

## CHAPTER II.

### **Early Days of the Chapel—A Strange but Attentive Congregation.**

HAVING brought the reader rather rapidly up to the present day, we must now retrace our steps, and deal with the chapel's rise and progress more in detail.

After Mr. Doggett had commenced the cause in the manner and circumstances described, it was continued for several years by the system of supplies, ministers coming from Tunbridge Wells and elsewhere, these including the Mr. Sedgwick already referred to, of whom his friend Mr. Doggett was fond of relating the following anecdote:—On the first occasion of his preaching here, Mr. Sedgwick found the barn full of a deeply attentive congregation. At the conclusion

of the service, on entering Mr. Doggett's conveyance, he said to the latter: "Well, Doggett, I never preached before such a congregation as *that* before! I felt much at home in speaking to them, but I did not know how the time was going on, as I was afraid to take out my watch to see!" "Yes," replied Mr. Doggett, "but rough-looking as they are, they have immortal souls to save as much as you and I have." "That is quite true," rejoined Mr. Sedgwick, "but in spite of that I was afraid to let them see I had a watch!"

#### **Always a Sunday School.**

It may be stated that, with short intervals, there has from the first up to the present day always been a Sabbath school connected with the cause, Mr. Ashdown being the first superintendent in the barn, and the first to give out the hymns there, and after him Mr. John Taylor, who, later on, for many years gave out the hymns at the Rotherfield Baptist Chapel. The Sabbath school was then held in the cowshed

adjoining the barn, which had folding doors communicating with the latter. These doors—when the school was over and the service began—were thrown open, and the children remained seated, and thus formed part of the congregation. Around the outer (and uncovered) parts of the cowshed they piled up rough stone walls. These primitive arrangements of course subsequently made way for others, as gradual alterations and improvements were made.

**The People desire a Pastor.**

After the services had been continued in the manner named for several years, the people began to desire, not like the Israelites of old a king, but a settled pastor. The result was that Mr. Jonathan Mose, of Tunbridge, who was then a member at Hanover Chapel, Tunbridge Wells, became the first pastor. There appears at first to have been some sore feeling on the part of the people of Hanover Chapel to his taking up this position; but this was only temporary, and there was afterwards, and has been since, complete

---

harmony between the two places. Subsequently the successor of Mr. Kewell in the pastorate there (Mr. Daniel Whittaker\*) always preached at the anniversaries here for a period of eighteen years, and there have always been mutual visits by members of the congregations of both places at their respective anniversaries—a remark which also applies to Rehoboth Chapel, Tunbridge Wells; though, owing to the multiplication of chapels of late years, and consequently of anniversaries,

---

\* I knew Mr. Whittaker at Blackburn. We were both members of the church there, where he was baptised, as were also Mr. Mackenzie (Editor of the *Gospel Standard* prior to the late Mr. Philpot), Mr. A. Taylor (who succeeded Mr. Gadsby at Manchester), Mr. T. Walsh, and Mr. John Forster. We all commenced preaching from there. It was through Mr. Whittaker's speaking of me to the friends at Crowborough that I was first asked to supply at the chapel. This, therefore, is the way in which God brought about my pastorate here. It may also be interesting to mention that whilst in Lancashire I frequently went down to preach at Northampton, and also at Nottingham, at the cause of which the late Lady Lucy Smith was one of the main supporters, preaching during these visits also at Wilford House, her residence, where she likewise held services; her work, after her

these friendly interchanges of visits have not been so extensive as formerly.

Mr. Mose at first used to drive over every Sunday with a pony and trap, returning the same evening, as there was then no railway. Later, he resided at Crowborough Cross, there being then no Chapel House.

#### **Formation of the Church.**

The church was formed on June 13th, 1844, by Mr. Philip Dickerson, pastor of Little Alie Street Baptist Chapel, London, at which time

---

death, being continued by Mr. Henry Abel Smith. During one of these visits I preached the anniversary sermons at Bedworth, amongst the congregation on which occasion were Mr. Hull, now of Hastings (Editor of the *Sower* and *Gleaner*), and Mr. W. Smith, now of Tunbridge Wells, who were members of that church, and of course have now become well-known ministers of the Gospel. In thinking of my conversation with them that day, I have often been struck with the circumstance that we should all have since become pastors in the same distant—that is, this—county.

“ His providence unfolds the book,  
And makes His counsels shine;  
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,  
Fulfil some deep design.”

