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Methodism in Didsbury

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ST. PAUL'S WESLEYAN CHAPEL, DIDSBURY.

THE
Rise and Progress
OF
Wesleyan Methodism in Didsbury.

A PAPER,
BY
JAMES FITTON,

READ AT A MEETING HELD ON 23RD OCTOBER, 1889, TO CELEBRATE THE JUBILEE OF THE
OPENING OF THE BARLOW MOOR CHAPEL AND SCHOOL, CHAPEL STREET, DIDSBURY.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HEDLEY FITTON.

What is Methodism? Is it not a new religion? This is a very common, nay almost an universal supposition; but nothing can be more remote from the truth. Methodism is the old religion, the religion of the Bible—the primitive church—the Church of England. This old religion is no other than the love of God, and all mankind.—REV. JOHN WESLEY.

MANCHESTER:
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1891.

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TO THE
OFFICERS AND TEACHERS
OF THE
DIDSBURY WESLEYAN SUNDAY SCHOOL,
IN WHICH SCHOOL
THE WRITER HAS HAD THE PLEASURE OF LABOURING AS
A TEACHER, AND IN VARIOUS OTHER OFFICES,
FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS,
IS THIS DEDICATED.

P R E F A C E .

WHEN I undertook to prepare the following Paper, I did not anticipate its appearance in permanent form, and it is only in response to the solicitations of many friends that it is now published. I trust, however, that a perusal of this Record—imperfect though it is—of the past successes of Methodism, may serve as an encouragement to the workers in this portion of the Lord's vineyard, and stimulate them to further labours on behalf of our cause; in which case its publication will not have been in vain.

To my brother, who has furnished the illustrations which lend interest to the Paper, and to those who have supplied me out of Memory's storehouse with their recollections of bygone days, I tender my warmest thanks.

If I have omitted to mention any persons whose names ought to have found a place in a Paper such as this, the omission has been unintentional, and I must ask those who knew them to rest satisfied with the assurance that their record is on high, and that their "*work shall be manifest, for the day shall declare it.*"

J. F.

Rise and Progress

OF

Wesleyan Methodism in Didsbury.

CHAPTER I.

IT seemed to me, at the commencement of the task which (by request) I had undertaken, of preparing this brief history of Didsbury Methodism, that I was in the position of one who had his "tale of bricks" to produce, but who was without clay and straw. The records from which any information could be gained are exceedingly scanty, and, in consequence, I found it a work of considerable difficulty and labour to gather up the fragments of Methodist History in Didsbury. Fortunately, there are still living amongst us a few friends whose connection with our Church and its work extends over a period varying from thirty to seventy years, and from them I have obtained much of the information which I have to lay before you.

It would appear that Methodism first possessed "a local habitation and a name" in Didsbury in the latter part of the last century, as I find that in the year 1790 a society class was in existence here.

To the present Superintendent of the Circuit (Rev. J. H. Corson) I am indebted for a list of the members of this class,

and, as they constitute the vanguard of Methodism in this district, I furnish their names, which are as follows:—

George Padmore.	Ann Atkinson.
John Hampson.	Betty Padmore.
John Hampson, junr.	John Bailey.
Daniel Hampson.	Susanna Woolsanham.
Alice Hampson.	Sarah Watts.
James Walker.	Elizabeth Walker.
Daniel Bancroft.	

Previous to this period, several of the above are returned as members of the society at Burnage, where a class had existed for some time. Five of them appear as members at both places, and thus it would seem that the Didsbury class was an off-shoot from the one at Burnage. I have not been able to ascertain who was the leader of the Didsbury class, but this honour would probably belong to Mr. Padmore, seeing that his name is first on the list of members. Of Mr. Padmore I am unable to gather any information, nor can I learn where the members were accustomed to meet, but this would doubtless be at the house of the leader or one of the members, as there was no Methodist preaching room in Didsbury for many years after then.

In the year 1800, John Hampson (whose name is second on the list I have given) appears in the Society Returns as leader of this class, which at that time numbered eight members, viz.:—

John Hampson.	Mary Bibby.
Daniel Bancroft.	Mary Birch.
Jane Bancroft.	Jane Sunderland.
Mary Higginbotham.	Ann Atkinson.

It is worthy of note, as showing the vast changes which have since taken place, that according to the Circuit Returns of June, 1800, there were then 1,018 members in the circuit, which included the societies of—

Stockport, Bullock Smithy, Shawfold, Burnage, Heald Green, Cresse Cross, Wilmslow, Levenshulme, Hooley Hill, Ashton, Astma

Smithy, Openshaw, Droylsden, Whitford, Gilbert, Marple, Longhouse Lane, Disley, New Mills, Hayfield, Charlesworth, Glossop, Hallfield, Mottram, Didsbury, Gee Cross, Barrack Hill, and Sale-Moor.

Mr. Hampson (who it may be stated was the grandfather of our friend, Mr. Daniel Hampson) was a farmer, and lived at the picturesque farm still in existence at Spring Hill, Didsbury.

Where the members met, whilst he was leader, is not definitely known. It was not likely to have been at his house, as his wife was a woman who had but scanty respect for the Methodists or their class meeting; in fact, tradition points to the meeting place as being at a cottage (occupied probably by one of the members) which stood behind the Didsbury Hotel, a cottage long ago pulled down.

For thirty years or more did Mr. Hampson faithfully discharge the duty of shepherd to the little flock which gathered together week by week. From what I can learn, he was a man of exemplary Christian character, and was greatly loved. That he was plain spoken and blunt of speech the following story, told on good authority, will show:—

He was one night meeting his class, and the members had commenced to sing a hymn. One good brother, not blest with a musical voice, had joined in the singing with unwonted energy, to the great discomfort of his fellow-members. The leader bore the infliction as long as he could, but the “joyful (?) noise” the member was making proved too much for him. Turning to the member and calling him by name, he said, “Eh —! if I were thee, and I couldn’t sing better than that, I’d give over.” The member, unabashed, replied in language as familiar as that of his leader, “John, mi *heart* sings, an’ I shall sing too!”

The incident shows the familiarity which existed between the leader and the members.

Mr. Hampson continued leader of this class until old age and gradually increasing infirmity led him to give up his farm, and go and spend the remainder of his days with his son

John, who lived at the Old Hall Farm, Withington. There is a touch of pathos in the old man's departure from Didsbury. He was then seventy-seven years of age and was very infirm; he was therefore placed upon his horse, which was gently led along the road by his grandson Daniel, then a lad of about ten. On the way, the leader called to bid one of his members, Mrs. Mary Street (the mother of Mr. Jonathan Street), Good-bye. As he bade her farewell, he was overheard by his grandson to say, "Now whatever yo' do, stick to th' meons," meaning the means of grace—the class meeting. With these words of counsel to her, he resumed his journey and passed out of Didsbury never to return; dying at his son's house in the year 1833, at the age of eighty years.



