds of work required upon the building. These specifications are too lengthy for quotation, though they might be of great interest to persons expert in building technicalities.

The following account of the expenditure of the Trustees is arrived at by bringing together the details given by the Secretary in his book and the Treasurer in his.

The gross sum paid for the property was £2501 15s. (including interest). £1206 15s. was received for the large house; and £95 for materials. The net cost of the land and house was therefore £1200; the proportion for the house retained being put down at £400. In addition to the cost of erecting the Chapel, £59 5s. was expended upon the house, and a school was provided at £257 9s. 10d.

*Brick Work.*—The tenders were: Thomas Lunt, £550; William Boden, £455. The latter was accepted, and in the Treasurer's book a payment of £508 14s. 9d. is recorded.

*Mason's Work.*—The contract was let on May 6th to Mr. Wm. Cole at £400. It was provided in the contract that

payment should be made for any greater depth of foundation necessary beyond that assigned in the specifications. Rock or strong marl was found in front at about four feet. At the back part there was a long and tedious job; it was found necessary to go down seventeen or eighteen feet. A bed of earth covering nearly all the site to the depth of three feet had previously been removed. Mr. Cole began to sink the foundations on May 22nd. In the Treasurer's book it is recorded that he was paid £830 6s. 10d. This is explained by the consideration just mentioned; and also by the fact that he was remunerated for important services rendered throughout the operations, as elsewhere mentioned.

*The Carpentry and Joiners' Work.*—The sections, working plans, and specifications were returned by several different persons desirous of tendering, with the remark that they were so complex, defective and incorrect that no proper estimate could be drawn from them. Mr. Gommer being in town within a few days met the parties and promised to send a proper number of working plans, and to draw out new and clear specifications. But his engagement with Sir Watkin Williams Wynne at Wynnstay occupied so much of his time and attention, that the Committee feeling themselves in danger of very serious delay, requested Mr. Gommer to give them up the plans. He complied in a very handsome manner. They were handed over to Mr. William Cole, who had taken up the masonry contract, but were not completed by him till July 2nd. Mr. Cole was further engaged as clerk of the works, and the Committee agreed to pay him £84, which was to cover all his charges for drawing out the plans and making the specifications. Tenders in this department were received from Mr. Cole himself at £2250; and from Messrs. Harrison and Bowden (Boden) at £1940. Some curious particulars are recorded in this matter. Before the latter firm were aware of the result of the tenders received, they offered to take £40 off their estimate, having heard of a reduction in the price of timber. This was allowed, and, their tender being the lowest even in its original form, was accepted. There was however a further alteration. The firm proved to the satisfaction of the

Committee that they had accidentally omitted to include the cost of the pulpit in their estimate. This they anticipated would involve them in an additional expenditure of £39. They threw themselves upon the consideration of the Committee, and the contract was finally settled at £1920. A bond was executed by the parties on July 27th, by which the contractors engaged under the penalty of £2000 to complete the whole of the joinery or carpentry work on or before the 12th day of August, 1812. The firm ultimately received from the Treasurer £2482 11s. 4d.

*Ironwork.*—Tenders were received as follows: Harrison and Pearson (amount not mentioned); Thomas Mosley Bennett, £91; Cole, Whittle and Co., £82 11s. 6d. (accepted). The Treasurer paid the last mentioned firm £123 5s. 2d.

*Slating and Plaistering.*—John Chesters, £283 19s. 4d.; Thomas Boden, £250; Wm. Hickson, £246; Richard Baker, £245 10s.; William Davies, £139.

The minute book says, “This last as the lowest estimate was of course taken, and instructions forthwith given to prepare a bond, obligatory on the contractor and his recognisances, for the performance of the contract.” But there was a hitch somewhere, for the Treasurer’s book records £268 16s. 2d. paid to William Hickson, Plaisterer. There was also an expenditure on Slates, including duty and freight, of £80 7s. 9d.

*Plumber’s Work.*—The tender of Mr. Porter at £30 per ton of lead used was accepted. He received payment of £145 3s. 6d.

Other items of expenditure were as follows: John Garner, Attorney, £96 9s. 6d.; Samuel Humphreys, do., £33 0s. 10d.; Mr. Harrison, Architect, £20; Kirkham and France, Painters, £50 0s. 7d.; John Williams, Glazier, £49 15s. 0d.; Daniel Dodd, Pavier, £38 3s. 9d.; Robert Jones, Whitesmith, £8 9s. 4d.; John Alderson, for lamps, £19 17s. 8d.; Henry Bowers, for street lamps, etc., £5 15s. 2d.; Mary Gardner, for table, £9 9s. 0d.; P. M. and S. Williams, for green cloth, £60 17s. 10d.; John Powell, for lining seats, £37 16s. 7d.

Thomas Jones, Cutler, £13 17s. 5d.; George Lewis, Birmingham, for hinges, etc., £13 2s. 8d.; Samuel Beard, for brass work, £87 11s. 9d.

The accounts, when finally made up in 1814, worked out as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
Land .. .. .	800	0	0
House .. .. .	400	0	0
School .. .. .	257	9	10
House alterations .. .. .	59	5	0
Interest on money .. .. .	204	13	11
Erection of the Chapel .. .. .	5144	11	1
Total ..	£6865	19	10
	£	s.	d.
Borrowed .. .. .	5070	0	0
Subscription list .. .. .	1288	6	7
Collections taken at the opening services, after deducting 21/- for base silver, and £11 2s. for preachers' travelling expenses .. .. .	147	9	9
Balance from the Octagon concern	338	10	2
Balance due to the Treasurer .. .. .	21	13	4
Total ..	£6865	19	10

The courageous spirit of the Circuit authorities at the time when the new Chapel was erected further appears from the fact that in 1812 they raised a sum of over £110 for the purpose of improving the ministers' residences.

The Methodists of Chester experienced something both of the burdens and privileges of the connexional principle of their Church.





THE EXTERIOR OF ST. JOHN STREET CHAPEL.



In 1800, the Conference ordered a collection to be made throughout the Manchester, Stockport, Bolton, Macclesfield, Chester, Burslem, and Northwich Circuits for a Chapel at Ashton; in 1803, throughout the Chester District, for Shrewsbury; in 1807, in Congleton, Chester, and Northwich, for Congleton. Returning to the old account book, it appears the burdened trustees of St. John Street began to look to this hopeful source of income.

On July 19th, 1814, 11d. was paid for the postage of a letter "to President of ye Conference at Bristol begg for releif for ye Chapel." On Nov. 24th, 10/- was paid to Mr. Monk for printing 100 circular letters addressed to the preachers at the last Conference, requesting their influence to obtain pecuniary relief for the Chapel.

In response to this appeal, the Conference passed the following resolution:—

On account of the very peculiar and distressing circumstances of the Chapels in . . . Chester . . the Conference is under the necessity of consenting that extraordinary applications may be made for their relief, according to the following plan: For Chester; in the Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Macclesfield, Liverpool, and Manchester Districts.

The results of this decision appear in the Chapel book.

*Decr.* 5th, 1814, to a bill received from Revd. Thos. Pinder, Superintendent of Ye<sup>e</sup> Chester Circuit, in part of the Collection he made in Manchester, in pursuance of grant of the last Conference, held in Bristol, for relief of the Chester Chapel by collections to be made in various other Circuits, £23. A further sum the next day, £19.

*Decr.* 19th, from Manchester and Altringham, £30.

1815, *Jany.*, Manchester and Warrington, £41. Northwich, £31 11s. 3d. Manchester and Bury, £43.

*March*, Haslinden and Bury, £7. Stockport, £19. New Mills and Ashton, £18.

*April*, Liverpool, £80. Oswestry, £10 18s. Burslem and Stafford, £52 5s. Macclesfield and Buxton, £73 18s. 2½d. Wigan and Leigh, £22 18s. Prescott and Ormskirk, £20 15s. Congleton, Leek, Dudley, Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, £64.

*May*, Newcastle, Birmingham and Stourport, £100 6s. Oldham, £12. Wrexham, £26 11s. 7d.

*June*, Coventry, Hinckley and Redditch, £12. Preston, £3 12s. Hereford, Ledbury and Kington, £48 4s. 6d. Lancaster, £4 9s. 6d. Blackburn, £23 12s. 6d.

*Octr.*, Wednesbury and Rochdale, £41 10s.

Many items occur to shew that this method of raising money involved great expense.

*Aug.* 15th, 1815, Paid Horse Hire for Messrs. Pinder and Oakes during the time Mr. Roberts had the Circuit. Horse in Herefordshire, £2 14s. od. *July* 24th, Expenses attending the collections in the Preston, Garstang, Lancaster, and Blackburn Circuits for Mr. George Walker and self being at Inns the chief part of the time, £11 15s. 5d. Horse Hire for self on account of above collections, £2 12s. od.

There are also several entries of sums paid for sending preachers to do Mr. Pinder's work within the Circuit, while he was gathering funds elsewhere.

The spacious sanctuary which at length rewarded the efforts of the brave and diligent men whose schemes have been expounded in the preceding pages, still stands substantially unchanged so far as the main structure is concerned, though the surroundings have altered very much for the better. The main dimensions were: outside length 84 feet; outside width 55 feet. The stairs of the pulpit descended at the first into the vestry, now they descend into the chapel. The chapel

was at the beginning lighted by 84 candles, exclusive of those in the singing gallery, stair cases, and under the gallery, viz.: 36 in 6 chandeliers in the gallery, 20 in the gallery front seats, 4 in the pulpit, and 24 in a large chandelier in the body of the chapel.

Janion, writing in 1833, says:—

This noble and beautiful house, in which the descendants of the ancient Chester Methodists, together with many of their fellow-citizens, now worship the Most High, has a semi-circular front to St. John Street, three entrances, a gallery on three sides, and an orchestra for the singers. The congregation is numerous and respectable. The financial affairs of the chapel, which were in a state of considerable embarrassment some years ago, are now gradually improving. The Society at present numbers 361 members; and in the Sunday School at the S. W. angle of the chapel, together with the branch school in Back Brook Street, about 500 children are receiving gratuitous religious instruction on the LORD'S day.

Mr. W. E. Whitehouse, of Birmingham, speaking of the traditions current in his young days says:—

It was thought to be a very beautiful and perfect construction, and the Chester Methodists are very proud of it. Its front to St. John Street is semicircular, and I have heard some of the old men and women speak in awe-struck tones of the immense cost of the bricks specially moulded for this erection.

The opening services were thus advertised in the papers:—

METHODIST NEW CHAPEL, ST. JOHN'S STREET, CHESTER.

This Chapel will be opened on Sunday, the 4th day of October: the first service will commence at precisely half past ten in the morning, the introductory part of which will be performed, by the REV. JOHN BRAITHWAITE, Superintendant of the Circuit, and the sermon will afterwards be preached by the REV. SAMUEL BRADBURN from Liverpool. The second service

will be held at half past two in the afternoon, and the sermon will be preached by the REV. JOHN GAULTIER (*sic*) from Liverpool. The third service will be held at six in the evening, and the sermon will be preached by the REV. JABEZ BUNTING from Halifax.

In order to aid the subscriptions, and also to accommodate the friends of this interest with room, it is intended that every person shall give Silver as they enter the Doors, at each of the services. The sums thus raised will be added to the Collections, which will be made immediately after every Sermon. A few pews not yet engaged, may be taken, on application to GEORGE WALKER. <sup>1</sup>

The following were Mr. Braithwaite's introductory remarks :—

*With desire* have many of us desired to see this day. We *see it and are glad*. We behold this neat and elegant structure, with very different sensations from those which arose in the breasts of the ancient fathers, among the Jews, when the foundation of the second temple was laid. Ezra informs us, that such as had seen the first temple in its pristine glory, wept aloud. And the prophet Haggai asks, *Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory ? And how do you see it now ? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing ?* Some of our aged brethren present, knew our *first* house in Chester, and God has spared them to witness the erection and completion of *this*. If they institute a comparison betwixt the two, and consider the contrast, they may be disposed to weep indeed, and to weep aloud ; but I am sure the tears will be tears of joy, and they will be ready to exclaim, with pleasure and admiration, *What hath God wrought ?* For the glory of this latter house far exceeds that of the former. If we only consider the extent of the building, the excellence of its accommodations, the convenience of its situation, and the whole of its admirable workmanship, which does equal credit to him who designed and to those who executed it, we shall be compelled to give it our decided preference.

---

1. *Chester Courant*, Tuesday, September 29th, 1812.

