

CHAPTER III.

IN the interval between the pastorates of Mr. Mose and Mr. Saxby, though before Mr. Mose had actually removed to his pastorate at Birmingham, amongst others who preached here (including Mr. Saxby) was Mr. Thos. Russell, who was invited to supply for several Sabbaths with a view of his becoming the pastor, this being the first occasion of his preaching in Sussex. This invitation he accepted; but at the conclusion of the period, the church not being unanimous, it did not result in his becoming the pastor. Some of those who were in favour of his doing so then held services in a schoolroom, and later in a barn, at Jarvis Brook, for the purpose of his preaching there, which he did. Subsequently they removed to a chapel at Rotherfield, concerning the owner-

ship of which there was some difficulty, in consequence of which the present chapel there (Providence Chapel) was built, with Mr. Russell as pastor of the church (which had previously been formed), this being briefly the history of the formation of the Rotherfield Church.

The Mott's Mill Chapel.

The Mott's Mill services are now held in a chapel which we hire, and at which I preach on Sunday and Wednesday evenings (the Wednesday services being discontinued for a short period during the busiest agricultural season). This chapel is a little over two miles distant. Of those who originally commenced these services, the only person now living is Mr. John Burfoot. They then consisted of prayer and the reading of God's Word, and were held at first from house to house. Few of those present were capable of reading the Word aloud, and Mr. Burfoot being best able to do so, the duty first fell upon him. Later on they were held at the houses of Mr. L. Langridge and Mr. Heath. Mr. Burfoot has also attended

the general chapel services at Crowborough longer than any person living, Mr. Ashdown, as previously stated, having resided at Edenbridge during an interval of fourteen years.

Mr. Saxby's Pastorate.

Returning to the interval already referred to, the next church book entry points out the course events were meantime taking with respect to the subject of the future pastor. It is as follows: "From September, 1852, up to April, 1853, the pulpit having been supplied by different ministers, amongst whom was our good brother Saxby, the church have given him an invitation to labour among them for twelve months, which he has accepted, commencing April 10th, 1853." This is in Mr. Mose's handwriting. At the close of this probationary period, Mr. Saxby was invited to become the pastor, and did so. An entry in the church book, dated June 4th, 1854, records this as follows: "A most cordial invitation was given to Mr. John Saxby to take the pastoral office, which he in the fear of God accepted. O

may the Great Shepherd condescend to bless this union.”

Mr. Saxby was at the time of his commencing to supply here pastor of Zion Strict Baptist Chapel, Sheerness, and at the same church meeting it was resolved to apply to the church in question for his dismissal to that at Crowborough. In connection with these events the following letter was written by Mr. Saxby:—

“To the Particular Baptist Church of Christ meeting for worship at Zion Chapel, Mile Town (Sheerness).

“Dear Brethren,—Although the subject of this communication may be rather unexpected to you, yet it has occupied my mind for some time past, and I have felt somewhat reluctant to take the step which I am now about to do.

“I am aware that the relation of pastor and people is a very near one, and should be considered a very sacred one, calling forth all the sympathies of the regenerate heart. Nor should that relation be dissolved without due considera-

tion. On my part I trust I have given it that consideration which it demands, and can truly say that my desire for the welfare of the church is as earnest now as when I first came among you. Most sincerely do I pray, and will still pray, for your prosperity. It would rejoice my heart to see you flourish as a church, abounding in love to Christ and in love one towards another, and increasing with all the increase of God.

“There are, however, circumstances which appear to indicate that it is the will of God I should remove from among you. I beg leave, therefore, to say that my labours as your pastor will cease on the 3rd January, 1853.

“Permit me to say that in writing this I am actuated by no feelings of animosity towards any brother or sister in the church. I have mentioned my intention to no one, deacon or member, excepting my wife. As I came in peaceably, so I wish to leave peaceably, throwing myself on the care and providence of my heavenly Father. My sincere prayer is that you may be directed by the

great Head of the Church to a suitable under-shepherd who shall be more successful than I have been, and who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. Begging also an interest in your prayers that I may be directed in that way which shall be for the glory of God,

“ I am, dear brethren,

“ Yours in covenant love,

“ JOHN SAXBY.”