CHAPTER II.

UP to a period between 1825 and 1830 there was no Methodist preaching place in Didsbury, and if our people wished to join in the public services of their own Church they had to walk to Heaton Mersey; but about this time events occurred which led to the establishment of a Methodist Sunday School. The two parishes of Didsbury and Barlow Moor presented, at that time, a widely different appearance to that which they have to-day. They were then mere hamlets, Barlow Moor being the largest and containing between 200 and 300 inhabitants, many of whom, alas, bore an unenviable notoriety for drunkenness, brawling, dog-fighting, and gambling. Two good sisters from Heaton Mersey, Mrs. Rigby and the wife of the gardener (whose name I cannot ascertain) at Parrs Wood (at which Mr. James Heald had a short time before come to reside), moved with compassion on seeing the godlessness which prevailed, visited Barlow Moor to seek out a place wherein they could hold cottage services. After a few fruitless visits, they found an asylum in the house of Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson, or Betty Johnson as she was more familiarly called. Her house was one of several which stood on the ground which is bounded by Hardman Street and Warburton Street. These houses were mostly occupied by hand-loom weavers, the lower part of each house consisting of a living-room and a loom-house. Here, on the Sunday afternoons, did these sisters hold cottage services. Mark the sequel! One of the results of these meetings was the conversion of Betty's brother, Austin Anderton, or "Owd Austin," as he came to be called in later years; a man whose name needs ever to be held in reverence by Didsbury Methodists. Austin's name subsequently came

to be so intimately bound up with the early history of Methodism in this place, and he was such a striking character withal, that I feel impelled to tell the story of his conversion, which some of our friends have heard him tell again and again in lovefeasts at Didsbury, Stockport, and elsewhere.

It was when Austin was about thirty-seven years of age that the great change was wrought in him. Up to that time he had led a most ungodly life ; had been a ringleader in sin, and a very terror to the neighbourhood. He was utterly ignorant of divine things ; in fact, he used to say that up to the time of his conversion he didn't know that a Saviour had been born in Bethlehem. He was one Sunday afternoon standing near the alehouse which stood on the site of the present Wellington Hotel, talking with his boon companions, when his niece Ellen (the daughter of Elizabeth Johnson, to whom I have referred) came to him with the message that some ladies wanted to see him at her mother's. As he was going across the road with the girl, he asked her what they wanted him for. Said the girl, "They're going to have a prayer meeting, and they want you to come." "I'll gi' thi prayer meeting, tha' little snicket," said he, and, turning on his heels, he rejoined his friends. Despite his roughness of character and many shortcomings, he had a fondness for this girl, and felt vexed with himself for having spoken so roughly to her, inwardly resolving that if the invitation were renewed the following Sunday he would go. Sure enough the invitation came, and to the meeting he went. It happened to be an experience meeting, and amongst those who spoke was this girl, who, in the course of a few remarks she made, said "I love God because God loves me." The words went like an arrow to the uncle's soul ; conviction seized him, and, said he (when telling the story afterwards), "I was so stricken in body an' spirit, that I could hardly rise fro' mi knees." He continued to attend the meetings, and in a few weeks light and peace entered his soul:—

His chains fell off, his heart was free.

He had been a great drunkard, and unfortunately in an unguarded moment he gave way to what had been his besetting sin ; ultimately, however, God gave him complete victory over his enemy, and henceforward he led a thoroughly consistent Christian life.

Here I must leave Austin for a time, and call brief attention to another man who was destined to play even a more prominent part than he did amongst Didsbury Methodists. I refer to Mr. Henry Bridge, who had come to reside in the village, and who was occupied as a joiner at Ford Bank, then in course of erection. Mr. Bridge was a man of good physique, tall, and of stately bearing ; he was a man, too, of some education, and of exceeding quiet and godly disposition. By the villagers he was held in great respect, being known amongst them as "The religious joiner," an epithet which, according to all accounts, was well deserved. He joined the little company of believers meeting at Betty Johnson's, and the good work so grew that it was decided to open a Sunday School.

I have some reason to believe that for a brief period this school was held in a cottage or room close to Betty's house, but though I have made diligent inquiry, I have failed to gain any definite information on the point. However, it is certain that this meeting-room very soon proved too small, and it would be as near as I can tell about the year 1830 that a move was made to the premises belonging to Messrs. Mycock, the plumbers, and then in the occupation of James Worsley, a smith and wheelwright. A room over the present workshop was taken, access to this room being gained by means of a doorway (and staircase) in the passage, in front of which passage the office now stands. A yearly rent of £4 was paid for these premises, and a good old Methodist (Samuel Shelmerdine) filled the post of school and chapel-keeper for the sum of (just think of it!) ten shillings a year!! A small pulpit fixed in one corner of the room, and a number of plain forms, constituted the sole furniture. Here for about nine years did our people worship.



BARLOW MOOR WESLEYAN SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Mr. Bridge was the first superintendent of the school, and we are privileged to have with us still, two who were scholars there—Mrs. Jon. Street* and Mr. D. Hampson,* whilst in the person of Mr. Jon. Street we have one who was a scholar,



MR. J. STREET.

and subsequently a teacher there for some time. It is also worthy of mention that Mr. Street not only taught on Sundays, but with a laudable desire to impart what instruction he could to others not so favourably circumstanced as himself, took charge of a night school which was held for the benefit of any who chose to attend. Mr. Street tells me that the arrangement he had with the young men who came was that they were to find the lights (candles) amongst them,

* Since this paper was read, both have died. See p. 47.

and he was to give his services as conductor. Thus it seems that these young men obtained the elements of a rudimentary education at a very trifling cost to themselves.

The Sunday School opened at nine o'clock and teaching went on until eleven o'clock (think of that, you present day teachers!), after which an address was given. In the afternoon there was teaching again, followed by a preaching service, the pulpit being occupied by the circuit ministers and by local preachers, amongst whom was the late Mr. James Heald.

It was shortly after the opening of this room that Mr. John Hampson went to reside at Withington, and that Mr. Bridge succeeded him as leader of the one society class which existed. Amongst the members of this class was Mrs. Daniel Hampson (not then married), who tells me that she had the honour of being the *youngest* member in the society, and received her first ticket in September, 1839, at the hands of the Rev. Wm. Horton (circuit superintendent), a ticket which she still has in her possession and treasures with pardonable pride.

In the work of the Sunday School, Mr. Bridge was greatly helped by Austin, who, after his conversion, threw himself body and soul into Christian service, being filled with an intense desire to do something for his Master. Truly could he say—

My heart is full of Christ, and longs
Its glorious matter to declare.

