

CHAP. XV.

METHODIST CHURCH.

The first Methodist Meeting-house was the residence of William Pearce, stone mason, situated at the entrance to the town from Sherborne. Here in the year 1820 the Sunday School was started by John Roberts, Ann Barrett and Rhoda Fudge. Milborne Port first appeared on the Methodist Church Circuit Records March 28th, 1821, with 16 persons "on trial" for membership. At that time there lived in a cottage that stood nearby in the middle of the present road, just below the Church Schools, an old man named John Fudge. He was very poor, but much esteemed by those who knew him for his simple earnest piety and benevolence. At his house the preachers were entertained, and it is certain that he used to deny himself of common necessaries that he might contribute to the comfort of those he regarded as God's messengers of salvation.

John Roberts has ever been regarded as the chief of the founders of Methodism in the town. With energy and vigour of character, this working man combined strong faith and fervent piety. In the course of the first year he removed to Newtown, and from this time until the chapel was built, the preaching and the school were conducted at his house. Roberts was a carpenter employed on the houses then being built in Newtown. Here he wrought timber for the first chapel built in 1829. An extract from the Chapel Steward's book, dated January 21st, 1829, states:—"Two cottages were purchased in Cold Harbour, Milborne Port, of Samuel Fudge, for the purpose of erecting a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. The amount of purchase was £55."

An extract, dated July 1st, 1829, states:—"New Chapel opened. Dr. Roberts, of Bridport, preached afternoon and evening. Collection £7 16s. od." The entire cost of the first Chapel was £218 9s. 2d. In less than two years this Chapel gave place to one twice the size. The alterations and additions cost £299 17s. 11d. The congregations increased so that a side gallery was added in June, 1860, and a corresponding one in October. It was soon evident that the additional room was insufficient. In many instances members of a family had to agree to take turns in going to Chapel.

Mr. E. J. Ensor, to whose writings we are indebted for much of the information about early Methodism, says:—"In the year 1859 the Society was in a healthy state and the meetings for prayer well attended. On the last day of the year, about thirty of the prayer leaders took tea together and spent the evening in devotional exercises until 10 o'clock, when they went to the Chapel for the Watch-night Service. In 1862 prayer services were held for seven or eight weeks in succession, and it was no uncommon sight to witness day after day from ninety to one hundred persons present at a six o'clock morning prayer meeting in Kingsbury."

THE OLD CHAPEL.

I have often heard my father speak with affection of the "old chapel." Before the time of well lighted macadamized roads and tarred footpaths, the congregation made their way with lanterns through dark and muddy lanes. The women wore "Pattens," *i.e.*, over-shoes with wooden soles, having iron rings underneath to raise the wearer's shoes out of the mud. It can be easily imagined that the noise of pattens as they "click-clacked" up the aisles would be rather distracting. Hence the notice over the lobby doors: "Please take off your pattens," obeying which the women carried their pattens into the chapel and placed them underneath the seats. There was a hat rack at the top of the gallery to accommodate the top hats which were then almost invariably worn by the men, and occasionally a pyramid of this cylindrical head-gear, built on an insecure foundation, would be precipitated down the stairs. Another feature of the old sanctuary was the large square curtained pews, furnished with tables, on either side of the pulpit, which were occupied by the "principal families." The customary attitude during devotional exercises was either standing or turning round and kneeling in the pews. It was also a common practice for devout men who were engaged in outdoor occupations to stand all through the sermon—which usually occupied an hour—in order to avoid falling asleep. Before the invention of composite candles, tallow candles were used for illumination, and required frequent attention to prevent the wicks becoming long and smouldering and smoking unpleasantly. Several times during the service attendants went round the chapel and visited the pulpit with snuffers to trim the wicks.

The singing was led by an orchestra, which occupied the front of the gallery, and consisted of flutes, cornopeans, violins and bass viol. The leader was Adam Thorne, who played the last-named instrument, and who acquired a certain quaint distinction by the loss of one eye. The music was an important feature of the service, which usually included an anthem. I am not sure if it was Adam Thorne who on a certain auspicious occasion was about to lead his orchestra in "Who is the King of Glory?" from Handel's "Messiah," when he requested a colleague to "Hand on the rosin. We'll tell 'em who the King of Glory is." My father was a boy contralto, and his place was next to Joshua Bugler the blacksmith, who played the same part on the cornopean. When Joshua, who was very hard of hearing and whose distended cheeks were evidence of the vigour of his performance, used to turn and admonish his young colleague: "Sing up, I can't hear 'ee," the boy sometimes felt it was a case of unfair competition.

But the singing of those old Methodist repeating tunes, "Lingham" to "O for a thousand tongues to sing," "Sprouton" to "Come let us join our cheerful songs," or "Job" to "When I

survey," possessed a quality of fervour and emotional uplift that can hardly be imagined to-day.