But I hope it will have a superior glory in another and more exalted sense. I hope it will have the glory of being the *birth-place* to many precious souls; and that where one soul was converted to GOD in the other chapel, scores will be converted in this; and that it shall be said, at no distant period, of this man and that woman, *that they were born here!* I am sure I speak the sentiments of many worthy citizens of Chester, who have subscribed nobly to this building, when I say, that this was the great object which influenced their conduct at the commencement of this undertaking, and which they have all along kept steadily in view—the promotion of the glory of GOD in the salvation of sinners.

It was not in hostility to the Establishment, nor in opposition to Christians of any other denomination, that this work was begun, and is now completed. The *LORD God of Gods, he knoweth, and Israel, he shall know, if it be in rebellion or transgression against the Lord that we have built us an altar.* It was rather with a view to promote the best interests of our fellow-creatures, and to enlarge the Redeemer's kingdom in this city. When I look back upon the events of the two last years, my mind is filled with the mingled emotions of wonder and delight, and I cannot help exclaiming, in the animated and exulting language of the Psalmist, *The Lord hath done great things for us wherefore we are glad.*

It has pleased GOD greatly to enlarge our borders as a Christian Society: our numbers are much increased, and our congregations doubled. For a time we were cooped up in a place which was much too strait for us, and which has frequently been so crowded as to threaten to bury us in its ruins. Many durst not come on this very account. Necessity, therefore, drove us to look out for a new situation, and we were compelled to build; and I gladly take this opportunity of saying, that many of you have afforded us the most liberal assistance. But I shall not anticipate what my respected brethren will doubtless say on this occasion.

I have only to add, that two of our ministers, Messrs. Bradburn and Gaulter, who stand high in our Connexion, and whom this city had the honour of sending out, will conduct the further services of this forenoon and afternoon; and our worthy brother Bunting [the Rev. Jabez Bunting, then stationed in Halifax], who stands equally high in the estimation of his brethren, will preach in the evening. May the great Head of the Universal Church crown their united labours with success; and may the luminous cloud of the Almighty's special favour and protection ever rest upon this place, and upon the congregation here assembled! Amen!

At the close of the morning service a very pathetic incident took place.

The late Rev. John Bowers, who was present, used to relate the following touching story:—When Bradburn came out of the pulpit into the vestry, he saw the old shoemaker with whom he had served his apprenticeship nearly fifty years before. His name was Peter Haslam; but Bradburn had been in the habit of calling him “Old Pe.” He was deaf, blind, and poor, and of course greatly altered; and when Bradburn recognised him, he was much affected, and taking one of the old man’s hands between his two, he said, as the tears streamed down his face, “Is this my old master? Poor old Pe! Poor old Pe! my heart bleeds for thee, Poor old Pe!” He then gave him all the money he had in his pocket; and at the next Conference, after making a moving speech about his old master, he stood with his hat at the door of the Conference chapel when the preachers retired, and made a collection for “Poor old Pe.” On account of his deafness, old Peter generally occupied a seat behind the preacher in the pulpit of the old Octagon Chapel during divine service. Bradburn seldom visited Chester, and it is assigned as a reason, that when he did go, he was so sympathizing and generous towards his relatives and friends, that he always left with a light purse. At the opening of the new Chapel, he met with his old friend, George Lowe, whose kindness he had so often proved in his youthful days. He said, “Mr. Lowe, you gave me my first black coat.” The old gentleman responded, “Do not mention it, Mr. Bradburn, I was the obliged person.”<sup>1</sup>

From a pamphlet (kindly lent by Mr. George F. Adams), printed by J. Fletcher, for the opening service, it appears that the following hymns were used:—

- Morning — 1. Lo! GOD is here! let us adore!  
 2. Exalt the King of Kings.  
 3. LORD of hosts, how lovely fair, etc.
- Afternoon—1. How pleasant, how divinely fair, etc.  
 2. In sweet exalted strains.  
 3. Come SAVIOUR, and our souls inspire.
- Evening — 1. How did my heart rejoice to hear, etc.  
 2. And will the great Eternal God.  
 3. Now, LORD, the heavenly seed is sown.

---

1. T. W. Blanshard: *Life of Samuel Bradburn*, 1871.



Rev. John Braithwaite, the younger son of an officer of excise, was born September 29th, 1770, at Parton, near Whitehaven. Intended for the Church, he received a good education, but coming under the influence of Methodism, he joined its ministerial brotherhood, of which he was an honoured member for many years. His wife, through whom he possessed considerable property in Whitehaven, died in Chester, January 2nd, 1811, at the early age of 39.

Writing from the Sheffield Conference, August 10th, 1811, he says:—

We have had a good work in Chester. At least one hundred have been added to the Society in the Circuit, sixty of whom are in the City. Our large Chapel is going forward fast, and we have got subscriptions in Chester alone to the amount of £1000. A gentleman, who was lately Sheriff, and who bids fair to be Mayor, has been recently brought to God, and has just begun to preach. Multitudes flock to hear him. He came to the Conference last Saturday, and has been with me ever since. Blessed be God for our encouraging prospects! May we cheerfully spend and be spent in the service of our divine Master!

Mr. Henry Bowers wrote the following letter to Mr. Braithwaite's biographer:—

To Mr. Robert Dickinson.

Chester, January 22nd, 1824.

Dear Sir.

Our late worthy friend, Mr. Braithwaite, came to Chester a few months after my conversion to God. When he began his labours in this city, the religious worship of God, by the Methodists, was carried on in the Octagon Chapel, and the Society were in a more prosperous state than they had been for some years; yet this city being the head of a Diocese, much Church prejudice existed; and, I believe, in the Conference, a more suitable preacher could not have been selected to meet the wishes of the Chester people and find acceptance among them. His ministry soon became abundantly owned and blessed of God; his amiable disposition and gentlemanly manners gained him the esteem of many, who before despised the Methodists. The chapel became too small for the congregation that attended; and the consequence was, we

commenced a subscription for a new one. I had the pleasure of accompanying Mr. B. in this labour of love; and having newly left the world, I had an opportunity of introducing him to many who had never been inside a Methodist chapel. There was something so pleasing in his address, that we succeeded in almost every case where we solicited. Several persons, strongly attached to the Church, subscribed as much as from five to ten pounds, and many one guinea each. In all, including our own friends, we raised upwards of twelve hundred pounds; but having to build when materials were at the highest, we have had many unavoidable difficulties to contend with.

He had been two years with us before the chapel was finished, and during that period had many seals to his ministry. My dear partner through his instrumentality was brought to God, and held him in the highest estimation. Indeed, he was beloved by all, more, perhaps, than any of his brethren who preceded him; his piety was deep and evidenced itself in all his communications with the people of God. No wonder, then, they should wish him to stay another year. To effect this, a petition was addressed to Conference; and as, at that time, three years' stations were discouraged, Mr. Walker and myself were deputed to go to Leeds, in order to effect so desirable an object. The day after we arrived there, a three years' station was rejected: However, we made all the interest we could to accomplish our purpose, and to the surprise of many we succeeded by a vote of Conference in our favour. We never had reason to repent of the trouble we took for his third year was, in my opinion, his best year: The large new chapel on a Sunday evening was crowded to excess. Mr. Hill, who was appointed with him that year was a very acceptable preacher, and assisted him in keeping up the congregations. He preached his farewell sermon on a Monday evening; and although we have not usually large congregations on week nights, yet, on that occasion, the chapel could not contain all that wished to hear him; the aisles were crowded, yet many went away. This respect shewn to him was not confined to the Methodists, but included Churchmen, and Dissenters of all descriptions.

Yours respectfully,

HENRY BOWERS. 1

---

1. *The Life of the Rev. John Braithwaite*, by Robert Dickinson, London, 1825, is a most interesting book. It contains many particulars about Mr. Braithwaite's work in Chester for which no room has been found above. He was greatly interested in the public life of the city, and his ready pen was often used in writing political verses.



**DAVID JACKSON.**

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE JUBILEE OF HIS MEMBERSHIP  
OF SOCIETY, AND AN EXPRESSION OF THE HIGH  
ESTEEM OF HIS FRIENDS.



The accounts of the Trustees were kept in one solidly bound volume from 1812 to 1891. The interest of the book is greatly enhanced by the fact that the autographs of most Superintendents, Trustees and Chapel Stewards from the beginning are to be found in its pages. What memories do its pages recall and what thoughts are stirred as the faded characters are perused! Here appear the names of many of the most distinguished Methodist preachers of the era as conductors of the Anniversary services.

Here one may see the firm signature of an early Trustee getting less firm, and then shaking more and more with each year added to the veteran's life, until the year comes when his name is written on earth no more. The advance of Science is revealed as we pass from the large charges for oil at the beginning to the regularly recurring gas bill in the later pages. The progress of Methodism and the effectual organization of the Connexional principle may be traced: at first we see the Superintendent and his officers travelling far and wide to collect for the new Chapel; in later years we read of a loan from the Chapel Committee and later still of regular subscriptions to the Chapel Fund and other Connexional institutions. A great feature has always been made of the Trust Anniversary. The first was held on November 2nd, 1814. The old way of making arrangements appears from the entry: 6s. Coach, 10s. 6d. Expenses for Mr. Pinder's journey to Liverpool to invite the preachers. No halfpenny cards or sixpenny telegrams then! The Rev. Henry Moore and the Rev. Edward Hare, both of Liverpool, were the preachers and the collections

amounted to £53 6s. 2d. At the fourth Anniversary the Rev. Robert Newton was the preacher, and the collections realized £98 10s.

Among the higher figures may be recorded ; 1834, £104 8s. 6d. (Rev. E. Walker).

The Seat Rents from the beginning till 1835 were recorded in a very strong and beautifully printed book. The entries are made with wonderful accuracy and neatness. The work must have been a labour of love. An examination of this register shows that the Seat Rents have been from the first a large source of income. The number of sittings offered was 612, the number actually let, 455, and the maximum annual rent possible was £311. The amounts received for the first four quarters were as follows :—

1812, Decr., £56 12s. 6d.	1813, Mch., £52 10s. od.
1813, June, £52 3s. 6d.	1813, Sep., £49 19s. 6d.

The amounts fell off a little until 1829, when 440 seats were let, and the income for the year was £209 15s.

Turning again to the Treasurer's account book, it appears that in 1847, the seat rent income still stood at over £50 a quarter. The highest point seems to have been reached in 1864, when it brought in £259. In recent years these figures have not been approached.

Pasted inside the old seat rent register is a plan of the Chapel with the prices charged for the seats indicated, dating presumably from the commencement. The front seats of the gallery and those to the right and left of the pulpit in the body of the Chapel, were the most expensive, being 3/- per quarter. The seats at the remote back both above and below were at 1/- each, and there were intermediate prices.

For many years the Trustees were hampered by a large annual payment to defray the interest on borrowed money. But the obligations were always duly met, thanks to the good anniversary collections and the excellent seat rent roll. In 1845 fresh liabilities were incurred. The large house and stable on the north side of the Chapel which had been bought by the Trustees in 1811, and then sold, were repurchased for £1100. The house was divided and rearranged for the accommodation of two ministers, at an expense of £243. On the site of the stable and yard behind it, were erected school buildings at a cost of £840, for the use of both the Sunday and weekday scholars. The total cost of the purchase, alterations, and erections was about £2500; of this sum about £2000 was borrowed on the note of the Trustees and added to the debt of the Trust premises. But even with this burden to bear the position of the Trust steadily improved.

In 1860 the question of reducing the debt was resolutely faced. The large sum of £1879 16s. 7d. was raised by subscriptions, and a loan of £1300 was granted by the Connexional Chapel Committee, to be repaid in twenty half-yearly instalments. This left a debt of £1100 only: £600 on annuity, £500 on loan. The position of the Trust continued further to improve. The instalments were steadily paid off. Thirteen years later when only the £500 remained, a further effort was made. £250 was raised to meet a loan of £250 from the Connexional Chapel Committee (to be paid off in ten half-yearly instalments). This provided for the entire extinction of the debt, and was recorded with deep expressions of gratitude to God. On the same

day the topstone of the City Road Chapel was laid, March 21st, 1873.

In 1878 the finances of St. John Street were at their best, when a sound healthy Trust was not only meeting all its own expenses, but rendering considerable help towards the support of the ministry.

The Trustees of St. John Street Chapel on the deed, dated July 30th, 1811, were as follows:—

George Lowe, Chester, Goldsmith.  
 John Jones, Chester, Linen Draper.  
 Henry Bowers, Chester, Druggist.  
 George Walker, Chester, Wine Merchant.  
 Robert Shearing, Chester, Druggist.  
 Samuel Williams, Chester, Linen Draper.  
 Thomas Jones, Chester, Gentleman.  
 Samuel Beckett, Chester, Waggoner.  
 Robert Parry, Chester, Currier.  
 Thomas Shone, Lower Kinnerton, Gentleman.  
 Joseph Betteley, Chester, Cordwainer.  
 John Hitchen, Alpraham, Gentleman.  
 James Sale, Duddon Heath, Yeoman.  
 John Reece, Tarvin, Miller.