He was, however, very ignorant. He himself said (speaking afterwards on the subject) that at the time of his conversion the only letter in the alphabet which he could distinguish was O, and that because it was round. "Oh," said he, "how I did long to be able to read God's book, and give out a hymn in th' Sunday School." In his extremity, he placed himself in the hands of the Great Teacher, and—

No matter how dull the scholar whom He
Takes into His school, and gives him to see;
A wonderful fashion of teaching He hath,
And wise to salvation He makes him through faith.

At the age of thirty-seven, Austin commenced to learn the alphabet. At that time he worked on the roads, and the story goes that he used to give halfpennies to the lads who came from Withington to the Didsbury National Schools, if they would be quick back from school and teach him to read. He also used to spell out the signs on the carts which passed to and fro. Often at home would he sit up into the silent watches of the night, and at other times, after he had had a few hours' sleep, he would in desperate earnestness get out of bed, obtain a light by means of his tinder-box, and spell out chapter after chapter in the Bible. In due time he was able to read a little and give out a verse or two of a hymn by spelling the longer words as he went on. Some of our friends still with us have seen him stand up in the little schoolroom and give out a hymn something after the following manner:—

My God, the s-p-r-i-n-g of all my joys,
The life of my d-e-l-i-g-h-t-s,
The g-l-o-r-y of my b-r-i-g-h-t-e-s-t days,
And c-o-m-f-o-r-t of my n-i-g-h-t-s.

We are tempted to smile, but his co-workers knew what a struggle it had cost him to attain the ability to do even *that*, and restrained any temptation to laugh. The hymn, of which the above verse forms part, became his favourite; in fact, it used to be called "Austin's hymn." He continued his efforts at self-education, and ultimately was able to read his Bible (in which he took great delight) and the Hymn-book fairly well. "Then," said he, "when I was able to do that, I didn't envy a king." In the work of the Sabbath School he took the greatest pleasure. He taught the youngest scholars and jokingly spoke of himself as "Taycher o'th *first* class." Beneath a rough exterior, he had a heart filled with great tenderness and love for the scholars. It is said that he once went to Parrs Wood to beg a subscription for the school. He met with a very kindly reception, and Miss Heald ordered the servants to give him something to eat. Afterwards, she asked him if he would like to see their pictures. "Yes," he said, "I should."

Miss Heald showed him round, and some portraits were brought under his special notice. "Aye," he said, "they're very nice, but eh, bless you, we've gotten prattier pictures than these at Barlow Moor!" "Have you?" said Miss H., laughingly. "Aye, we have," said he; "these have eyes and 'canno' see, ears and 'canno' hear, mouths and 'canno' spake, 'but there's some lasses and lads yon' at th' school, whose hearts the Lord has oppen'd, and theer they are, singin' His praises. They mak' a deal prattier pictures than these!"

As showing Austin's zeal, and also the difficulties these early labourers in the Sunday School had to contend with, let the following story suffice.

Bibles and Testaments were badly wanted, but there were no funds wherewith to purchase them. In this extremity, Austin went to Heaton Mersey School and begged a number of old worn-out books which had been cast aside as unfit for further service. He filled a large basket with these books and carried it off on his shoulders in triumph, and often, afterwards, spoke of the joy that filled his heart as he trudged home with his heavy burden.

In Austin's nature there was a good deal of sly humour. Many stories proving this could be told of him, but I must content myself by relating two only.

Mr. Bridge, though an excellent superintendent in many respects, had a weakness for lying in bed rather long on a Sunday morning, and as a result he was sometimes late at school—an example which was not lost on some of the scholars. This troubled Austin, but how to try and read his chief a lesson without giving offence seemed a matter of some difficulty. At last he made the venture, and one Sunday morning, when Mr. B. had come in late, Austin said to him after the opening services, "'Enry, I wish you'd just spake to these childer about comin' late." "Eh, Austin," replied Mr. B., "I *dare* not." Whether he profited by Austin's sly rebuke or not, history does not relate.

One other story. He was one day working on the road in Withington when there came along two ladies, and with them

two little girls. The ladies went into a shop, leaving the children by the road side. Austin, who never lost an opportunity of speaking a word for his Master, began to talk to the children about the Saviour. Whilst talking with them, one of the ladies came and remonstrated with him. He told the lady of what he had been speaking, and incidentally mentioned that he belonged to the Methodists. "I don't like the Methodists!" she exclaimed indignantly, and turned to walk away. "Madam," was his quick reply, "the *devil* doesn't!"

I have dwelt at some length on Austin, and if any apology were needed for doing so, I should find it in the fact that he was such a striking figure in the early history of our school, and one of the brightest trophies, if not *the* brightest trophy, that Methodism ever won in Didsbury.



CHAPTER III.

EIGHT or nine years, as near as I can tell, were spent in the room I have described. It had, however, grown too small for the gradually increasing number of scholars and adult worshippers, and was altogether very inconvenient.

It was determined to make a move, and the way was opened out by one of the friends (Mr. James Worsley) erecting a building in Chapel Street, the lower part of which was to serve as cottages, and the upper part as a school-chapel.



BARLOW MOOR WESLEYAN CHAPEL AND SCHOOL.

The cottages—three in number—each consisted of a living room and bedroom on the ground floor, and overhead was the

one large room, for which a rent of £9 per year was paid. At one end of the room there was a small gallery and the pulpit, and down each side of the pulpit there were two or three pews for the use, I suppose, of our "upper ten," who paid from ninepence to one shilling per quarter for each sitting. This room, which was dignified by the title of the "Barlow Moor Wesleyan Chapel and School," was opened for worship on Sunday, the 20th October, 1839, the opening sermons being preached by the Rev. Wm. Horton and the Rev. W. H. Clarkson, the two circuit ministers.

The following paragraph, having reference to the opening services, appeared in the *Stockport Advertiser* of 25th October, 1839:—

BARLOW MOOR.

"The room which the Wesleyans formerly rented at this place "having become far too small, Mr. Worsley kindly undertook to "build a more suitable place. A new and commodious Chapel and "Sunday School was opened on Sunday last, when the Rev. Wm. "Horton and Rev. W. H. Clarkson preached most excellent and "appropriate sermons to overflowing congregations. The collections, "including liberal donations from Joshua Birley, Esq., Sam. Stocks, "Esq., and other generous friends in the neighbourhood, amounted "to £29. 16s. 7½d.—an extraordinary sum for such a place."

It will be remembered that the year 1839 was the Centenary Year of Methodism, so that a double interest attaches to the opening of the chapel and school referred to, and to the jubilee we are now celebrating.