Before the service commenced there was a great tuning of instruments. The number of the hymn announced, the tune was played through, Adam Thorne looking across to Joshua, the cornopean player, and saying *softo voce*, "Softer." Perhaps the tune would be "Calcutta," and the preacher would read the first two lines:

"Lo, He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain."

Not everyone could read then, and the hymn was read through in couplets as the singing proceeded.

The preachers in those days were not so anxious to avoid offending the susceptibility of their hearers as of delivering their message faithfully and fearlessly. The Rev. James Mitchell, who was noted for punctuality, noticing several members of the congregation arriving late and kneeling at the wrong time, rebuked them, "We are farther on than that, friends."

Rev. A. D. Cope, somewhat eccentric as well as intensely earnest, would pray on a Sunday morning for those absentees who were "at home cooking their miserable little bit of meat, and muddling about."

THE PRESENT METHODIST CHURCH.

The present church, which was erected in 1866, and renovated in 1903, is a building of native and Bath stone in the Decorated and Perpendicular styles. It was built to accommodate 480 persons, but constructional alterations have since reduced the seating capacity to 420. The measurements are as follows:—

Extreme length	..	116 feet.
Extreme width	..	56 "
Height of turret	..	82 "
Height to ridge of roof	..	54 "
Height of cross	..	59 "

The cost, inclusive of furniture, was £2,732 12s. 6d. A school-room and set of class-rooms adjoin the church on the north side. The work of the ministry is shared by ordained ministers and local preachers. In the list which follows of ordained ministers since the beginning of Methodism in the town, where two names are given, the first is that of the Superintendent of the Circuit, and where only one is mentioned, this is the resident minister.

1820/1	: John Appleyard.
1822	: Henry Powis.
1823	: Henry Powis, Edward Norwood.
1824	: Henry Powis, John Edmonds.
1825	: John Hawtrey, John Edmonds.
1826/7	: John Hawtrey, John Smith.
1828/9	: Nicholas Sibby, John Henley.

- 1830 : Nicholas Sibly, Thomas Brothwood.
 1831 : Francis Collier, Henry Cheverton.
 1832/3 : John W. Cloake, Charles Westlake.
 1834 : William Sharpe, Henry Groves.
 1835 : William Sharpe, Horatio Pearce.
 1836/7 : H. B. Trethewey, George Driver.
 1838 : H. B. Trethewey, William Halden.
 1839/40 : John Radford, Thomas S. Wood.
 1841 : John Radford, Thomas Collier.
 1842 : John Bustard, Charles North.
 1843 : Benjamin Carvosso, A. Puddicombe.
 1844 : Benjamin Carvosso, Charles Hame.
 1845 : Benjamin Carvosso, Isaac Phenix.
 1846 : John W. Roberts, Felix H. Pickworth.
 1847/8 : James Smeeth, Walter Vercoe.
 1849 : James Smeeth, John Jesson.
 1850/1 : Zephaniah Job, Uriah Scott.
 1852 : Elijah Morgan, John Bramwell.
 1853/4 : John G. Avery, Edward Addison.
 1855 : William Wedlock, Edward Addison.
 1856 : William Wedlock, John W. Dawson.
 1857 : George Savery, John W. Dawson.
 1858 : George Savery, William F. Clarke.
 1859/60 : William Henley, William F. Clarke.
 1861 : A. Puddicombe, John S. Vickers.
 1862/3 : A. Puddicombe, James Pratt.
 1864 : E. Fison, William Nicholson.
 1865/6 : E. Fison, John Kirby.
 1867 : James Mitchell, John Kirby.
 1868/9 : James Mitchell, Joseph Male.
 1870 : Richard Harding, William D. Walters.
 1874 : George C. Mayes.
 1876 : Joseph Howard.
 1877 : Olinthus R. Barnicott.
 1878 : George Hack.
 1882 : Robert Raw.
 1885 : John Boulter.
 1887 : William C. Williams.
 1889 : Edward Milner.
 1892 : Richard Butterworth.
 1895 : John W. Denham.
 1898 : John B. Nowell.
 1901 : Thomas G. Squire.
 1904 : Edwin C. Lansdown.
 1907 : W. H. Cheetham.
 1910 : W. Routley Bailey.
 1913 : Charles A. Sheppard.
 1915 : Albert G. Tuck.

- 1918 : S. Derham Robinson.
 1921 : Montague L. Foyle.
 1924 : Harold Snowdon.
 1928 : Wilfred J. Jenkins.
 1930 : Goronwy Jones Davies.
 1931 : W. Ellum Lowther.
 1934 : Robert E. Clark.
 1938 : Vincent E. Knowles.

SUNDAY SCHOOL.

A copy of the original Rules formulated for the conduct of the School includes the following clauses:—

Rule 4. "Each teacher shall be in his or her place at the time specified, and if not there within five minutes shall forfeit one penny, the Superintendent two pence, unless prevented by personal or relative sickness. Newtown teachers to be allowed five minutes more."