It was arranged that there should be thirteen trustees. Mr. Samuel Beckett withdrew his name during the time the deed was in process of formation and Mr. Reece was appointed in his place. But just before the deed was engrossed Mr. Beckett desired that his name should be retained. Thus fourteen persons were appointed. Mr. John Garner, junr., was the Solicitor.

It has not been found possible to compile a complete list of all those whose names have at subsequent



times been enrolled upon the Trust ; but it is believed that the following particulars are not seriously deficient. The second enrolment was on February 14th, 1829. From a minute of 1830 it appears that the trustees then were : George Walker, Thomas Bowers, Samuel Beckett, William Guest, Benjamin Davies, Richard Evans, Matthew Harrison, Joseph Janion, Samuel Williams, Dutton Williams, and George Lowe.

The next enrolment was on February 18th, 1845, and the trustees were Charles Simpson, Samuel Rutter, John Turner, Matthew Harrison, Henry Richard Bowers, John Simpson, Thomas Bowers, William Edwards, Thomas O'Hara, James B. Baker, and Joseph Dean.

In 1860 at the time when the great financial effort was carried out, the number of trustees had been reduced by death and resignation to the first seven of those in the preceding list, and there were then added : James Done Bowers, Samuel Meacock, Joseph Beckett, Thomas Beckett, Charles Parry, Francis Butt, and George Williams.

In March, 1881, the various deeds were reviewed by the Connexional Chapel Committee at Manchester, and the whole of the property consolidated. The Trustees then surviving were : Matthew Harrison, H. R. Bowers, J. D. Bowers, Charles Parry, and George Williams ; there were then added : William Twiston Davies, Charles Lee, Richard Jones, Robert Evans, John Griffiths, Alfred Wathew Butt, John Stringer Moss, and Samuel Clemence.

On May 8th, 1891, futher additions were made : George Eaton Clarke, Arthur Henry Davies, Samuel

Percy Davies, John Dodds, George Edward Oldmeadow, and Michael Johnson.

Matthew Harrison was on the trust for a very long period. The son of a devoted coadjutor of the Wesleys, and the father of one of the noblest laymen our Church ever had, he was a connecting link between ancient and modern Methodism. He was born in 1799, and was the son of Robert Harrison, one of the early Methodist preachers ordained by John Wesley. He was sent to Kingswood at a tender age, and, as an illustration of the conditions of life then prevailing it may be mentioned that the prohibitive cost of travelling made his visits to his home so infrequent that he was once seven years without seeing his mother.

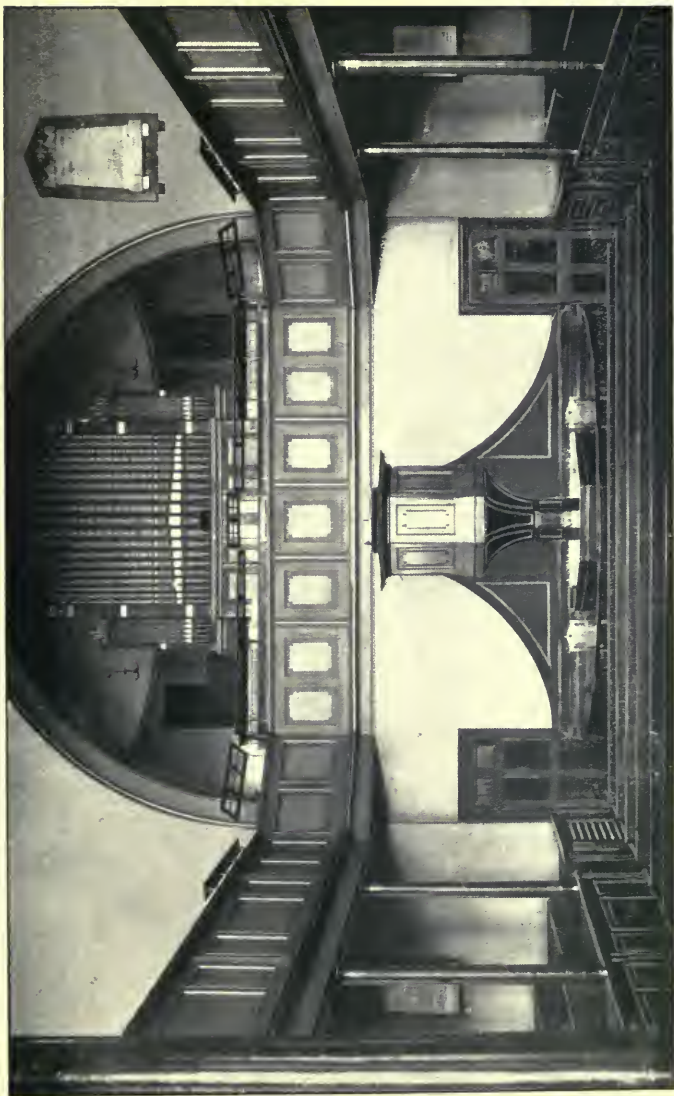
“Matthew Harrison settled in Chester, and for sixty years lived in the same house in Castle Street. When he retired from business he spent a great part of his time in reading, his love of books leading him to the accumulation of a considerable number. For many years he was a familiar figure in the streets of Chester, tall and striking, stern yet kindly, as he wended his way twice a day with unflinching regularity to the services at the Cathedral.”

As already recorded, he married Eliza, daughter of the Rev. George Morley. Their eldest son was Dr. G. Morley Harrison, father-in-law of the Rev. John Dymond.

Matthew Harrison was early presented with the freedom of the City, and in honour of that event gave the name of the Methodist Mayor of 1827 to the son who was born September 4th, 1830: Henry Bowers Harrison, in subsequent years so greatly honoured of GOD at Gravel Lane chapel, Manchester.<sup>1</sup> Matthew Harrison died in August 1893, aged 94.

---

1. *Life of H. B. Harrison*: by his daughter, 1895.



INTERIOR OF ST. JOHN STREET CHAPEL.



Probably few Chapels as old as St. John Street can shew such a short list of Chapel stewards. The list from the beginning is as follows, with the date of appointment :—

1812 George Walker.	1828 Henry Bowers.
1814 Robert Shearing.	1830 Matthew Harrison.
1816 Thomas Bowers.	1831 Thomas Bowers.
1819 Joseph Janion.	1848 Thomas Bowers, junr.
1821 Samuel Williams.	1878 James Done Bowers.
1823 Samuel Beckett.	1895 A. W. Lucas, F.G.S
1824 George Lowe.	
1827 Henry Bowers and Joseph Janion.	

On the resignation of Alderman Thomas Bowers in 1878 after thirty years of devoted service, it was decided that the duties of the stewardship hitherto discharged by him should be rearranged, and that three separate officers should be appointed :—1 Trustees' Treasurer ; 2 Chapel Steward ; 3 A Steward to take oversight of the house property belonging to the Trustees. The veteran was retained in the service of the Trust by being appointed to the first of these offices, but shortly passed to his reward. Mr. J. D. Bowers discharged the first two offices in conjunction until his death in 1895, when Mr. John Dodds was appointed Treasurer.

A notable early convert at the new Chapel was David Jackson. He was born in London in 1782, and died in Chester, May 23rd, 1870. It was in 1811 that he came to Chester, and bound himself for seven years as a labourer to Mr. William Davies, bricklayer. He was attracted to the Watchnight service conducted by Rev. Wm. Aver, Rev. James Blackett and Alderman Henry Bowers. He was deeply impressed by the latter speaker, and thenceforward turned his back upon his sinful ways. In 1817 he became a member of the Methodist Church, and retained that privilege with

honour till his death. A man whose life was steeped in prayer, he had great gifts of public prayer, and as a class leader and local preacher, was eminently useful for a full half century. He never missed but one appointment, though the Circuit was much wider than it is at present. He would frequently walk 32 miles, and preach three times on the Sunday. It is said that he had regular stations for prayer upon these country journeys. Once when he was employed to erect an oven near Ruabon, he was often found during meal times in prayer, and a man who used an adjacent stable was constrained to say, Either David Jackson prays too much or I pray too little! He regarded Methodism as his home, and looked upon the Methodists of Chester as belonging to his family. In June, 1867, when completing the Jubilee of his membership, he invited all the Chester Society to take tea with him on the Chapel premises; after tea a very interesting meeting was held, which led to arrangements being made for the painting of the beautiful memorial portrait now in St. John Street vestry, and reproduced in this volume.

\* \* \*

It must distinctly be borne in mind that this is a history of *early* Methodism in and around Chester. The erection of St. John Street Chapel is its natural terminus. Many worthy ministers and laymen have been associated with the later history of the Circuit. It would have been a pleasure to have recorded their work had it been possible, and have said more about extensions at City Road and at Garden Lane. The body of this work has occupied more space than was anticipated at the outset, and several items prepared for the Appendix have had to be sacrificed.

# NOTES.

—◆—  
*Note A, page 1.*

Everett says it was "a prebend," who gave the book. Jessop, (*Mag.* 1857), says it was Dr. Samuel Peploe. It is to be regretted that the names of other members of this pre-Methodist Society at Bunbury have not been preserved. The only name that can be added with certainty to those mentioned in the text is that of George Craven of Bunbury; probably Thomas Hilditch and — Davidson were members also.

*Note B, page 19.*

The particulars relating to Alraham and Bunbury, which Everett gives in his book on *Methodism in Manchester and its vicinity*, were derived from correspondence with Mr. John Sim Hitchen. The letters which passed between them have been perused for the purpose of this work.

*Note C, page 28.*

John Bennet, like most of the early preachers, kept a diary. His Journal is still extant, in whole or in part, and it was hoped at one time that the Wesley Historical Society would be able to publish it. It has not, however, been available for the present work, to which no doubt it would have materially contributed.

*Note D, page 28.*

The earliest Circuit divisions were as follows:—

1746.—1. London. 2. Bristol. 3. Cornwall. 4. Evesham. 5. Yorkshire (which included Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutlandshire and Lincolnshire). 6. Newcastle-upon-Tyne. 7. Wales.

1748.—1. London. 2. Bristol. 3. Cornwall. 4. Ireland. 5. Wales. 6. Staffordshire. 7. Cheshire (which included Cheshire itself, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Sheffield, etc.) 8. Yorkshire. 9. Newcastle.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. For notes C and D see the first volume of The Publications of the Wesley Historical Society.

*Note E, page 13.*

Wesley wrote from Dublin, July 19th, 1750, to Mrs. Gallatin, wife of Colonel Gallatin, as follows:—

The reason why we refused for several years to license any of the places wherein we preached was this: we supposed it could not be done without stiling ourselves Dissenters. But the Recorder of Chester shewed us this was a mistake, and procured a license for Thomas Sidebottom's house in that County, altho' he then, as well as at all other times, professed himself a member of the Established Church. Since then we have licensed the House at Leeds, and some others.

I do not think there is anything in this extract, kindly furnished by Mr. Stampe, to modify what is said in the text. It does not necessarily imply that Wesley had been in the city of Chester. I do not recollect to have met with the name Sidebottom in any of my reading.

*Note F, page 46.*

This letter was not known to Rev. B. Smith when he was drawing up his manuscript. But when I published it in the *Methodist Recorder* with an indication of its difficult points, it was from him that the most helpful reply came. The explanation given in the text is substantially his.

*Note G, page 56.*

Tyerman, (*J. W.*, II., 538), makes a strange slip. In mentioning the opening of the Octagon in 1765, he says, "At this period Chester was included in the Manchester Circuit, the Society raising, by their united efforts, about a shilling per week for the support of their preachers." He gives as his authority a reference to *Magazine* 1844, wherein appeared the account of the Quarterly Meeting held at Boothbank, April 1752. But in 1765, as we have seen, the Society was much stronger than thirteen years earlier. Hemingway in his *History of Chester*, II., 162, says the Methodists had sufficient credit to obtain £520 upon bond to erect the Octagon.

*Note H, page 87.*

This journal ran through five editions by 1799, the first being printed by Harvie, a Chester printer, in 1768. Wesley's preface "To the Reader" is dated Liverpool, April 7th, 1768. See Green's *Wesley Bibliography* § 250. The pamphlet lies before me as I write. A short account of Miss Mary Gilbert extending to eight pages, precedes the extract from her Journal. This was written, surely, by her uncle Francis. Mr. Green says, "probably by her father." But he was far away in Antigua at the time.