At the opening services the centenary hymn was sung, one of the verses of which hymn runs as follows:—

Like the first ray of morning, emerging from night,
Our rising was feeble, obscure, and confined;
But as time kept advancing, increased was the light,
And wider and wider spread over mankind.

The hymn appears to me to have had a special appropriateness for the occasion, as whilst the sentiments expressed

in the lines quoted were suited to Methodism generally, specially were they applicable to *Didsbury* Methodism.

How true it is that here at any rate—

Our rising was feeble, obscure, and confined;

and that—

As time kept advancing, increased was the light.

Even in the first preaching room and school our friends had their anniversary sermons, and it will interest you to know that admission to the services on such occasions was by ticket, for which the friends were expected to pay one shilling, two shillings, or two shillings and sixpence as they could afford. A collection was also made after each service, and the possession of a ticket did not absolve you from contributing thereto.

Methinks that if some of us were judged by the standard of giving, which the Methodists of those days set up for themselves, we should be found wanting.

By the kindness of Mrs. Jon. Street we have come into possession of a number of these admission tickets, there being one for 1830, another for 1834, and one for the opening services of the chapel and school-room in Chapel Street. These tickets have no merit as works of art, but they form a most interesting memento of the past, and to preserve them so far as we can from the further ravages of time, we have had them mounted and framed, and they now hang in our school-room. This practice of admitting to the anniversary sermons by ticket obtained for some years after the opening of the room in Chapel Street, but was ultimately broken down by one of the students, I am told. If this be so, it would seem that the students of those days exercised much more authority than their successors do now.

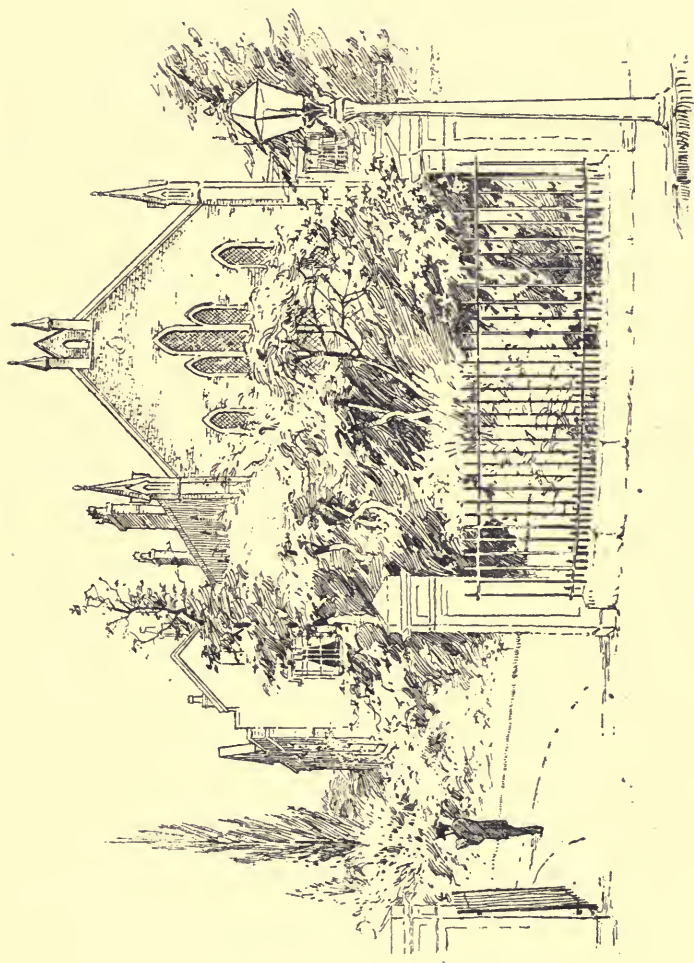
CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT this period (1839) our Conference took a step which was to raise Didsbury from obscurity to one of the foremost places in Methodism. I refer to the establishment here of the Northern Branch of the Theological Institution, the cost of which was defrayed out of the Centenary Fund, which amounted to about one quarter of a million pounds. In 1840, ten acres of land were purchased at a cost of £2,000, and suitable buildings were erected thereon at a further cost of £18,000. There was a handsome stone residence on the site. This was retained, and now forms the centre of the pile. A wing was added on each side, each wing being carried some distance back, the whole forming three sides of a quadrangle. A neat brick chapel, in the Pointed style of architecture, and capable of seating about 300 people, was erected close to, for the use of the Institution and the inhabitants of the district.

This Chapel was opened on 22nd September, 1842, the opening sermon being preached by the Rev. Dr. Hannah (then President of the Conference), who took as his text :—

“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Psalm xxvii. 4).

It is a notorious fact, though one not known perhaps to many of the present generation, that the opening of the Theological Institution, and the spread of Methodism in the district, was most unpalatable to the then rector of the parish church (St. James's), who had a short time before been appointed to the living. Though an estimable man in many respects, he knew no tolerance towards Dissenters, and before the Institution was opened did he fulminate with tongue and pen, and



WESLEYAN COLLEGE CHAPEL.

with great bitterness of spirit, against it, and against Methodism generally. In 1842 there was issued to the parishioners a pamphlet (bearing the signature of the Rector and his Curate), entitled "The Didsbury Church Hand-Bill." In this document our ministers were courteously designated as "the strangers." Rather cool this, from one who was only about thirty years of age, and who himself had just come to a district where Methodism had existed between fifty and sixty years!

The following are a few choice extracts therefrom :—

"There be some that trouble you. Not themselves recognizing "us as their spiritual pastors, they seek to draw you away to the "separate synagogue they have set up. . . . Their apparent "object is to scatter the seeds of division . . . and to endeavour "to loosen the attachment of the parishioners to the Church of their "Fathers.

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"It is our solemn conviction that the Wesleyan Ministers in "Didsbury have no proper authority, either from God or man, to "administer the sacraments of the Gospel."

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"We willingly believe that our new neighbours have the cause of "the Gospel chiefly at heart, yet the fact that none, save under especial "circumstances, are admitted to class without periodical payments "necessitates the belief that the rulers of the Connexion are unable to "adopt, with a clear conscience, the language of the apostles, 'I seek "not yours but you.' . . . The periodical contributions of the "members well nigh constitute the very life-blood of the Conference. "Stop the supplies, and as a religious body the Wesleyans are dead. ". . . 'To entrust money and power in the hands of an irresponsible "body (such as the Methodist Conference) is to put in jeopardy the "civil and religious liberty of our country. This was the germ "whence sprung the tyranny of papal Rome. Nor is there anything "in history to justify the belief that the bishops and rulers of that "Church, in its infancy, were less pious or more aspiring than is the "Methodist Conference of this day. Viewed in this light the tendency "of the system of Wesleyan Methodism is fraught with more real "danger to our country, in proportion as its wealth and power

“increases, than is that of any other Nonconformist system in our land, Popery alone excepted.”