The next church book entry records the receipt from the church at Sheerness of Mr. Saxby's dismissal, and his reception into the church here.

The Church at Horsted Keynes.

Referring to the application for dismissal, during Mr. Saxby's pastorate, of one of the members to Horsted Keynes, an entry dated June 28th, 1863, records the then recent formation of the church there. This chapel, which was built in the centre of the village of Horsted Keynes, and of which Mr. Woods was the pastor, through circumstances too lengthy to detail here, was closed later on for several years.

Subsequently. I occasionally visited Horsted Keynes, and frequently said to the friends there that it was a pity so nice a chapel should not be opened, and eventually went to see Mr. Woods on the subject. He then gave me full liberty to preach and hold services there when I chose, which I did several times. I also took my late brother John and the late Mr. Sinkinson, of Bedworth, to preach there. This was the re-opening of the place for public worship, and the cause has continued ever since.

A further church book entry, dated Jan. 28th, 1866, also records the application for dismissal of Mr. Shipton to the church at Berkhamstead, of which he later on became the pastor, which position he still retains, having recently visited this chapel, the place of his spiritual birth, and preached from its pulpit on two anniversaries.

The deacons during Mr. Saxby's pastorate were Mr. Thos. Walklin, Mr. John Burfoot, Mr. Jas. Wickens, Mr. Thos. Tasker, and Mr. George Ashdown (subsequent to his return from Eden-

bridge). Mr. Walklin and Mr. Wickens died during his pastorate, the former on July 2nd, 1866, and the latter on November 20th, 1859, Mr. Tasker having died during my pastorate on March 3rd, 1890.

Extension of Chapel—New Baptistry—Chapel House.

The present baptistry (which is in the chapel, and is well built and cemented) was constructed during Mr. Saxby's pastorate. The first person baptised in it was Mr. George Cole. The present Chapel House (subsequently enlarged since my residence here) was built in 1855, on the spot where the three cottages stood, these being pulled down for the purpose. These cottages were originally known as "Two Chimneys," probably from their having two chimneys between them. During this period also was added the second wing of the chapel as until lately existing. During some very rough weather the outlying portion of the barn was blown down by the strong wind. The result was that the second wing referred to was built in its place, at a cost of

about £115. The small gallery existing at the end of the former structure was then taken down, the pulpit was removed to its present position, and the entrance to the front of the building where it exists at present, but without the addition of the present porch. The building then, and until the recent rebuilding, had practically two roofs—one to each wing—with a channel, or roof gutter, outside running between them, from which the rain water was conducted by pipes into the baptistry, whence an overflow pipe conducted it away when necessary, as at present. From this gutter there was in wet weather a frequent leakage, which at times rendered certain parts of the chapel very damp.

Close of Mr. Saxby's Pastorate.

Mr. Saxby, who had many family trials and domestic afflictions to contend with, was a man of very humble and Christ-like spirit, and was generally respected and beloved. His pastorate was continued until his death, which took place, at the age of 64, on March 10th, 1867. The

following inscription appears on the marble tablet which was placed in the chapel to the memory of himself and his first wife and two daughters :—

IN MEMORY OF

MR. JOHN SAXBY,

Fourteen years the beloved and useful Pastor of this Church, who gently fell asleep in Jesus, March 10th, 1867, aged 64 years.

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”—I. COR. xv. 54.

He was interred in the chapel burial ground by the side of his wife and two daughters (who, as also recorded on the tablet, had previously passed away), leaving a widow, who survived him twenty-two years, and was also buried there, where a tombstone is erected to her memory. At the conclusion of the inscription on the latter appears the following: “She was sustained by hope and died in the faith (Heb. xi. 13).”