Mr. Mose had preached at the chapel about four years. From the first entry in the church book we take the following, the entry being in the handwriting of Mr. Mose:—

“Through the blessing of God on this little cause, it having now been formed into a church, we think it right to record and preserve for future days the various steps taken, to show that so far as the Lord has given us grace to enable us and light to direct us, we have followed the path which He Himself and His Apostles taught and

---

On my return, I strongly urged the late Mr. Sinkinson (then of Preston, Lancashire, whom I well knew, through our both preaching at Bolton and other churches for years) to go to Bedworth to preach, he having been invited to supply the church there. He was very reluctant to go out of Lancashire. But after our conversation he felt moved to visit them, which he did. This in the course of time resulted in his becoming the pastor, and he died there. Mr. Sinkinson has preached several times for me at our own chapel. His last sermon here (a few months after which he died) was from Isa. xxxii. 2: “A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest.” This sermon was reported at the time and published.

practised. Through His abundant mercy the Gospel of the grace of God, having been attended with the power and demonstration of the Spirit, has been preached amongst us, and been made effectual in giving knowledge of salvation; and we, having through grace given ourselves unto the Lord, were anxious of giving ourselves to one another in the bonds of church fellowship, according to the law of our Lord."

The entry then states: "After holding meetings to relate the Lord's dealings with us, and feeling united to each other in Christ Jesus, we were desirous to follow the Lord in His own appointed ordinance."

#### **The First Baptising.**

On the day of the formation of the church (Sunday) Mr. Mose preached in the morning, and in the afternoon Mr. Dickerson gave an address, and then baptised ten, whose names were as follow: John Heasman, Susan Heasman, Thos. Walklin, Joseph Penlip, George Edwards, Sarah Callow, John Neeve, Abraham Brown, Susan

Heaver, and Edward Willey.\* There being, of course, no baptistry then, the baptising took place in the open air in a large pool of water in a field near the chapel, existing at this day. There was a large concourse of people present to witness the strange ceremony, and during the deep and solemn address which Mr. Dickerson delivered we have often heard him say the effect upon the rough congregation was such that tears rolled down the cheeks of some of them "as large as peas."

#### **The Evening Meeting.**

In the evening Mr. Dickerson assembled the brethren and sisters who had been baptised, and (formally ascertaining such to be their desire) formed them into a church. Referring to the evening proceedings, Mr. Mose's entry in the church book says:—

“After giving us the right hand of fellowship, he gave us a most suitable, solemn address, and

---

\* Mr. Ashdown, one of the present deacons, was amongst the second party who were baptised and joined the church.



broke bread with us. In recording these events we would lift up our hearts in devout thankfulness to the God of all grace for the hallowed influence of His Holy Spirit, which He was so graciously pleased to pour out upon us on that solemn occasion; and we would pray that the union thus formed may be strengthened by the addition of many of the Lord's blood-bought and grace-redeemed souls from time to time; and by sweetly influencing us who are thus united by His Spirit, as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so also to walk in Him."

How fully these prayers have been answered the living descendants of the church then formed, as well as many others, can truly testify.

**Declaration of Faith and Practice.**

Then follows a lengthy "Declaration of Faith and Practice" of the church, of which the entry says:—

"We think it right to record our views of Divine truth, which are the fundamental principles of our union, and to which we subscribe

---

our hands. And we pray that the vital savour of these truths may rest upon our souls . . . that we may in all times and places through grace stand fast by the truth . . . not be of them who deny the faith, but who contend for it earnestly as once delivered to the saints . . . resting in the glorious hope that we shall one day arrive at that glorious consummation so desired by the Apostle (Col. i. 28).”

The “Declaration” is too lengthy to quote, but it is sufficient to say that the truths set forth in it are those which continue to-day to be proclaimed from the pulpit, and which are set forth in the trust deeds.

#### **Purchase of the Property.**

In the previous year—that is, on March 1st, 1843—the land, barn, and cottages were bought, and under somewhat special circumstances. Certain opponents of the truths proclaimed at the chapel, hearing that the land was about to be permanently secured by purchase, attempted to forestall this step by buying it themselves, and

thus put an end to the cause, but were a day too late, Mr. Betts, of London, at the request of his friend, Mr. Doggett, having already secured it at the price of £260, which he paid himself.

#### **Trustees Appointed.**

On the return of Mr. Betts to London, fifteen trustees were chosen from Mr. Dickerson's church in London; and on March 6th, 1844, a trust deed, investing the property in them "for the benefit of the Strict Baptist denomination for ever," was drawn up and executed. These trustees are now all deceased, and, as will be found later on, new ones were appointed in 1883. During his pastorate at Crowborough, Mr. Mose occasionally contributed to religious magazines under the name of "Jonathan on the Hill" (*i.e.* Crowborough Hill).