Speaking of the means provided for the spiritual instruction of the people in the district, the rector, in a pamphlet entitled “Christian Unity,” published shortly after the handbill, says:—

“The Wesleyans possess a small chapel and school in Withington, whilst in Heaton they have an endowed school; and the Independents have also a chapel and school in the latter place. These two bodies have effected much good in those villages, but experience proves that no efforts of Nonconformists, however well intended, can supply the want of the village church. The stars may assist the traveller by night, in the absence of the moon; but they do not prove a substitute for that light which she was set in the heavens to reflect from the sun.”

Any value, however, which attaches to this acknowledgment, is somewhat discounted by another passage in the same pamphlet, which runs as follows:—

“In Heaton the Wesleyans have laboured for nearly twenty years by themselves. What have they done towards evangelizing and reforming the population? I am assured that the neighbourhood is worse now than it was ten years ago; and I very confidently appeal to the poor of both villages as to where they most punctually and sympathizingly receive that advice and assistance and those personal kindnesses and attentions which tend to pare down the distinctions between rich and poor! In this neighbourhood, at least, the Wesleyan system, ‘when weighed in the balance, is found wanting.’”

The rector’s splenetic attacks caused considerable sensation at the time, but (as may be well imagined) they did our cause no real harm. His serious misrepresentations of Wesleyan Methodist principles, and his endeavours to impede the usefulness of our ministers and people, were scathingly exposed and rebuked in two letters written and published in pamphlet form (in the early part of 1843) by a then well-known Methodist layman.

After all, the rector was better than his creed. He came to be convinced that it was not for proselytising purposes (as he had imagined), but for mere convenience of situation, that the Theological Institution and its chapel had been located at Didsbury; he also lived long enough to see how vain had been all his fears.

Happily, we can testify to the existence of a much better state of things nowadays. There is a more charitable and Christ-like spirit abroad; and our sincerest wish is that this spirit may continue to increase amongst the various branches of the Christian Church.



CHAPTER V.

TO return to my theme. Up to the time of the opening of the Theological Institution it had been the custom to teach writing in the school on Sundays. This was done in very many schools in those days, and some justification for the practice may be found in the fact that the lives of the poorer people were a continuous round of hard toil from Monday morning to Saturday night, and that Sunday was practically the only time when the rudiments of an elementary education could be obtained. Mr. Bridge felt sure that this practice, though it might in some measure be justified, would be distasteful to the ministers at the College about to be opened, and, taking time by the forelock, he called the teachers together to talk over the matter. Said he, "Now we shall never be allowed to continue this teaching of writing; let us quietly drop it and say nothing." His advice was acted on, and the practice ceased at once and for ever.

In the Rev. John Bowers, who became Governor of the Theological Institution in 1843, the school found a warm friend, and during the whole of his twenty-one years' residence at Didsbury, he and his family laboured with a zeal which hardly knew bounds to promote its interests.



REV. JOHN BOWERS.

In 1853, the school lost its honoured superintendent, Mr. Bridge, who went to live at Heaton Mersey. He, however,

continued to come and lead his society class, and did so up to his death in 1859.



MR. A. FITTON.

After his death the class was divided, Dr. Hannah being appointed leader of one portion, and my father (Mr. Andrew Fitton) leader of the other. For some few years before, Mr. Bowers had conducted a class, but that to which my father was appointed was the only one which was led by a layman, and as he has been its leader ever since, he has the honour of representing the first Methodist class meeting established in Didsbury.

There are no school records in existence for the period prior to 1851, but in a Superintendent's Register, which dates from May of that year, I find that there were eighty-four scholars and nineteen teachers on the books. About this time some of the students took an active part in the management of the school. One of the first names I find is John Bond. Then follow the names of Geo. W. Olver, Jas. D. Tetley, Richard Green, Wm. F. Slater, J. Priestley (who I understand subsequently went out to Africa as a missionary), Simpson Crump, Charles H. Kelly, and others less known. All the foregoing, judging from the number of times their names appear in the Register, must have taken a deep interest in the school, and we greatly rejoice that two of them (Rev. R. Green and Rev. Wm. F. Slater), after a long experience in circuit work, are found at Didsbury again, the former as Governor, and the latter as Classical Tutor, of the Institution at which they were students together.

It is an interesting fact that the oldest minute book extant (which dates from 6th November, 1857) was kept at the outset by the Rev. Chas. H. Kelly (the present President of the Conference), who was at that time the school secretary. And I ask, had ever any school a worthier secretary than he? It happens that some of us possess books given to us as prizes during Mr. Kelly's term of office. This fact, coupled with the accounts our fathers have given us of the splendid service rendered to the school by Mr. Kelly, have led us to follow his movements with more than a little interest, and amongst his many friends he had none who more greatly rejoiced than some of the teachers of this Sunday school when he was elected to fill the highest office Methodism has to offer.

On looking over the register I was rather amused to find that early in 1855 a plan was adopted of fining teachers one penny for being late, and there follows an entry: "Received by James Norris 4d. fines." "Received 1d." "Miss Lamb owes 1d." From which it would appear that Miss Lamb* had come late, and had also left her purse at home. The arrangement seems to have proved only a very qualified success (I think 6d. was about the total amount Mr. Norris received) and was soon abandoned.

Excluding the students, who were virtual superintendents, the following is a list of those who have filled the office of superintendent since a school was first established:—

Name.	Period of Service.
Mr. Hy. Bridge	1828 or 9 to 1853.
„ James Norris... ..	1853 to 1879.
„ Chas. Worsley	1853 to 1854.
„ Andrew Fitton	1854 to July, 1860.†
„ Daniel Bancroft	July, 1860, to Dec., 1860.

* I have since been informed that Miss Lamb objected on principle to pay the fine, the system of fining having been adopted without the proper authority of the whole body of teachers. All honour to her!

† Mr. Fitton resigned owing to his duties as local preacher interfering with attendance at school.

Name.	Period of Service.
Mr. John Crompton ...	Jan., 1860, to Dec., 1862.
„ H. A. Johnstone ...	Jan., 1863, to Dec., 1869.
„ J. H. Killingbeck...	Jan., 1870, to the present.*
„ Alfred Heald ...	Feb., 1880, to June, 1881.
„ James H. Norris ...	June, 1881, to the present.

It will be seen from this list that our present superintendents—Messrs. Killingbeck and Norris—have served us, the former (with a temporary break of nine months through illness) for well nigh twenty years, and the latter for over eight years, and there are many of our number who hope that they may “long be the last.”



MR. J. H. KILLINGBECK.



MR. J. H. NORRIS.

OUR SUPERINTENDENTS.