*Note J, page 97.*

It has often been stated, as for instance on p. 14 of Dr. Gregory's *Life of Samuel Bradburn*, that Olivers was the author of *Hymn 66*, "Lo He comes with clouds descending." But this was probably not so. See a full discussion in *Magazine* 1861; also Green's *Wesley Bibliography* § 192.

*Note K, page 102.*

One may be certain that many most illuminating facts about the Chester Circuit perished in those flames. Mr. Jackson had probably some reason unknown to us when he declared that the Vicar's letter was addressed to a young woman in Chester. The only Arretton I can find in the very complete index to the *Royal Atlas* is in the Isle of Wight. The Bardsley letters in the text are from originals belonging to Mr. George Stampe, of Great Grimsby, whose kindness I gratefully acknowledge.

*Note L, page 106.*

Samuel Bradburn was President in 1799, and passed to his reward in 1816. The particulars given are derived from the little book by Dr. Gregory; from *The Life of Samuel Bradburn, the Methodist Demos-thenes*, by T. W. Blanshard, 1871; and *Memoirs, etc.*, by Eliza Weaver Bradburn, 1816.

In the latter an interesting account is given of a visit of Bradburn paid to Chester in 1775 to see his dying mother.

"Chester, March 7th, 1775. An unkind report having been circulated that I was turned a Socinian, I thought it my duty to go and confute such a falsehood by preaching expressly upon the subject. [For the same reason he visited Rushton also on this occasion.]

"Chester, April 21st. While I was at breakfast a messenger came to inform me of my mother's death. She died on the 20th inst. aged 53. One circumstance constrains me to be in some measure resigned; God spared her life nearly twelve years ago in answer to a prayer that I offered up, when she seemed to be dying; in which I begged that she might live twelve years exactly. I was then very young, and could not bear the thoughts of losing her; but imagined I should be able to part with her after those years."

I have said that it was Mr. Gardner of Tattenhall who disappointed the congregation at Wrexham and thus furnished the opportunity for Bradburn's first sermon. Blanshard, following the early memoir, says, "Mr. Gardiner of Tottenham." This I take to be a transcriptional error.

*Note M, page 122.*

These particulars about John Murlin are not to be found in the sketch of his life printed in the third volume of E.M.P. They are taken from a rare volume in my possession entitled: *Experiences and Happy Deaths of several Methodist Preachers who laboured in connexion with*

*the late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. A New and Improved Edition. Dublin: Printed by John Jones, for the Methodist Book-Room, Whitefriar Street. 1806.*

Its contents correspond nearly, but not exactly, with those of Jackson's six volumes.

*Note N, page 131.*

The association of Madeley with Chester clearly appears from the following references. On p. 442 of *Wesley's Designated Successor*, a letter of Fletcher's is quoted in which he calls Boothby and Hern "preachers who came over to help us." Writing from Nyon in 1778 to the Societies in and about Madeley, he sent his love and thanks to Mr. Murlin and Mr. Roberts. In 1779, he writes, "Thank brother Costerdine and his fellow-labourer for their occasional help." At this time, Fletcher had recently erected a meeting house in Madeley Wood, now part of the Wesleyan Chapel there.

*Note O, page, 198.*

The Williams family.—Mr. Smith's MS. contained little reference to this family. The particulars given in the text are the fruit of much search in the old Magazines, and of considerable correspondence and inquiry. With Mrs. Gittins of Wrexham, I had a prolonged correspondence, though I never had the pleasure of her personal acquaintance; and it was with great regret that I saw in the *Recorder* that she passed away shortly before these pages went to press. I am also indebted to Rev. R. Harding, Mrs. Tilston, Mrs. Samuel Moss, and Mrs. Edmund Hill. The task has been rendered unusually difficult by the fact that there were two Williams families, and that the same names appear in successive generations.

*Note P, page 209.*

The account of the conversion of Alderman Henry Bowers is derived from a manuscript prepared for a funeral sermon by the Rev. John Bowers, and kindly lent me by a member of the family. It was largely quoted by Dr. Osborn in his interesting and beautiful memoir of Rev. John Bowers (Mag. 1870) and is doubtless authoritative. Rev. David Young, in his *Origin and History of Methodism in Wales*, gives another account. Alderman Henry Bowers heard Bryan preach at Beaumaris where the former was visiting and the latter stationed. He was so impressed that he came round to see the preacher early the next morning. John Bryan, though shaving, suspended his toilet and there and then prayed with his visitor, who found CHRIST in that Anglesey cottage. I have ascertained that this account, if modified, is probably true. I think it must refer to the period when Henry Bowers was seeking the LORD, and that the deep conviction which took place under the preaching of Bryan, was afterwards erroneously spoken of as his conversion. But in any case it is strange that the long paper referred to does not mention Bryan.

# APPENDICES.

---

## APPENDIX I.

---

### **Schedules of Membership, with Notes.**

---

**T**HIS table of the membership in successive years of the places at present composing the Chester and the Tarporley Circuit, is as nearly decennial as the state of the records will allow. To avoid misunderstanding on the part of those who are not intimately acquainted with Methodism, it should be said that the Methodist system of reckoning members by no means indicates the full strength of the Churches; adherents are several times as numerous as those actually enrolled in membership, especially of later years.

	1790	1799	1810	1822	1831	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900 (Dec.)
The Octagon -	129	100	180	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. John Street -	—	—	—	468	289	345	467	458	373	278	299	195
City Road -	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	160	164	173
Christleton -	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	—	35	41
Waverton or Rowton -	24	21	6	15	8	8	11	18	36	24	21	11
Barrow -	—	—	16	15	7	25	33	41	36	31	52	31
Dunham -	12	16	11	4	—	6	2	39	9	25	36	18
Pulford or Belgrave -	—	—	—	21	6	—	—	—	—	—	6	3
Stanney -	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	9	8	9	8
Ellesmere Port -	—	—	—	—	—	16	27	—	—	—	—	16
Garden Lane -	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	41	37
Hargrave & Green Looms -	—	—	—	—	—	—	4 ea.	8	9	12	11	10
Saltney -	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	36	20	17	34	29
Milton Green -	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	23	29	39	31
Tarporley -	8	56	26	47	—	70	58	33	—	—	—	—
Mouldsworth -	—	—	—	17	17	22	13	2	—	—	—	—
Duddon Heath -	19	20	19	14	10	22	24	14	—	—	—	—
and Clotton -	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kelsall -	22	—	10	22	20	36	45	37	—	—	—	—
Eaton -	—	18	—	—	15	36	56	29	—	—	—	—
Tattenhall -	—	—	12	5	10	—	14	7	—	—	—	—
Tarvin -	—	—	—	—	—	7	25	29	—	—	—	—
Tiverton -	20	24	17	26	21	12	11	18	—	—	—	—
Alraham -	9	29	32	50	38	47	61	42	—	—	—	—
Bunbury -	—	—	47	38	36	34	63	28	—	—	—	—

The separation of Tarporley and its associated villages was accomplished in 1868 after long debate, it being then arranged that the Chester Circuit should be worked by two married ministers and Tarporley with one married minister and one single. At the present day the Tarporley Circuit comprises all the places it took over at the division, with the exception of Tiverton and the addition of Oakmere. Our Church has no building in Tattenhall itself large and important village as it is. But Tattenhall Lanes Chapel is not far on the one side, while on the other Milton Green attracts many worshippers. With respect to the commencement of the work in Kelsall, Janion says: "I introduced preaching into Kelsall, and gathered a Society of 10 or 15 members. We occupied Mr. Rowe's barn first as a place to preach in, and afterwards we fitted up one of the out houses as a place for public worship: now they have a handsome good Chapel at Kelsall."



The earliest extant tabular record of the Chester Circuit is that drawn up by Andrew Blair in 1788, and reproduced in the illustration which faces p 136 The Society in the City was then divided into 10 classes, the leaders being G. Walker, 25; J. Sellers 24; S. Walker, 14; W. Ellis, 11; J. Parry, 14; M. Brisco, 16; My. Blair, 15; Wm. Stanton, 12; John Armstrong, 17; Peter Heath, 4; Total, 152. The schedule for 1790, drawn up by Parson Greenwood for the last Conference over which Wesley presided, gives the names as follows:—

Geo. Walker, Ann Do., Sar. Manning, Jane Jonson, George Lowe, Mary Lowe, Mary Walker, John Jones, Wm. Cliffe, Mary Faulkner, Mary Meredith, Cath. Latham, Margt. Powel, Martha Duke, Rachel Roberts, Robt. Benion, John Jones, Sen., Ann Bennet, Thos. Venables, Elizh. Whitehead, Margt. Bradburn, Elizth. Wharton, Margt. Williams, Sarah Barry, Ben. Carter, Dory. Langley, Richd. Atherton, Elizh. Mixon, Elizh. Rowland, John Sefton, Mary Hall. 31.

Willm. Moulton, (late Sellers), Henry Jones, Mary Gaskill, Jane Mesham, Mary Williams, Mary Humphery, Ann Brown, John Skellard, Robt. Moulton, Richd Orme [Tailor], Elizh. Jenks, Martha Thornhill, Peter Heath, Catherine Robinson, Margt. Sefton, Elizh. Tomkies, James Kirk, Hannah Breeze, Ann Cotgrave, Thos. Foulkes (lives in Wales, but desires to have his home amongst us).\* 20.

Mary Ann Brisco, Lr., Fanny Hawkins, Sarah Steel, Mary Orme. Hanh. Challenger, Hanh. Dutton, —Ellis, Susannah Parrey, Liddia Sellers, Mary Brassey. 10.

John Armstrong, Lr., Ann Stanton, Ann Evans, Cath. Jones, Wm. Noble, Robt. Roberts, Robt. Williams, Patric Boyd, Wm. Cook, John Hopson, Ann Smith, Mary Hocknel, Sar. Pickering, Sar. Charnick, John Jones, Jane Ithell, Mary Ellis. 17.

Wm. Stanton, Lr., Collin Robinson, Thomas Bradshaw, Ann Gorton, Mary Jones, Elizh. Oneal, Cath. Powel, Mary Simpson, Evan Williams. 9.

James Parry, Lr., Thomas Manning, Saml. Ankers, Thos. Caldicut, Richd. Jones, Richd. Parker, Thos. Taylor, John Harrison, John Hughes, John Charles [Cordwainer], Thos. Lowe, Saml. Steel, Jos. Challenor, Martha Jones, Willm. hallenor. 15.

Wm. Ellis, Lr., John Mc. Daniel, Charles Greenley, Thos. Avern, Saml. Bradburn, Wm. Codington, John Jones, Rem., Evan Roberts, Thos. High, James Hayward, Thomas Higinson, John Jones. 12.

Wm. Ankers, Saml. Walker, Thos. Fearnal, Elizh. Williams, Jane Cook, Jane Oldham, Elizh. Wright, Sarah Ormes, Marg. Ridish, Mary Hinds, Mary Robinson, Ann Do., Mary Phillips, Jas. Wharton, Mary Greenwood. 15.

\*Thomas Foulkes joined the Methodist Society at Neston early in its history. He afterwards removed to Chester and subsequently to Machynlleth. There he joined himself to the Calvinistic Methodists. He retained his affection for his own people and was in the habit of presenting a donation to the Chester Society at every Midsummer fair. When Owen Davies and John Hughes, the pioneers of Wesleyan Methodism in North Wales, came to Machynlleth he received them gladly.

—o—

Greenwood records the following names in the country Societies mentioned in the above table.

### Wharton, or Rowton.

John Dean, Lr., John Gregory, Mary Do., Thomas Williams, Pen. Do., Dan] Thelley, Elizh. Do., Jo. Dean, Mary Cookson, Elizh. Howel, Mary Dean, Ann Williams, Charles Weaver, Jo. Dod, Samuel Dean, Han. Do., J. Ellis, Elizh. Do., Alice Reew, Hanh. Hooley, Thos. Dean, William Howel, Jane Mason, Ann Oldfield. 24. (1788, 22.)

### Tarporley.

Wm. Wild, Eliz. Do., James Holt, John Hinton, Sarah Do., Sarah Johnson, Elizh. Gregory, Mary Littler, 8.

### Alperham.

Saml Hitchens, Mary Do., Ralph Simm, Elizh. Smith, Edwd. Penington, Mary Cawley, Saml. Lloyd, Mary Do., Cathe. Bebington. 9. (1788, 10.)