Rule 7. "No child will be admitted into the School under four years of age nor without the consent of the Superintendent."

Rule 9. "Any child wilfully absenting himself or herself three successive Sabbaths shall be excluded."

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TREAT.

It is interesting to compare the customs of succeeding generations on their high days and holidays. My grandmother used to recall the annual Sunday School Treats of her young days, now nearly a hundred years ago, when the children assembled at the School-room, and after being regaled with a cup of cider and a bun, dispersed to frolic in the lanes or fields as fancy inclined them. As a boy this seemed to me to be primitive indeed, in comparison with our annual festival. If I describe the Wesleyan Sunday School Treat of my boyhood, I think it would be tolerably true to say that with one or two minor differences I shall be describing the annual festival as celebrated by each of the Sunday Schools of the town. At the time of which I speak, the Wesleyan Sunday School numbered 400 scholars, including the Adult Bible Classes, or more than a fifth of the population at that time. Mr. George E. Dyke had succeeded the joint Superintendents of my earlier days—Messrs. Silas Dyke and Edward John Ensor. The "treat" was held almost invariably on a Wednesday, principally because that was "early closing day" for the shops. There were occasions when the appointed day turned out to be wet. Then towards noon there were hurried and anxious consultations between the officers and teachers, and it was agreed to send the Crier round with his bell to announce the postponement of the event until the following day. Sometimes that, too, proved to be a day of un-

propitious weather, and the bread and cake having been ordered, the tea was held at the Victoria Hall, to be followed at a more favourable time with the sports. But it was unanimously agreed that a postponed event was never quite the same. For days previous to the treat, preparations had to be made. Quantities of bread and cake were ordered from Luffman's or Coombs's, and grocery orders were shared between local tradesmen. Permission was obtained from Sir Wm. or Sir Edward Medlicott for the use of the Ven gardens—usually quite legitimately described in the local Press as “the beautiful and picturesque grounds of Ven,” permission for the use of the adjoining “Barley Close” being kindly granted by the farmer. A local carpenter—either George Pitman or Edwin Hann—received an order to have swings erected. Friends arranged the provision of a refreshment tent, where at that time my Father and Mr. Thomas Thorne, and later Mr. Wm. Trott and others, sold sweets and minerals, &c. Somebody saw to the hauling down to the field of a boiler for hot water, tables and forms for the elder scholars' tea, the little ones sitting in rings on the grass. Bats and wickets were borrowed from the Town Cricket Club, and a cricket pitch was arranged far enough removed from that part of the field occupied by the children for safety. Then there were sports to be arranged, a course roped off, prizes obtained, and a programme of races made, including sack, wheelbarrow, three-legged, and obstacle races, as well as egg-and-spoon races for the young ladies. It is difficult in these days of 'buses and cinemas, motor coaches and wireless, to recapture the thrill of such village festivities to the youngsters of those far-off days—the anticipation for weeks previously, the waking on the morning of the great day, the best clothes, the getting ready hours before the time, arrivals at the School-room beginning an hour before the appointed time for assembling at 2 o'clock.

After a prayer for Divine blessing, a procession is formed in the chapel yard, flags being distributed by Mr. Thomas Penny to the older lads, and now the strains of music from the approaching Town Brass Band causes youthful pulses to quicken. Now the teachers are busy marshalling their scholars, and the long procession begins to wend its way. The Union Jack on its hefty pole, resting easily on the well filled waistcoat of “Uncle Bob,” leads the way, followed by the band, under Bandmasters Pitman or Hodges. Then the Men's and Women's Bible Classes are followed by the other classes of boys and girls alternately, in order of seniority, and separated by waving banners. Then several brightly painted farm waggons, bedecked with greenery and bunting, conveying noisy toddlers of the infants' class, bring up the rear.

The long procession winds its way along Pope's Lane, Rosemary Street, London Road, High Street, and turns at the Cross

down South Street to Barley Close, eventually drawing up and forming a circle in front of Ven House whilst the band finishes its march. Then the youngsters scamper off, some to the swings, some to the refreshment tent, to spend their pennies. The afternoon is spent in such games as Rounders, Knock In Knock Out, Oranges and Lemons, Twos and Threes, and “Man's Life's a Vapour,” whilst the men and youths find the cricket pitch, and some of the elders stroll through the gardens or sit and listen to the band, until the bell announces tea. Sports follow, and the evening passes all too soon. At nine o'clock the band begins to march towards the gate. Mothers and fathers lead little tired toddlers, as from the gardens follow lads and lasses arm in arm. (How many life-long partnerships have here been formed?) Now the band halts at the old Cross, and the vast concourse gathers round as the Superintendent mounts the ancient pile and concludes with words of thanks to all and sundry, and a crowd of happy people find their homes.