When there are so many who have rendered long and faithful services to the school, it seems rather invidious to mention names, but I cannot refrain from referring to the services rendered in earlier days by the Misses E., I., A. M.,

* Mr. Killingbeck resigned temporarily in October, 1877, owing to ill-health. He resumed his office (which in the meantime had been filled by Mr. Fitton) in August of the following year.

and S. Bowers, Mary and Martha Brundrett, R. Hollingworth, White, Birch, Street, and Messrs. Bridge, Anderton, Bancroft, Richard Sellors,* Norris, Hampson, Mottershead, Johnstone, Gordon, and Ewen.

Some of these, with the gathered years of life upon them and with the marks of many a conflict upon their armour, now stand in the glorious circle of Christ's conquerors. Others, including some whose names are not mentioned but who have rendered good service, are in other parts of the country, whilst there are some in distant countries, still engaged in the blessed toil.

Instead of the fathers we have the children. Do you ask what becomes of our elder scholars? We reply that perhaps here, more than the average number are found standing by the old school and the old flag. Look through the present teachers' roll and you find the names of Norris, Fitton, Worsley, Street, Seale, Marshall, Wharton, Greenfield, Crompton, and Johnson—names, some of which appear on the school records twenty, thirty, and even forty years ago. Many of these, after passing through the school as scholars, have laboured long and faithfully as teachers and in other offices, and we can only trust that many years of service may yet be theirs.

* Mr. Sellors was then employed (indoors) at the college. He subsequently became a student, entered the ministry, went out to Australia, and has recently filled the post of President of the Australian Conference.



CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT the year 1859 an agitation for a new school was set on foot. The district had been gradually growing, and, what was more, the lack of a *Day* school had begun to be felt. The fact that some of the young people attended the National Day Schools (the only schools near) during the week, and the Wesleyan School on Sunday, gave offence to the then rector of the parish, who said that if these scholars went to their day school they ought to go to the Sunday school, too. The question lay heavily on the heart of Mr. Bowers, and as the old school had long been unsuitable for the requirements of the district, it was decided to build a new one, which should serve for Day and Sunday school purposes. Mr. Bowers worked might and main on behalf of the scheme; Mr. James Heald gave most liberally, as indeed did others; and the result was the erection of our present school. The following account of the stone-laying ceremonial is taken from the *Stockport Advertiser* of 5th October, 1860.

“On Friday, 28th September, subsequent to an address by Dr. Hannah, delivered at the College, the ministers and others assembled at the College, proceeded to Barlow Moor, where the foundation stone of a new Wesleyan Methodist Day and Sunday School was laid by Mr. James Heald, who has made himself responsible for half of the expense of erecting the building.

“The ceremony commenced with prayer, after which the Rev. John Bowers presented to Mr. Heald a silver trowel, with which the latter laid the stone. Mr. Heald expressed the hope that the Lord would prosper the work in which they were engaged.

“Mr. Bowers afterwards addressed the assemblage, and said that for thirty years a school had been conducted in the village by members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society. The school grew, and they had to take a second and larger room, and afterwards a third and still larger. This last had now become so small that it

“was necessary to provide greater accommodation in the building now commenced.

“The school will be built in Gothic style of red brick and stone facings, and will cost (exclusive of the land) about £1,070. It is also proposed to build a master’s house, which will cost £400 to £500 more.”

The school, which was built by Mr. Street, who did his work right well, was opened in May, 1861. On the 28th January preceding, a Day school had been commenced (in the old room), with Mr. H. A. Johnstone, the present headmaster of the Brentnall Street Wesleyan Schools, Stockport, as master.

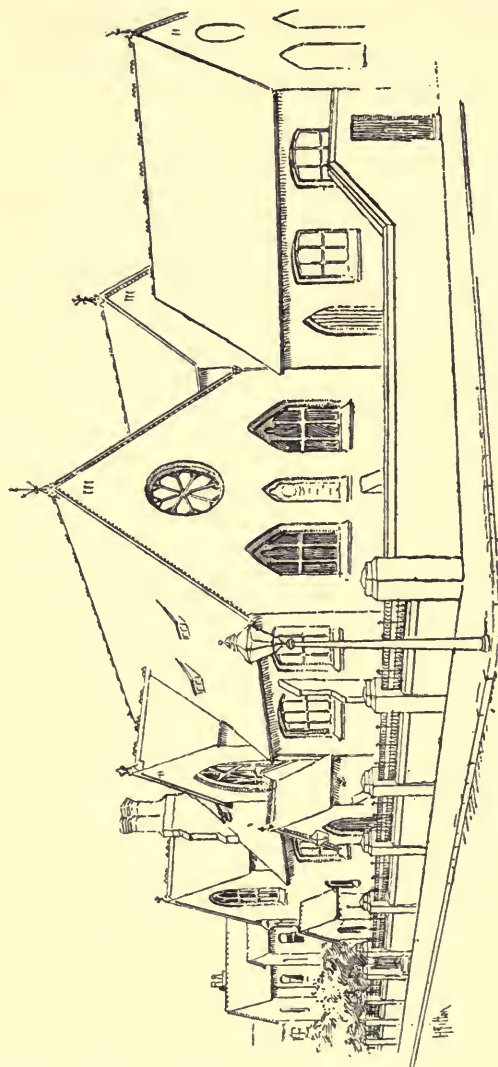
On the opening day, thirty-seven boys and girls (of which number I had the pleasure to count myself one) presented themselves for admission, so that it may truly be said to have been “a day of small things.” When the new premises were entered upon (27th May) the number of scholars rapidly rose, and the school soon acquired a high reputation. In January, 1870, Mr. Killingbeck succeeded Mr. Johnstone, and the school’s good name has been worthily maintained through the years which have followed.

In the report to the Conference of 1861, on the Theological Institution, the Governor (Rev. J. Bowers) says:—

“During the year a new and handsome school has been erected in the village. The Sunday school, long established, has now acquired increased importance and prosperity. The day school has recently been opened under very favourable auspices, and, when fully in operation, it will prove, as we trust, auxiliary to the training of the students, by giving them an opportunity of acquiring a familiar knowledge of our Connexional system of day school instruction, and by creating an interest in this department of our work.”

In the same report the Governor, speaking of some extensive alterations which had been carried out at the College chapel, says:—

“Additional space has been provided for the increasing congre-



DIDSBURY WESLEYAN DAY AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS

“gation by the erection of a gallery. The cost of this enlargement “has been generously defrayed by two estimable ladies, the Misses “Heald, who have testified on many occasions by a magnificent “liberality their affection for the interests of Methodism.”