## Teverton.

James Baily, Sarah Do., Richd. Oaks, James Butler, Mary Do., Geo. Dimila, Jane Do., Elizh. Jackson, Charles Wharton, Rachael Do., Wm. Warburton, Margt. Do., Samuel Barnes, Ellenr. Do., Thos. Walker, Cathe. Do., Wm. Challenor, Thos. Tapley, Elizh. Lloyd, Martha<sup>†</sup>Bailey. 20. (1788, 28.)

## Dutton Heath.

Thos. Faulkner,\* Lr., Grace Do., Mary Billington, John Varnon, Zachy. Snelson, Mary Amery, Hugh Wharton, John Francis, Sarah Do., Sarah Besad, Thos. Crowfoot, James Do., Saml. Do., Willm. Do., Willm. Wharton, Han. Do., Mary Dodd, Tim. Lloyd, Rich. Howel. (1788, 19.)

Worthy, warmhearted, indefatigable . . . Indeed, if he had any faults, it was an excess in religious exercises; for when he had got his heart warm, he would continue his prayer for 15 or 20 minutes; but if this were an error I wish we had more. Duddon Heath and Tattenhall were the first places that received the tenets of Methodism from Alpraham, . . . Mr. Faulkner was one of the first at Duddon Heath who opened his house to receive the messengers of the churches. <sup>1</sup>

## Kelsall.

Edwd. Astbury, John Wally, Mary Do., John Do., Jane Do., Samuel Rowe, Martha Do., Edward Garner, Sarah Garner, John Garner, Elizh. Do., James Prescott, Mary Do., Esther Walley, Martha Do., Sarah Do., John Roberts, Jams. Sutton, Robert Watson, Ann Garner, John Done, John Garner. 22.

## Dunholm.

Wm. Davies, Thos. Dutton, Mary Do., Thos. Youd, Alice Do., Sarah Do., John Dean, Elizh. Do., John Bradbury, Jas. Pritchard, Thos. Rowe, Nathl. Parkins. 12. (1788, 15.)

## Clotton.

Charles Garner, Elizh. Garner, Jo. Jackson, Elizh. Do., John Do., jun., Ellenr. Garner, John Johnson, Mathew Prince, Margt. Do., Elizh. Johnson. 10. (1788, 18.)



In the earlier chapters of this book it has been indicated that in the earliest days of Methodism Circuits or Rounds were very extensive and vaguely defined. By the time of Wesley's death their boundaries had become fairly well fixed. The Chester Circuit then covered a very much wider area than in modern times. The

following facts derived from the study of the Chester records will show that the places worked in connection with the old Chester Circuit have been distributed over the following ten Circuits at least in addition to the Chester and Tarporley Circuits.

### 1.—Wrexham.

1790: Caergwrle.

Richard Williams, Lr., Elis Do., John Do., Rich. Do., Eliz. Do., Martha Roberts, John Tillotson, Ann Ragg, Robt. Jones, Elizh Do., Marg. Robinson, Ab. Davis, John Sefton, Cath. Do., Eliz. Griffith, Ellen Kendrick. 16.

1792: Wrexham, 9 (1799, 28).

1799: Racre or Rackery, 7.

Wrexham was made a circuit town in 1803. It was apparently handed over to the pioneers of Wesleyan Methodism in the principality previously to this; for in the list of members prepared for the Conference of 1803, Whitchurch is included but not Wrexham and its villages. In 1804 both are gone. The genealogy of these places on the borders is somewhat complicated. But in the light of the statement just made it seems that the statement in *Hall's Circuits and Ministers*, that Wrexham was formed from Welshpool, which in 1799 was formed from Brecon, cannot stand.

### 2.—Whitchurch.

1790:—Whitchurch.

Thos. Roberts, Ann Do., Willm. Batho, Eliza. Do., Han. Edwards, John Baker, James Garmston, Saml. Hesketh, Ellen Wynn, Saml. Roberts, Ann Ellis, Mary Broughall, John Catterwell, John Parsons, Mary Price. 15. Mary Baker, Dor. Smith, Mary Roberts. (1788: 21.)

Bronington.

John Winn, Mary Do., John Roberts, Eliz. Dodleston, Josh. Randols, Sar. Preston, Sar. Hopwood, Alice Cartwright, Amb. Edge, Ann Do., Mary Chidlow, Richard Radcliffe, Mary Dodleston, Richd. Gilbert, Susa. Do., Mary Butler, John Huxley, Danl. Catterall, Ann Do. 19. (1788: 19.)

Dods-green.

Wm. Mate, Eliz. Do., Richd. Glassey, Ann Do., John Do., John Dale, Mary Billington, Marg. Do., Thos. Foster, Han. Do., Wm. Jones, John Clark, Sar. Clark, John Greatbanks, Sarah Do., Martha Glassey, Mary Do., Saml. Key, Jo. Sadler, Mary, Do. 21. (1788: 22.)



Whitchurch was associated with Wrexham at the division of 1803. In 1815 it became a Circuit town. Record is also found of members at Tilston and Wirswall. In 1799 there were 21 members at Aston.

### 3.—Nantwich.

1790 : Nantwich.

Thos. Robinson, Han. Davenport, Wm. Plant, Mary Do., Saml. Wilkinson, Cathe. Do., Elizth. Hall, Han. Swan, Sar. Brook, Mary Barker, Jane Acton, Saml. Penkethman, John Richardson, John Furnifall, Mary do., Ellenr. Prince, Thos. Knowdon, Eliz. Robinson, Pheby Williamson, Ann Do., John Welds. 21. (1788: 16. 1799: 23.)

1796 : Audlem; 1799 : Whettenhall, 18; 1803 : Betley.

When the Congleton Circuit was formed from Macclesfield in 1803, Nantwich with its adjacent villages was ceded to it. Nantwich became the head of a separate Circuit in 1808. It is not clear whether Chorlton, with 21 members in 1799, is the place of that name now belonging to Nantwich, or a little village near Chester; probably the former, though in 1822, Chorlton by Wervin was on the Chester plan. In 1802, the Methodists of Nantwich were worshipping in an old hired Baptist Chapel. Ground was subsequently purchased in Hospital Street, on which a commodious Chapel was erected at a cost of £3,300. It was opened in November, 1808, by John Gaulter.

The first plan of the Nantwich Circuit, dated 1808, includes the following places:—Nantwich, Winsford, Wheelock, Buerton, Faddiley, Weston, Chorlton, Hough, Lea Hall, Betley, Haslington, Coppenhall, Minshull Vernon, Alsager, Bickerton, Peckforton, Aston Green, Wettenhall, Bull's Green. (*History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Crewe Circuit, Cæsar Caine, 1883*).

Despite the fact that there is no place now on the Nantwich plan called Acton, and an Acton does appear on the Northwich plan, it is probable that the work referred to in the following note was in the neighbourhood of Nantwich.

1788 : Burland and Acton, 15.

1790 : Little Acton.

Jo. Brown, Ann Do., Richd. Smith, Elizh. Platt, Margt. Cookson, Elizh. Cawley, Elizh. Smith, Elizh. Brown. 8. (1799, 27.)

## Burland.

Wm. Allwood, John Willet, John Wilkinson, James Platt, Mary Do., Mary Do., Frances Johnson, Geo. Chester, William Chester, Thos. Cookson. 10. (1799, 7.

William Allwood was a preacher. He is in all probability to be identified with the William Allwood who entered the itinerant work in 1756 and left it in 1764. It is said that his difficulty was matrimonial, and that materials exist for writing an account of his romance. Samuel Bardsley, in an affectionate letter dated May 16th, 1775, says:—"Do you think you can ever take the field again? Is not your way more clear than it was? Well, come when you will, and I will give you my vote."

There was some trouble about Allwood in which Wesley concerned himself. The point involved was probably his practice of travelling and preaching in other men's Circuits. The following letter is of interest:—

June 11th, 1775.

Dear Billy,

I am not easy to have this thing hang any longer. I therefore desire that you will immediately fix a day and summon all the Trustees, Preachers, Stewards, to meet you on that day at Chester, to determine that affair at once, and bring it to a final issue.

I am,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

Room must be found here for a word about a noted Cheshire Methodist, Thomas Walker. He was born in 1777, and in 1781 the family removed to Broxton Lower Hall. He was much helped by the local preachers, including Alderman Bowers, William Williams, and Peter Woolley of Duckington. When he first joined the Methodist Society, he attended public worship at Tattenhall, and subsequently at Duckington. He made himself very useful in the locality. In 1826 he purchased a farm at Minshull Vernon, and opened his house for preaching. He gave the land for the chapel there, and also the bricks required. His later years were spent at Nantwich, where he was honoured as a sympathetic visitor of the sick and dying. He died Sept. 6th, 1845.

#### 4.—Northwich.

1790: Winsford.

Charles Bebington, Ann Do., Ann Delves, Mary Gerrard, John Do., Thos. Vernon, Reb. Do., Geo. Wood, Margt. Wood, John Hampson, Sarah Griffith, Ann Blower, Elizh. Kent. 13. (1799: 27.)

Slater in his *Chronicle of Lives and Religion in Cheshire* speaks of Thomas Hulse, one of the early Methodists of Winsford, whose Christian life dated from long before the erection of any chapel in that place. Hulse used to say that when a boy he heard one of the first Methodist preachers. When the good man took his stand in the street, men, women and children ran in all directions to see the monster, and a murder in the street could hardly have caused a greater sensation.

1796: Over.

1799: Swanley Lane, 11, probably represents the modern Swanlow Lane.

#### 5.—Mold.

John Wesley preached at Mold on several occasions, but the place is first mentioned in 1792, 10 members, though nothing has come to hand with respect to the formation of the Methodist Society there. The work at Buckley was remarkably successful in the middle of the century: 1810, 21; 1822, 73; 1831, 90. In 1831 Mold had only 8 members. Mold and Buckley were ceded to Denbigh in 1832, the Chester Circuit in that way losing 104 members. Mold has been for many years a single station with Buckley and several other places upon its plan. Edward Parry who died in Chester in 1879 did a great work for that Circuit.

#### 6.—Frodsham.

In 1831 there were 30, and in 1840 20 members at Helsby which now belongs to the Frodsham Circuit which was formed in 1872. In 1791 there were members at Kingsley.

Many particulars relating to the introduction of Methodism into Frodsham and neighbourhood may be gathered from Janion.

Some time in the year 1790 the Methodists fitted up two bays of a barn for preaching in the town of Frodsham, which

were given to them by a farmer for that purpose. This place they occupied for the space of 12 or 14 years, until Divine Providence gave them the means of erecting a substantial Chapel at the east end of the town, which has since its erection, been considerably enlarged, so that it is now capable of accommodating 5 or 6 hundred persons. With this chapel has been connected for many years a good Sunday School. About the year 1800, my worthy friend and neighbour, Mr. Samuel Burgess of Helsby, fitted up a large room on his own premises, with a view of affording accommodation to his family and neighbours therein to worship God and to hear His word.

But it does not appear that any members at Frodsham were ever enrolled in the Chester Circuit. The place seems to have been worked by preachers from the other side.

### 7.—Birkenhead.

In 1790 there were the following members at Heswall (spelt then Haswell) :

Wm. Jones, John Minchall, John Upton, Thomas Williams, Jo. Blundell, Jo. Boumphrey, Han. Do., Eliz. Williams, Eliz. Gilbert, Mary Upton, Eliz. Burrows, Eliz. Blundell, James Swift, Jane Briscoe, John Burrows, John Jackson, Margt. Davis. 17. (Several of the names are marked with a cross, and at the end is written "given up.")

The work at Heswall was part of the shortlived Wirral Mission described on p. 147. Heswall is now a prosperous station in the Birkenhead Circuit which was divided in 1851 from Liverpool. Probably the modern Methodism of the Wirral is quite distinct from that which Miles Martindale inaugurated. There is also one record of members at Tranmere.

### 8.—Rock Ferry, divided in 1888 from Birkenhead.

Several of the places on its plan appear in the early Chester records.

#### 1790 : Neston.

Richard Hilsbury, George Welsh, Elizh. Do., Thos. Peters, Elizh. Do., Mary Guile, Mary Ware, Jane Brown, Margt. Do., John Williams, Richd. Lewis, John Prince, Henry Swift, Pheby Do., Alice Roberts, John Graham, Jo. Garner, Saml. Gladwin, Margt. Rothwell, Nancy Rawson. 20. (1788, 17 ; 1799, 17 ; 1822, 30 ; 1831, 54 ; 1840, 15 ; 1850, 20.)

For Methodism in Neston see pages 53, 63 and 189.

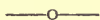
1822: Thornton Hough, 11; 1840, do., 3; 1850, do., 6.