#### **Close of Mr. Mose's Pastorate.**

Mr. Mose's pastorate continued until 1852, when he tendered his resignation. An entry in the church book records his reasons, viz. "1st, the decreasing attendance proved that our

brother's labours were not so highly valued as formerly, which" (says the entry) "might be accounted for by his frequent absence" (preaching elsewhere, including Birmingham, to which he finally removed). "The second was, he did not perceive the Lord was with him blessing the Word as formerly. This was a serious cause of sorrow to him. And next, the resources of the cause were dwindling, so that he feared he should not be able to maintain himself honourably." This was early in February, and was to take effect at Michaelmas, when he formally resigned, but was requested by the church to continue his ministrations till the Lord removed him from the locality, an arrangement which he accepted subject to the provision that, if the church should meet with a desirable minister, they were at liberty to invite him.

It was about this time that Mr. Ashdown (one of the present deacons) removed to Edenbridge, returning some fourteen years later at the close of Mr. Saxby's pastorate.

An entry about this time relating to a subsequent church meeting says: "Our brethren Thomas Walklin, John Burfoot, and Jas. Wickens were chosen deacons . . . such a step being absolutely necessary, as the Lord was evidently removing our ministering brother Mose."

Shortly after his resignation Mr. Mose accepted the pastorate of the Baptist church at Gooch Street, Birmingham. (A later entry in the church book records his dismissal to that church.) During the pastorate of Mr. Mose the chapel had a liberal supporter in the person of a Mr. Walesby, a miller, then of the Warren Mill, who at the time regularly doubled the amounts contributed by the congregation.

#### **The Old Baptistry.**

During Mr. Mose's pastorate a baptistry was constructed. This was outdoors, in the then unused half of the chapel burial ground, of which the used and unused portions were then divided by a hawthorn hedge (commencing just to the left of the existing yew tree near the school),

since removed by me when the use of the whole burial ground became necessary, when also this baptistry was filled in. It was situate two or three yards to the left of where the late Mr. Richard Pratt, the minister (formerly of Crowborough Mill), is now buried. Mr. John Burfoot (present deacon) was amongst the first baptised in this baptistry.

#### **Description of the Old Barn.**

So far as can be gathered, it appears that the barn was at first of the then usual structure—chiefly, if not wholly, of wood and thatch—and that later on (during Mr. Mose's pastorate) the walls were made stone ones. When the barn had been some time in use, a gallery was found necessary, and was put in. This was placed at the end of the building over the doorway (the marks where the old doorway existed may still be seen on the right-hand side of the chapel), the pulpit being at the opposite end. Not reckoning the cowshed portion, where the school was then held (since formed into what afterwards became

the second wing of the chapel), the barn-chapel, as then constructed, would be of about half the present capacity of the chapel (exclusive of vestries, school and class rooms).

The old barn and cottages originally belonged to Mr. John Hider Taylor, related to old Mr. Moses Boarer and Mr. Jonathan Cushman, who married Mr. Boarer's daughter, and was the the first person buried in the burial ground. The cottages were occupied by Mr. Richard Budgen, Mr. Jas. Baker, and a Mr. Avis.

At this time many who later on went to Dorman's Land Chapel from Hartfield, Holtye, Forest Row, &c., used to attend the services in the barn, whilst others used to come from Eridge Green; all these places being several miles distant.

In the earlier days of the chapel, when the olden custom of various instruments was usual in country places of worship, the singing was led by a flute, a clarionette, and a bassoon, the latter two played by Mr. George Taylor, and his son.

Mr. Taylor died a few years ago. Later, a harmonium was used, but Mr. Huggett continued to assist with the flute until the time of his death.

#### **The Queen's Wedding Cake.**

Amongst the congregation who attended the services in the barn was Mr. Trayton Bailey, then at the Warren Mills, Crowborough. At this time occurred the marriage of Her Majesty Queen Victoria to the Prince Consort. Here was ground the flour used in Her Majesty's wedding cake; and it was taken by Mr. Bailey from here in his van to Mr. Gunther, confectioner, of Berkeley Square, London, S.W. By this it will be seen that one of the congregation here at that time was the person who carried to London the flour for the wedding cake of the Queen who has had the longest reign in British history. In a letter written by Mr. Bailey, and published in an account of him in the *Gospel Standard* of May, 1898, he says, "It was pressed upon his mind to go to the Forest Fold Chapel" (on Good Friday



1846), and whilst hearing the minister preach says : “ I fell like a bird shot from a tree, and I saw where I was as a guilty sinner, and that God was holy, and could by no means clear the guilty, and the guilt fastened upon my conscience. I went home, and tried to conceal the matter from my wife, but I could not, and she said to me : ‘ Trayton, you have been to chapel for something ! ’ . . . But, blessed be His holy name, He appeared, and set my soul at happy liberty by revealing to me Christ crucified, and shedding His precious blood for my atonement.”

In these days when visiting the chapel at anniversaries, &c., Mr. Dickerson used to be obliged to travel by coach to Edenbridge, and walked the rest of the journey.