The transition from the old school to the new one was of course very great. It was almost like stepping from prison to palace. The change was a cause for much rejoicing, though it was not without a feeling something akin to sadness, that teachers and taught bade farewell to the old place. Round it there gathered many pleasant memories. Many had been the scenes of refreshing from the presence of God. At various times wonderful works of grace had been wrought there, and teachers and scholars had rejoiced together—

O'er sins forgiven ;
Of hell subdued and peace with heaven.

An old scholar and teacher and personal friend (Mr. E. Turner), writing to me recently, says :—

“I'm not likely to forget the old school, nor ‘Owd Austin,’ as he was known to us lads. How his stick used to come down on our poor heads when we had tried his patience beyond endurance ! But he was a good old soul. Nor do I forget Daniel Bancroft, who made his lessons the more palatable to us by a liberal dispensation of toffy. How he used to pinch our little thighs when we had been misbehaving ! But more than all I recollect how earnestly he pleaded with God on behalf of the scholars, prayers which I truly believe have been answered in the salvation of many of those who attended the little ‘upper room.’ One of the incidents I well remember was the singing of that grand hymn, ‘All ye that pass by,’ to the tune Harwich. That hymn and tune are burnt into my soul, never to be forgotten. Nor shall I forget one Sunday afternoon in particular, when the teachers met in earnest prayer ; the result of which was the conversion of several young men and women. I sometimes fancy I can feel the blessed influences which then passed through the school, even yet.”

Many similar testimonies could be borne if time permitted. And couldn't the ladies if they had the freedom tell of the

tea meetings they had in these olden times? Talk about tea meetings! From all accounts, those of the present day are poor affairs indeed when compared with those of former days, when the ceiling and walls of the old room, literally hidden in flowers and evergreens, echoed and re-echoed the joys of Christmas. But I must pass on.

In the year 1864 the Rev. John Bowers, after twenty-one years' service, retired from the Governorship of the College, and was succeeded by the Rev. William Jackson.



REV. WM. JACKSON.

Mr. Jackson was immediately appointed School Treasurer, an office which he retained up to a few years ago. He always took great interest in the school, whilst his saintly—and now sainted—wife filled the office of Missionary Treasurer several years, and laboured for some considerable time

as a teacher, with great acceptance.

The commencement of 1867 witnessed the death of the old veteran, Austin Anderton, at the ripe age of seventy-three. For many years before, he had been laid aside from active work owing to increasing infirmity. On his retirement, his fellow-teachers presented him with a testimonial consisting of a large family Bible and a sack of flour! together with a little hard cash towards the rent of the cottage in which he lived. What a practical and common-sense view of things did these teachers take! After his resignation he occasionally visited

the school. In the Register I find an entry, on a Sunday in May, 1853—"Our old friend, Austin Anderton, paid us a visit to-day." His visits, however, gradually grew fewer, and for some time before his death he was confined to the house altogether. His work was done, and patiently he waited for the Master's summons. This came on the 4th January, 1867, and he went to his grave "*in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season*" (Job v. 26).

During the few following years nothing of special moment happened, but I would like to say that the year 1870 found the Rev. Wm. Hy. Booth (now on our platform) and the Rev. John Hooper here as students. During their stay, they rendered great assistance, in fact, at no time since the years 1850-6, had the school received such help from the college as was afforded by these two students; and we are glad to have this opportunity of acknowledging their valuable services.



CHAPTER VII.

THE year 1877 saw the opening of St. Paul's Chapel (see *frontispiece*), built as a memorial to the late Mr. James Heald by Miss M. Heald, his sister (since deceased), and Mr. Wm. N. Heald, his nephew. Now, if we owed the erection of our present school, in a great measure to the zeal of Mr. Bowers, it is, I believe, in some slight degree at any rate, owing to Mr. Jackson that we have come into possession of our present very beautiful sanctuary. It was after discussing with him their purposes and plans, that Miss and Mr. Heald decided that their memorial gift should take the form of a new chapel, the old one having long proved unsuitable and inadequate. No expense was spared by Miss and Mr. Heald, and, as a result of their exceeding munificence, there was built and presented to our connexion probably the most ornate and beautiful chapel which English Methodists can boast of. This chapel, which occupied about two and a half years in building, and cost about £20,000, was erected by Holme and Nicol, of Liverpool, from designs by T. D. Barry and Son, of the same city. It was opened on the morning of Wednesday, 17th January, 1877, by the Rev. Alexr. M'Aulay (President of the Conference), who preached from the words "*These all died in the faith*" (Hebrews xi. 13). The Rev. G. T. Perks preached in the evening from the words "*Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house . . . until I find out a place for the Lord*" (Psalm cxxxii. 3, 5).

I cannot, within the limits of a Paper such as this, dwell at length on the old chapel, nor on the changes which have taken place since its erection. Suffice it to say that very precious and hallowing are its associations. We remember some of the saintly men who have ministered from its pulpit :

Drs. Hannah, Punshon, Pope, Geden, and Reverends John Bedford, Samuel Coley, John Bowers, and others ; not forgetting the eminent laymen, the late Mr. James Heald and the late Mr. Richard Haworth. We remember the old chapel, too, as the scene of many works of grace, and the spiritual birthplace of not a few now gathered here; and for these precious memories we give God thanks.



CHAPTER VIII.

IN 1879 the school lost its veteran Superintendent, Mr. Norris, whose name, perhaps more than all others, deserves to be had in lasting remembrance. For length of service and for general devotion to the school's interests, it may be said that he had excelled them all. He joined the school about 1849, and in a very few years became a superintendent.



MR. JAMES NORRIS.

Sabbath after sabbath for thirty years was he found at his post with a punctuality and regularity rarely

equalled, and, I incline to think, never excelled, by *any* superintendent anywhere. He counted no sacrifice of time or labour too great if he could but promote the interests of the school. Was it required that the scholars should be taught the hymns for Whit-week, anniversaries, &c., Mr. Norris had to take the matter in hand. In the School Register I find the following entry in May, 1853:—

“The hymns to be sung at the anniversary were sung by the children to-day with good taste and earnestness. Thanks to Mr. Norris!”

Was money wanted for a harmonium, Mr. Norris undertook to collect it. Were tea-urns wanted, again his services are requisitioned. Was money wanted for the scholars' festival at Whit-week, again he was to the fore; in fact, I verily believe that if it hadn't been for Mr. Norris, the chariot wheels must many times have stood still. As a parenthesis, let me say that the mantle of the father has fallen upon the son, our junior superintendent, who is always ready to do his utmost on behalf of the school.

It was in February, 1879, that Mr. Norris's thirty years' connection with the school ceased. Failing health and advancing years led him to retire from the post he had filled with such honour to himself and benefit to the school, and seek a well-earned rest. On his retirement, the officers and teachers presented him with a beautiful timepiece and side ornaments as a mark of their esteem, and hoped that he might for long be spared to the Church; but the Master willed otherwise, and on the 13th February of the following year (1880) he entered into the rest that remaineth to the people of God.