Is Burton Green with 10 members in 1822, the Burton near Neston from which the little cause at Puddington draws a large proportion of its congregation; or the Burton whence worshippers go to Duddon Chapel?

Bebington in 1788 had 13 members; it does not appear in 1790; in 1799 there were 11. Whether its present Methodism, which dates back a long way, is continuous with the old cannot be said.

9.—**Denbigh**, see page 177.

10. **Seacombe**. There were members at Liscard in one of the early schedules.



There is now to be recorded a remarkably long list of places where there were once members belonging to the Chester Circuit, but where there is at the present day, so far as the writer can ascertain, no *organised English Wesleyan Methodism*. This fact however does not spell Methodist failure in every case.

*a.* Redistribution of various kinds has taken place. For instance, though many of the names associated with the earliest Methodist work in the Wirral district are no longer to be found in any Methodist returns, the important centres of Birkenhead, Seacombe, Hoylake, and others, are now occupied by our Church.

*b.* In some of the places Welsh Methodism in one of its sections is meeting the needs of the people.

*c.* Other Methodist Churches have entered the field; as the following list, by no means exhaustive, will shew.

The Chester Circuit of the Methodist New Connexion comprises Chester, Oscroft, Delamere, Aldford, Shocklach, Holt, and Huxley. There is also a Circuit with its head quarters at Hawarden.

The Primitive Methodists of Chester have Chapels as follows.—  
 First Circuit: George Street, Guilden Sutton, Saughall, Willaston, Little Neston, Manley, Elton, Mickle Trafford, Piper's Ash, and Croughton. Second Circuit: Hunter Street (City Temple), Churton, Rossett, Saltney, Dodleston, Golly, Llay, Commonwood. Third Circuit: Boughton, Huxley, Clotton, Ashton, Tarvin, and Stapleford. Ellesmere Port is also the head of a strong Primitive Methodist Circuit.

Here it may be said that the course of Primitive Methodism in this neighbourhood has been quite distinct from that of the old body. The beneficent work done by this community in the area covered by this history is gratefully recognised.

Besides these considerations it must be borne in mind, that some of the places about to be named, had societies merely, without trust-property.

From Blair's schedule for 1788, are taken the following which do not appear later: Caldly 13, Willington, 16, Chumpson (Cholmondeston) 8.

From Greenwood's list, 1790, are taken:—

#### Kinnerton.

Hugh Ley, Lr., John Davis, John Ley, Mary Davis, Ann Davis, Jo. Phillips, Margt. Do., Ann Do., Jo. Do., John Price, Cathe. Davis, John Shewel, Elizh Roberts, Jane B., William Williams, Mary Do., John Phillips, Elizh. Do., Mary Griffith, Jane Burton, John Davis, Mary Williams, Ithel Davis, Thos. Leech, Margt. Phillips, Mary Davis. 25. (1788, 13; 1799, 14; 1810, 25.)

#### Northop.

Richard Harrison, Lr., Wm. Hughes, Jane Harrison, Margt. Do., Mary Tomley, Elizh. Davis, Jane Hoskins, Sar. Price, Ann Do., Ann Morice. 10. (1788, 6; 1799, 9.)

#### New Pale.

Ralph Rolinson, Ann Do., George Pugh, Alice Do., Robt Do., Esther Do., Margery Dych, Mary Tickle, Ann Hall, Martha Othwell, Martha Capper, Martha Mercer, Wm. Parkinson, Martha Do. 14. (1788, New Pale and Woodside 9; 1799, 24; 1810, 15.)

Mrs. Alice Pugh was one of the Lewis family of Godscroft Janion writes in 1833:—

When I call to mind the public meetings which were held at the New Pale about forty years ago, especially our love-feasts, which came round once or twice in the year, I think I am got back to the primitive ages of Christianity, when simplicity and godly sincerity occupied every bosom. We were of one heart and one soul, and only love inspired the whole. The influence of these love-feasts spread as far as Manchester and Bolton, and our friends came from every quarter. Such crowds came from neighbouring villages, that at times we were obliged to hold the love-feasts out of doors, or in some of the out buildings; and great were our rejoicings on those occasions.

### Soghall.

Charles Done, Mary Done, David Price, Sar. Yoxhall, Margt. Rigby, Edd. Thornton, Silvester Warrington, Martha Thornton, Benj. Hancock, Jane Jones, Ann Williams, Cather. Price. 12. (1788, 13; 1799, 3).

### Storeton.

Richd. Yeadsley, Jonr. Hays, Thos. Lewes, John Johnson, John Ledsham, Martha Lewis, John Price, Margt. Do., Jam. Trilford, Elizh. Do., Willm. Do., Nancy Do., Saml. Upton, Margt. Do., Mary Pears, Rachel Collins. 16. (1788, 11).

### Greasby.

Thos. Turnifall, Richd. Halle, Sobt. Silcock, Elizh. Kendrick, Margt. Hayward, Richd. Shulcock, Abrm. Tronton, Jo. Barker, Han. Do. 9. (1788, 7).

### Melse [Meols?]

Marg. Cookson, Willm. Martin, Mary Do., Fanny Do., Willm. Cookson, Simon Do., Saml. Done, Ann Do., John Smith, Alice Do., Hanh. Barlow, Wm. Renison, Sar. Do., Wm. Evans, John Holmes, James Caturick. 16. (1788, 14).

### Grange.

James Raynford, Elizh. Do., Elizh. Johnson, Mary Carter, John Do., Rose Randle, Elizh. Lavey, Jo. Warren, Robt. Davis, Jo. Davis, Charles Taylor. 11.

### Rushton.

John Barker, Mary Do., Peter Plumley, Mary Do., Mary Roberts, Thos. Hitchens, Mary Do., Sarah Stockton, Jonn. Hitchens, Sarah Bettley. 10. (1788, 11; 1799, 14).

### Peckforton.

Thomas Bowden, Mary Do., John Rowland, Sarah Do., Thos. Guest, Mary Do. Ann Gardner, Richd. Smith, Sarah Do., Saml. Moss, John Do., Ellen Do., Martha Foxley, Dan Smith, Mary Do., Thos. Fleet, Mary Do., John Windsor, Han. Owens, Rem., Ann Woodflint, Wm. Wilson, Rem., John Furnifall, John Smith. 23. (1788, 18; 1799, 19; 1822, 12; 1831, 10.)

When Mr. John Reece, together with his two neighbours, Mr. Robert Dutton of Brassey Green, and Mr. Boden, then of Hoofield Hall, afterwards of Peckforton, first joined the Methodist Society, it made a great noise in the county. For some time they seemed to waver between Calvinism and Arminianism; but I believe that a sermon preached by Mr. Robert Roberts, determined their choice among the Methodists. (Janion, p. 81.)

### Duckington.

James Woolrich, Wm. Jones, James Pickering, Elizh. Do., Wm. Johnson, Mary Weaver, Richd. Faulkner, Alice Do., Cath. Smith, Han. Walker, Mary Vauhan, John Steel, Thos. Tinsley. 13. John Singleton, Eliz. Aston, Thos. Simpson, Mary Parker. (1788, 14; 1799, 25.)

### Tallent Green.

Wm. Peak, Peter Hope, Simon Do., Thomas Do., Rem., Elizh Davis, Mary Faulkner, John Davis, Sarah Do., Ann Hope, Audrey Do., Rem., Ann Peak, Jon. Hughs, Rem, Richd. Hope, Sick. 13. (1799, 24).

### Ightfield.

Jane Cliffe, Elizh. Do., Thos. Bradshaw, Ann Do., Elizh. Jarvis. 5. (1799, 3).

### Broomer-green.

Willm. Cartledge, Thos. Cliffe, Elizh. Do., Margt. Coons, Geo. Cliffe, John Chester, Saml. Hughs, Wm. Cliffe, Wm. Cooper, Eliz. Massey, Jane Sumner, Willm. Breeze, Charles Sproston, Susn. Serjeant. 13. (1788, 20; 1799, 15).

### Huxley.

Robt. Dutton, Peter Do., Mary Tickle, Thos. Do., John Do., Richd. Do., Sarah Dutton, John Young, Richd. Dutton, Edward Do., Mary Do., John Sandbach. 12. (1788, 16; 1799, 17; 1810, 10).

An examination of later records, keeping in the main to the same decennial periods of enumeration as in the preceding table, adds these names to the already lengthy list :—

Godscroft (1799, 6; 1810, 10; 1822, 19; 1831, 10).

Lea Hall (1799, 6), a common name in Cheshire, was probably near Nantwich, as the leader's name was Withinshaw.

Leighton (1799, 11).

Trafford (1810, 5).

Bretton (1810, 6; 1822, 2).

Horsley Bath (1810, 17; 1822, 6).



Mollington (1822, 10; 1831, 11; 1840, 9; 1850, 9).

Lynypandy (1831, 4).

Upton (1831, 7).

Halkin (1831, 14)

Barnston (1840, 8).

Raby (1840, 6; 1850, 10).

Yew Tree House (1840, 11; 1850, 13).

Beeston (1840, 9; 1850, 6).

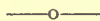
Elton (1840, 6; 1850, 8; 1860, 2).

Utkinton (1840, 7).

Stoke (1840, 6; 1850, 6). This must be a little village between Chester and Ellesmere Port, not the Pottery town.

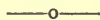
Farndon (1860, 2).

Oscroft, Egg Bridge, Brimstage, Burwardsley, Northwood, Welshampton, Spurstow, Barton, Bull's Green, Pentrehobin, Penymynydd, and Willaston, also appear.



The members in the Circuit in 1803, after the important divisions which took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century were :—

Chester 100, Rowton 10, Pentrobin 20, Kinnerton 12, Leighton—, Neston 15, Dunham 13, Godscroft 9, New Pale 17, Rushton 9, Tiverton 13, Duddon Heath 9, Tarporley 40, Alpraham 30, Winsford 29, Swanlow Lane 5, Bunbury 22, Peckforton 36, Huxley Lane 6, Whettenhall 11, Bull's Green 10.



The oldest plan of the Chester Circuit which has come to hand, was kindly lent by Mr. James Walker, of Northgate Street. It is for 1817.

The places were :—Chester, Bunbury, Tarporley, Buckley Mountain, Mold, Neston, Kinnerton, Bretton, \*Pulford, \*Greenwalls, Tattenhall, Helsby, \*Godscroft, Kelsall, Mouldsworth, Alpraham, \*Bath, \*Peckforton, \*Burwardsley, Duddon Heath, Barrow, Mollington, Rowton, \*Christleton, \*Dunham, \*Trafford, \*Clotton.

*The places marked with an asterisk were only supplied fortnightly. There are no week night services on this plan.*

The Preachers were :—AVER, BLACKETT, HITCHENS, ELLISON, WHARTON, R. JACKSON, SPRATT, REECE, ASTBURY, BOWERS, SPENCE, NICKSON, HURST, VERNON, BEBBINGTON, MELLOR, BARROW, HULSE, PICTON, WILSON, EVANS, TURNER, HUSSEY, LLOYD, DUTTON, J. NICKSON, JACKSON, FOXALL, WILLIAMS, C. JANION, J. JANION, EDWARDS, T. BOWERS, SIMPSON, S. JACKSON, EVANS.

On the plan for 1821 the following additional places appear :—  
 Guilden Sutton, Tilston, Chorlton, Waverton, Pentrehobin.



An interesting old Minute Book of the Local Preachers' Meeting, furnishes a good deal of information with respect to the working of the circuit in the earlier parts of the century. In the period covered by the first part of the book, which commences with 1825, the meetings were held fortnightly. An entry relative to the giving up of the service in many of the country places on the day when the Foreign Missionary sermons were preached in the city reveals a custom that has long since been discontinued. Such an interruption must have been very detrimental to the work.

Amongst the places mentioned in the volume are : Mold, which in 1826, it was decided to take off the plan, no details being given ; Kinnerton, " Bro. Richard Asbury having taken the chapel at Kinnerton for twelve months certain, this meeting agree to supply it afternoon and night in conjunction with the Buckley preachers." (1826.)

From the same book is taken the following extraordinary programme for the Watchnight of 1826. Our fathers must have had great staying power !