CHAPTER IX.

I SHALL in no way be departing from the subject of my Paper if I turn aside for a moment to make mention of the Albert Park Chapel, which was opened for worship on the 11th January, 1883, the opening sermon being preached by the Rev. W. B. Pope, D.D.

This chapel occupies a somewhat anomalous position, as it belongs to the Oxford Road Circuit, though situate within the geographical area of Didsbury, which forms part of the Stockport North Circuit.



ALBERT PARK WESLEYAN CHAPEL.

It was largely through the efforts of the late Mr. Richard Haworth (who was a very generous contributor to Methodist

causes) that it was built. He bore about half the cost of its erection, and in other ways rendered invaluable assistance to it.

The chapel is structurally an ornament to the district in which it is situate, and has proved very successful. It boasts a good and gradually increasing congregation, and the various church organisations which centre there are in a flourishing condition.

Seeing that Mr. Haworth, to whom its erection was mainly due, was a frequent worshipper at our own chapel, and that a number of those who worship there were members of our congregation, we may fairly lay claim to something like a paternal interest in it. Its success may in some degree be said to be ours also. It stands as an evidence of the spread of Wesleyan Methodism in Didsbury, and we rejoice in its prosperity.

It is not my purpose to make any lengthy reference to the many services Mr. Haworth rendered to Methodism. A life such as his, and so honourable and successful a career as he had, would furnish materials for a volume. It is sufficient here, simply to record the fact that, during his fifteen years' residence at Didsbury, he took much interest in our Day and Sunday Schools, presiding for



MR. RICHARD HAWORTH.

many years in succession at the annual meetings of the latter. By his death, which occurred in November, 1883, we lost a warm and generous friend, and Methodism one of its most honoured adherents.

CONCLUSION.

THE last few years have brought no great changes. We have been pursuing our way with even tenour; and thus am I brought to the end of my story—imperfectly told, I must admit.

When we take a retrospect of the past, remember the struggles and discomforts of the early Methodists of Didsbury, and consider *our* position and prospects, what a deep cause we find for thankfulness to God, that the lines have fallen to us in such pleasant places. We have commodious schools which have been twice enlarged, and are about to be further extended; over 250 scholars, with forty officers and teachers on our Sunday school register, and one of the most beautiful chapels in the Connexion, together with other organisations and helps to Christian service. From the very beginning, the blessing of God has rested upon our Church. The walls of our schools and sanctuaries have all echoed the cry of the penitent, and the joyous shout of the pardoned. As He, to whom be all the praise, "*is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,*" let us, cheered by the recollections of the past, go forward, and so live and labour, that "*the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.*"

And in the great decisive day,
When God the nations shall survey,
May it before the world appear
That crowds were born for glory here.



In Memoriam.

IT is with much regret I have to record the fact that during the period which has elapsed between the preparation of this Paper and its publication, no less than three friends, of whom special mention has been made—Mrs. Street, Mr. D. Hampson, and Miss Mary Brundrett—have died.

Mrs. Street's lot was not cast amongst the active workers, but rather was it in the quieter walks of Methodism, and in the home, that her Christian graces and godly character were manifested.

Mr. Hampson's was a more prominent position. He was for many years a class leader and a teacher in the Sabbath school. He was a man of quiet unobtrusive piety, and of sterling worth.

Miss Brundrett was at one time an enthusiastic labourer in the school; failing health, however, compelled her to relinquish the work, and for many years she was laid aside—a confirmed invalid. Her sufferings were at times most intense, but her faith in Christ never wavered.

All were life-long Methodists, and in their respective spheres rendered good service for the Master. The end of each was peace, and they have passed away, leaving—

—a world made better by their lives.

They sleep in the quiet graveyard of the parish church (St. James's), where lie many of the sons and daughters of Didsbury Methodism, awaiting the resurrection to Eternal Life.

J. F.

BRIEF RECORD OF THE JUBILEE PROCEEDINGS.

Taken from "*The Methodist Recorder*," 31st October, 1889.

To mark the jubilee of the opening of the Barlow Moor Chapel and School at Didsbury, near Manchester, special sermons were preached on Sunday, October 20th, at St. Paul's Chapel, by the Rev. John Stevinson, Alderley Edge, to large congregations. In further commemoration of the event, a crowded meeting was held on Wednesday evening, presided over by John F. Haworth, Esq., supported by the Revs. Wm. Jackson (ex-Governor of the College), Richard Green (present Governor), Wm. F. Slater, M.A., Wm. H. Booth, and Alex. Mayes, and Messrs. Daniel Hampson, Fitton, Street, Ewen, and James Fitton.

Prayer was offered by the Rev. A. Mayes. After a few appropriate observations by the Chairman, a paper on the "Rise and Progress of Methodism in Didsbury" was read by Mr. James Fitton. Mr. Fitton dealt with the first beginnings of Methodism in Didsbury, and traced its history down to the present, at which time our people find themselves in possession of commodious schools and one of the handsomest churches in the Connexion, the church having been built in 1876 at a cost of nearly £20,000 by the late Miss Margaret Heald, and Mr. Wm. N. Heald, of Parrs Wood, as a memorial to their relative, the late Mr. James Heald, whose name is so well known in Methodist annals.

The paper evoked very great interest, several of the speakers expressing the earnest hope that it would appear in a permanent form. The Rev. Wm. Jackson, in an earnest practical address, referred to the happiness of his Didsbury experiences, and was followed by the Revs. Richard Green, Wm. F. Slater, M.A., and Wm. H. Booth, all of whom are old Didsbury students, and took very deep interest in the work of the Sabbath School during their College term. Mr. Green spoke of the additional pleasure he had derived from the meeting, by the singing of several old tunes which he much loved, and incidentally mentioned the fact that he was in possession of all, or almost all, the tunes which had been published by our Connexion. Messrs. Fitton, sen., D. Hampson, Jon. Street, and Ewen also offered a few observations.

An interesting feature of the meeting was the singing of a number of our hymns to old-fashioned Methodist tunes, with violin accompaniment, Mr. James H. Norris (one of the superintendents) presiding at the harmonium, and his colleague (Mr. Killingbeck), together with Mr. W. P. Redmayne (the organist of St. Paul's), being amongst the violinists. The meeting altogether was one long to be remembered.

On the following evening the scholars were entertained to tea, the expense being generously borne by Mr. Jonathan Street. The chair was taken by Mr. E. Turner, an old scholar and teacher, who gave a very practical and interesting address to the scholars. Messrs. W. B. Pope, M.A., Street, and James Fitton also addressed the meeting.



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