1.	H. Bowers to preach	..	..	60 minutes.
2.	S. Meacock to pray	..	..	15 "
3	J. Turner to speak ..	..	..	20 "
4.	W. Heath to pray ..	..	..	15 "
5.	R. Spence to speak	..	..	20 "
6.	Thos. Floyd, to pray	..	..	15 "
7.	Thos. Bowers to speak	..	..	20 "
8.	J. Hick (Minister) to conclude	..	..	15 "

---

180 "

Society.	No.	...	...	Deficient.	Surplus.	Extra for peace, or Remarks.
Chaster						
Mr. Jones	24	2 8	1 16 0			allowed for Members ready to pay
Preachers	14	1 8	2 13 1		1 10 1	
Wm. Howells	44	4 8	4 8			
Edwards	15	1 0	17 10	8 2		
J. Baker	15	1 10	2 3 10		13 10	
Wm. Williams	36	3 19	5 1 4		1 9 4	
S. Beckell	16	1 10	1 10			
R. Phillips	13	1 0	1 2 11	3 1		
Geo. Snow	10	1 19	1 12			
W. Brown	17	1 1	3 4 8		1 10 8	
R. Wigley	7	1 18	1 18			
Wm. Jones	14	1 8	1 1 4	5 8		
Wm. Thomas	19	1 18	1 5 10	12 2		
W. Williams	10	1 19	2 3 4		11 9	
Geo. Walker	13	1 0	2 1 10		15 10	
J. Meadeley	11	1 2	1 8	1 6		
Duddon	21	2 18	33 3 8			
Winstley	14	1 8	1 2 6			allowed for Members ready to pay
Horwley	17	1 1	1 3	9		
Silverton	13	1 10	1 10			
Alpraham	24	2 8	2 8			
Silstone	10	1	10	10		
Bunbury	17	1 14	3 10	1 8		
Sarporley	12	1 12	1 18 6	7 6		
Kilsall	14	1 11	1 4			
New Palton	14	1 8	1 8			
Godsroft	11	1 9	1 6		1	
Dunham	8	1 6	1 5		1	
Suttonhall	13	1 0	1 8 6		2 5	
Winnerton	17	2 14	2			
Wigley	24	2 8	1 9 11	1 6		allowed for Members ready to pay
Rowlton	17	1 14	1 4 6	9 5		
Drayford	5	1 0	1 6		6	
Pickforton	12	1 4	1 4			
	509	60 18	61 13 4 5 12 7	7 19		

THE FIRST PAGE OF THE CIRCUIT STEWARDS' BOOK, 1812.



## APPENDIX II.

---

**The Circuit Stewards' Account Book.**


---

THE photograph giving an account of the contributions from the various places in the Circuit is taken from the first page of the very strong and handsome volume in which the Circuit Stewards have kept their accounts from the time the St. John Street Chapel was built right down to the present time. The hand-writing is that of Alderman Henry Bowers.

The following scattered facts, additional to some that have already been given, may prove of interest :—

In one place at least mention is found of the old custom of paying ministers partly in cash and partly by orders upon the stewards of societies that had not sent in their due amount.

1813. 2/- each charged for the Quarter Board dinner.

1814, Decr. £41 4s. 9d. due to the Treasurer and stewards. It was resolved that 1/6 per member be raised by the leaders. On the whole this heavy levy was successfully carried out. It was resolved that "each married preacher shall be paid from this board the sum of £30 per quarter instead of board, quarterage, coals, candles, water money, servants, washing, gates, stationery and letters." Turnpikes, it may be said, are a frequent item in the accounts.

1823. A vigorous attempt was made to cope with the financial situation, by resolving that collections be taken in every congregation on the last Sunday in August and the first in September, to discharge the debt; and that the following sums be expected quarterly :—

Neston, Thornton, and Willaston, £5; Tarporley and Eaton, £6; Buckley, £5; Alpraham, £5; Bunbury, £5; Duddon, £1; Mouldsworth, £1 10s.; Barrow, £1 1cs.

1826. The March Quarterly Meeting was held at Kelsall, followed by a sermon and a Watchnight service.

## APPENDIX III.

---

**Subscriptions to Connexional Efforts.**


---

IN 1811 a special contribution of £7 11s. 6d., mostly from the City, was sent by the Chester Circuit towards the expenses occasioned by opposition to Lord Sidmouth's Bill, which would have proved most injurious to Methodists, as it included an attempt to require all persons applying for licenses to preach to prove that they were the ministers of distinct congregations. It was defeated in the House without a division.

In 1818 £14 1s. was subscribed for the liquidation of the debt of the Connexion. Henry Bowers, 5 guineas; Phyllis, Martha, and Samuel Williams, do.; Mrs. Gilbert, Mr. Joseph Janion, 1 guinea each; small sums 8s.

In 1819 £33 2s. was subscribed towards the relief of distress in the West Indies.

Chester has taken an honourable position in the three major Methodist financial efforts.

In the report of the *Centenary Fund*, published in 1834, Chester is credited with £603 os. 6d. Items of special interest were Mrs. and Miss Gilbert, £30; Mrs. Gilbert in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett of Boughton, £10 10s.; Joseph Reece, Esq., Tarporley, and Mrs. Reece, £10 10s. each, in memory of Mr. Reece's parents who were connected with Methodism 60 years.

The *Thanksgiving Fund* (1878-1883). Chester contributed £998 4s. 3d.

The *Twentieth Century Fund* of One Million Guineas. Chester promised at the outset One Thousand Guineas and honourably redeemed its promise with an ample margin.

#### APPENDIX IV.

#### List of Subscribers to St. John Street Chapel.

**A**MOUNT of the Subscriptions towards the erection of a New Chapel for the Public Worship of Almighty God, in Saint John Street, in the City of Chester:—Began by the Society of Methodists in this City, in the month of May, in the year of our LORD, 1811.

	£	s.	d.
The House of Messrs. Phillis, Martha, and Samuel Williams, Linen Drapers.. .. .	100	0	0
Miss Phillis Williams of the above House (a class leader)	50	0	0
George Lowe, Esquire, Goldsmith, a class leader and Trustee .. .. .	100	0	0
Henry Bowers, Esquire, Druggist, a Trustee .. .. .	100	0	0
John Jones, Linen draper, a Trustee and class leader ..	50	0	0
Mr. Thomas Cliff, Gentleman, the father-in-law of Mr. John Jones .. .. .	10	0	0
Thomas, Edward-parry, and Eliza, three infant children of Mr. John Jones .. .. .	10	0	0
George Walker, Wine Merchant, a Trustee .. .. .	50	0	0
Mr. Robert Parry, Currier, a Trustee .. .. .	25	0	0

	£	s.	d.
Mr. Robert Shearing, Druggist, a Trustee .. ..	25	0	0
Mr. Thomas Shone, Gentleman, of Lower Kinnerton, a Trustee .. ..	50	0	0
Mr. Samuel Beckett, Waggoner, a class leader.. ..	25	0	0
Mr. Samuel Smith, Gentleman .. ..	20	0	0
Mr. Thomas Hardman, of Wigan .. ..	25	0	0
William Smith, Esquire, of Warrington, from whom the premises were purchased .. ..	10	0	0
Mr. Thomas Jones, Gentleman, a Trustee .. ..	10	0	0
Mr. Thomas Jackson, Shopman, a local preacher ..	5	0	0
Mr. William Howie, Gunner at the Castle of Chester, a class leader .. ..	5	0	0
Mr. Thomas Allen, Macclesfield, Hatter .. ..	5	5	0
Mr. James Done, Farmer, Bradford p: Northwich ..	5	5	0
James Snape, Esquire, Brewer .. ..	10	0	0
Thomas Moseley Bennett, Esquire, Ironfounder, Chester and Liverpool .. ..	5	0	0
Mr. John Seller, Brewer .. ..	10	0	0
William Newell, Esquire, Brewer, and Alderman of the City of Chester .. ..	10	0	0
Mr. Charles Parry, Rope manufacturer .. ..	2	2	0
Mr. John Walker, Goldsmith.. ..	2	2	0
Messrs. Daniel and John Smith, Shoemakers .. ..	2	0	0
Mr. Joseph Betley, Shoemaker .. ..	—		
Mrs. Thomas Jenkins, widow, Tanner.. ..	2	0	0
Thomas Jones, Esquire, Hardware dealer .. ..	2	0	0
Mr. William Hankey, Hair Dresser .. ..	5	0	0
Miss Mary Meacock, Dressmaker .. ..	1	0	0
Richard Buckley, Esquire, Wine Merchant .. ..	10	0	0
Mrs. Joseph Wright, Widow .. ..	1	0	0
Thomas Clubbe, Esquire, Brewer .. ..	1	0	0
Mr. Thomas Jones, Linen draper .. ..	—		
Mr. Joseph Hancock, Shoemaker .. ..	2	2	0
Mr. Francis Parry, Baker .. ..	1	0	0
David Francis Jones, Esquire, Solicitor .. ..	5	5	0
Miss Eliza Walker .. ..	2	2	0
Miss Ann Bowers .. ..	1	0	0



	£	s.	d.
Miss Julia Jones .. .. .	1	1	0
A friend, p. Geo. Walker .. .. .	1	0	0
Mr. Chas. Sproston, Gentleman, of Stoke p: Namptwich	2	2	0
John Egerton, Esquire, of Oulton Park, Cheshire, one of the representatives in parliament for the City of Chester	50	0	0
John Fletcher, Esquire, Merchant .. .. .	10	0	0
Mr. John Garner, Junior, Solicitor, a local preacher ..	50	0	0
Mr. Adam Bailey, Bleacher, Ratcliffe, Lancashire ..	10	10	0
Joseph Johnson, Esquire, Wine Merchant .. .. .	10	0	0
Mrs. Collin Robinson, Widow, Flour dealer .. .. .	10	0	0
William Cole, Esquire, Builder .. .. .	10	0	0
Mr. Daniel Ley, Gentleman .. .. .			—
Mr. John Hitchen, Gentleman, Alpraham, Cheshire, a Trustee .. .. .	10	0	0
Mr. Richard Williams, Farmer, Rackerry, Denbighshire, the Brother of Messrs. Williams, Linen drapers ..	10	0	0
William Richards, Esquire, Town Clerk .. .. .	5	5	0
Mr. John Mellor, Plumber .. .. .	5	0	0
The Reverend George Morley, Methodist Minister, the Brother-in-law of Messrs. Williams, linen drapers ..	5	5	0
Miss Hannah Pickering, Servant to Mrs. Cummin, Widow	5	0	0
Mr. Robert Topham, Skinner.. .. .	5	0	0
Miss Leming, Spinster, Manchester .. .. .	5	0	0
The Reverend John Braithwaite, Methodist Minister ..	5	5	0
Mr. Robert Foulkes, Brandy Merchant .. .. .	2	2	0
Mr. Joseph Sheppherd, Carpenter .. .. .	5	5	0
John Bradford, Esq., Tanner .. .. .	10	10	0

---

All the above belonged to Chester, unless otherwise specified. The lists of payments and promises do not coincide; and the Treasurer's book differs somewhat from the Secretary's, from which the above list is extracted.

## APPENDIX V.

---

**Welsh Wesleyan Methodism in Chester.**

---

A DETAILED account of Wesleyan Methodist work amongst the Welsh speaking section of the population in Chester is excluded by the scope of this book, for none appears to have been attempted till the nineteenth century was well in its teens. Moreover the available materials are largely to be found in Welsh publications, which the present writer is unable to read. It is however well to set down briefly the various steps by which Welsh Wesleyan Methodism came to be established in the city.

*The Stranger's Companion in Chester*, 1821, in a paragraph upon St. John Street says, "a small building by the side of it in the same yard belongs to a Welsh congregation of the same opinions." The services held in the schoolroom were initiated a few years previously by Mr. Evan Jones, a Welsh Wesleyan from Rhuddlan who came to Chester in 1815. The Society was included in the English Circuit for some time, and in the old membership registers "the Welch class" appears for several years. In 1822 it was transferred to the Holywell Welsh Circuit. Boarding School Yard and Shoemakers' Row are mentioned as successive meeting places of the Society at this period.

In 1827 a site was purchased in Hamilton Place for £150. Great sacrifices were incurred by the brave Society as they proceeded to erect a Chapel thereon. It is said that they actually pawned their watches when there was no money in hand to pay the workmen. In August 1828 the Revs. John Bowers, Joseph Raynor, and others took part in the opening services of the Hamilton Place Chapel. The work continued to prosper and in 1850 a new chapel was erected upon the same site. The Chester Society was transferred to Mold upon the division of the Holywell Circuit, but for some years past it has been included in the Bagilt Circuit. In 1884 the beautiful modern chapel in Queen Street was erected. The site of the Hamilton Place

chapel is now included in the area occupied by the Market Hall. Many worthy names are to be found on the roll of Chester Welsh Wesleyans and it is greatly to be desired that the work may prosper, for in a border city like Chester there will always be found a large number of people more accessible to religious teaching in their own well-loved native tongue, than in the English language which in nearly every case they understand. Some of the foregoing information is derived from Rev. David Young's *Origin and History of Methodism in Wales*, in which further particulars are given.

## APPENDIX VI.

---

### The erection of City Road Chapel.

---

**A**FTER a mission had been carried on for some years in Black Diamond Street, a site offered in City Road was taken up by the St. John Street people, and a new Chapel erected thereon, several families transferring their membership thither from the mother chapel. The corner stones of the new building were laid on a beautiful day in July, 1872. At the ceremony four trowels were presented: the first, by Alderman Bowers to Mr. Thomas Hazlehurst, of Runcorn; the second, by Mr. Charles Lee to Mr. W. C. Marsden, of Bolton; the third, by Mr. Charles Parry to Mr. Joseph Beckett, of Belvidere, near Whitchurch; the fourth, by Mr. H. R. Bowers to Mr. William Smith, of Darcy Lever, Bolton. The opening Service was held on October 1st, 1873, and the first sermons were preached by the Rev. G. T. Perks, M.A., then President of the Conference, Rev. Morley Punshon, Rev. Gervase Smith, Rev. Luke H. Wiseman, and Rev. Richard Roberts. The cost of the Chapel, which provides seats for 1000 persons, was upwards of £7000. In 1875, the Trustees' Treasurer was able to state that no debt remained on the property.

City Road, though young, has its memories and its hallowed traditions. Andrew Bromwich was born at Chester in 1863. Converted at seventeen, he soon engaged in Christian work, and was for several years the life and soul of a successful mission band. The Conference of 1885 sent him, as a candidate, to Richmond College. In January, 1887, he went out to the fatal West Coast of Africa, and like many another heroic worker fell a victim to the climate very soon after his arrival there. A man of attractive and winning personality, full of earnestness and zeal, he exercised a great influence over his contemporaries at City Road, and was the means of turning many to righteousness. A tablet to his memory is one of the ornaments of the Chapel.

Rev. Thomas B. Goodwin, after his retirement from the active work of the ministry, rendered valuable help to the City Road Society, in connection with which he conducted a class. He was a Christian gentleman of a rare and beautiful type; courteous, yet firm. It is difficult to estimate his influence upon the society, so unostentatiously was it exerted. His memory is fragrant still amongst those who were privileged to come into close contact with him. The Goodwins were a Levitical family indeed.—Rev. T. B. Goodwin, 1841-1895, was a son of Rev. Josiah Goodwin, 1808-1866, who was a son of Rev. John Goodwin, 1768-1808 (Chester Circuit, 1796-7). It is said that the conversion of John Goodwin took place under the preaching of Moses Dale, of Northwich, a man whom Wesley would not receive into the itinerant ranks because of his deficient abilities.

FINIS.

## INDEX.



*The Roman numerals following the names refer to Chapters, and the plain figures to pages.*

*The names of preachers appointed to the Circuit are only included in the case of those who receive extended mention in the text: these names are given without title; whereas all other Clergy and Preachers included are styled "Rev," and the laymen "Mr."*

*The Index does not include matters mentioned only in the Appendix or Notes.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Acton, 5, 35, 36<br/>         Alpraham, I., 35, 36, 42, 112,<br/>             124-5-6<br/>         Baldwin, Rev. John, 34<br/>         Bardsley, S., 70, 99, 113<br/>         Barlow, S., 38<br/>         Bealey, Mr. Rd., 195<br/>         Bennet, John, I., II.<br/>         Bennett, Mr. Thos., 65, 112, VII.<br/>         Birchenall, Dr., 217<br/>         Blair, Andrew, 136<br/>         Boothbank, 35<br/>         Boughton, 26, 238<br/>         Bowers, Alderman Henry, 207<br/>             Do. Rev. John, 213<br/>             Do. the family, 214, 267.<br/>         Bradburn, Rev. S., 56, 103, 178,<br/>             233, 255<br/>         Brisco, Thos., 111, 143<br/>         Broster, Mr. Thomas, 40<br/>             Do. Miss Sarah, 40, 215<br/>         Bruce, Mr. Rd., 36, 191<br/>         Bryan, Rev. John, 178<br/>         Bunbury, I.</p> | <p>Calveley Hall, 7, 11<br/>         Carman, Mr. William, 205.<br/>         Catton, Mr. George, 28<br/>         Cawley, the family, I., 35, 126,<br/>             218<br/>         Cheek, Mosley, 85<br/>         Chester Churches :—<br/>             St. John's, 28, 31, 80<br/>             St. Martin's, 29, 31, 33, 34<br/>             St. Bridget's, 66<br/>             St. Werburgh's, 80<br/>             Trinity, 80<br/>             The Cathedral, 80<br/>             Matthew Henry's, 117<br/>             Independent, Queen Street,<br/>                 118, 150, 217<br/>             M. N. C., Pepper Street, 174<br/>             Presbyterian, City Road, 224<br/>         Christleton, 76, 238<br/>         Clarke, Rev. Dr. Adam, 158, 187<br/>         Coke, Rev. Dr., 158, 173, 234<br/>         Commonhall Street Preaching-<br/>             room, IV., V.<br/>         Cooke, Joseph, 184</p> |
|---|--|

Darney, William, 22  
Davenport, Rd., Esq. 7, 11  
Davies, Owen, 170, 176  
Day School, 241  
Dean, Rev. John, 151  
Denbigh, 177  
Duckington 61  
  
Escrick, Mr. George, 36  
Everett, Rev. Jas., I.  
  
Fletcher, Rev. John, 81, 86, 88,  
131  
Furz, John, 55  
  
Gardner, the family, 14, 192  
Gaulter, Rev. John, 39, 134, 171,  
202, 256  
Gilbert, the West Indian family,  
their residence in Chester, and  
other facts, 72-95  
Do. Miss Mary, her Journal pub.  
by Wesley, 86  
Gittins, Mr. John, 196  
Gommer, Mr. B., 209  
Goss Street Library, 240  
Grimshaw, Rev. Wm., 4, 38  
  
Hampson, Rev. John, 35, 36, 67,  
179  
Handbridge, early Sunday School  
work in, 238  
Harbridge, Mary, 179  
Harrison, Matthew, 196, 266  
Do. H. B., 266  
Harrison, Mr. Thomas, Architect,  
249  
Haswell, J. P., 189  
Haughton, John, 37  
Heath, Mr. Peter, 47  
Hitchen, S. and J. S., I.  
Hobrow, Mr., 137  
Hopper, Christopher, 8, 37  
Horne, Rev. Melville, 83  
Horner, William, 125

Huntington Hall, 28  
Hughes, John, 176  
  
Jackson, Mr. Daniel, 16  
Do. Rev. Thos. 24  
Do. Rev. William & ancestors,  
25  
Do. Mr. David, 267  
Jaco, Peter, 43  
Janion, Mr. Joseph, 178; his book  
181, quoted *passim*  
Do. Rev. Charles, 181; his  
mother, 128  
Jones, Mr. John, of Weaverham, 25  
Do. Mr. Rd., of Love Lane, II.  
Do. Mr. Edwd. of Bathafarn, 176  
Joyce, Matthias, 108  
  
Kilham, Rev. Alexr., 159  
Kingsley, 179  
Kingswood School, 14  
  
Langson, Mary, 107  
Leadbetter, Mrs. afterwards Mrs.  
F. Gilbert  
Lee, Thos. 51  
Leighton, 63, 121, 161  
Little Leigh, 178  
Lessey, Rev. Theophilus, 179  
Lowe, Mr. G. Sen., 58, 62, 226  
Do. Mr. G., Junr., 218  
Do. G., the preacher, 141, 183  
Do. Thos., 173  
Lyons, James, 173  
  
Manchester Round, 35, 39  
Manners, Nicholas, 51  
Martindale, Rev. Miles, 146  
Marsden, the family, 138, 150,  
195  
Maskew, Jonathan, 37, 38  
Mather, Alex., 71  
Methodist New Connexion, forma-  
tion, etc., etc., V., see also VII.  
Methodist Chapel, Independent,  
Trinity Lane, 157, 174

Miller, Robert, 186  
Moat House Farm, 9  
Mold, 36, 48, 177

Morley, G., 175, 195  
Moss, Mrs. Jane, 219  
Mouldsworth, 179  
Moulton, Rev., Wm., and his  
descendants, 205  
Murlin, John, 122

Nelson, John, 1, 47  
Neston (53), 63, 121, 188  
Norley, 179

Octagon Chapel, erection and  
early years, III.  
Do. later years, VI.  
Do. post-Methodist history  
of, 221  
Octagon Sunday School, VII.  
Oliver, Rev. P. 223  
Olivers, Thos., 95, 107

Parkgate, 36, 51, 53, 108, 188  
Parry, Mr. James, Sen. and Jun.,  
V.  
"Pear Tree" Preachers, 9  
Perronet, Rev. Edwd., 5  
"Pilgrims'" Inn, 65  
Porteus, Bp., 230  
Preston on the Hill, 106  
Pritchard, Mr. Jonathan, 35, 36,  
46, 61, 112

Rackery, 177, see also Williams  
family  
Reece, Rev. Rd., 137, 195  
Rodda, Rd., 134, 228  
Rogers, Mrs. H. A., 124, 135  
Roberts, Robert, 64, 120  
Do. Joseph, 196  
Robinson, Mr. Collin, 202  
Ruthin, 176

Scholfield, Jas., 41  
Seed, Rd., 98  
Sellers, Mr. John, 148  
Shaw, Mr. Geo., 26  
Do. John, 98  
Sim family, I.  
Simpson, Mr. C., 216  
Smith, Mr. S., of Tattenhall, I., 36  
Smith, Ann, 4  
Sunday School Work, Early, VII.  
Suter, Alexr., 182  
St. John Street Chapel, VIII.  
St. Martin's Ash, II., 56

Tarvin, 4, 27  
Tattenhall, 13, 14, 36, 52, 56  
Taylor, Thos., 83  
Taxall, 107  
Tiverton, 12, 25  
Townley, Dr., 184  
Trinity Lane Chapel, V.

Walker, Mr. G., the earlier, 171,  
199  
Do. do. the later, first steward at  
St. John Street, his MS. History  
of Chester Methodism, *passim*  
Walsh, Rev. Thos., 42  
Warren, Dr., 194  
Wathew, Mr., 218  
Wem, 53  
West, Francis, 185  
Whitchurch, 108, 177  
Whitefield, Rev. G., 42  
Whitehead, Dr., 5  
Whitehouse, Mr. W. E., of B'm.,  
213, 229, 255  
Wilcoxon, Mr. Jonathan, 119  
Williams, Mr. Ambrose, 198  
Williams family, of Rackery, 190  
Wirral, its early Methodism, 145  
Wooldridge, Mr., 61  
Wrexham, 16, 106, 111, 177, 178  
Wrigley, F., 113

Wesley, Rev. John, his visits to the neighbourhood:—

- 1 1749, Oct., to Alpraham, 6
- 2 1751, April, do. 19
- 3 1752, March, do. 20
- 4 1752, June, the first to—  
Chester, 31
- 5 1752, July, 32
- 6 1753, March, 34
- 7 1756, August, 47
- 8 1757, April, 47
- 9 1759, April, 48
- 10 1760, March, 48
- 11 1760, August, 49
- 12 1761, April, 52
- 13 1762, March, 53
- 14 1762, August, 54
- 15 1764, July, 56
- 16 1765, Spring, 69
- 17 1765, August, 70
- 18 1766, April, 72
- 19 1768, April, 86
- 20 1769, March, 97
- 21 1770, March, 106
- 22 1771, March, 108
- 23 1772, March, 109
- 24 1774, April, 112
- 25 (?) 1775, 123
- 26 1776, April, 123

- 27 1777, April, 123
- 28 1777, October, 123
- 29 1779, April, 124
- 30 1780, March, 125
- 31 1781, April, 126
- 32 1781, later, 127
- 33 (?) 1783, April, 127
- 34 1783, May, 128
- 35 1784, April, 128
- 36 1785, Spring, 130
- 37 1785, July, 130
- 38 (?) 1786, April, 134
- 39 1787, April, 135
- 40 1787, July, 135
- 41 1788, April, 141
- 42 1789, July, 143
- 43 1790, April, 149.

Wesley, Rev. John, letters of:—

- To Jonathan Maskew, 38
- To Jonathan Pritchard, 39
- To (?) —, 45
- To Jonathan Pritchard, 112
- To S. Bardsley, 124
- To Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 145
- To Rd. Rodda, 226
- To Mrs. Gallatin, 270
- To Mr. W. Allwood, see App.

Wesley, Rev. Charles, 27, 141

Wesley, Mrs. John, 34







UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 547 343 4

