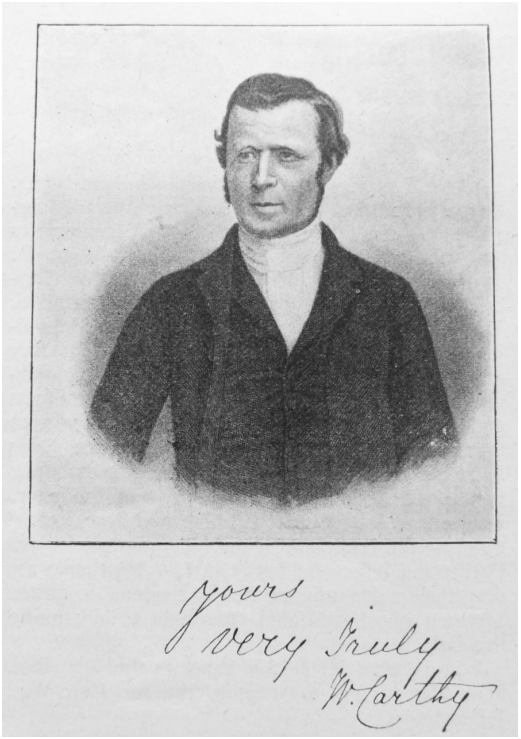
Men Worth Remembering

Rev. W. Carthy

By Rev. John Wenn



WHO has raised Howe from the dead?" was the question put by one bookseller to another at the time when Robert Hall was the prince of preachers in England. For Hall was wont, in his vivacious and earnest manner, to ply every theological student or other intelligent and godly young man that he met with, with the query, "Have you read Howe, especially his 'Living Temple'?" "No." "No! then, if you have to sell the coat off your back in order to do it, go and buy him at once, and give yourself no rest till you have read and mastered him." Spurred on by Hall's eloquence and influence, these youths were seen darting in and out of book-shops in quest of Howe. It was in this way that the then all but forgotten Howe was induced, in a new edition, to "revisit the glimpses of the moon."

Howe is still remembered and read by a few persons; but the record of many as brave, though not as renowned, a spirit has well nigh "perished from the earth." Like the poor fellows who, from wounds and weakness, fall out from the ranks of a beaten and retreating army to die alone by the hedge-side or under a tree, so many a valorous soldier of the cross has fallen on the field or been "invalided home," who, in the onrush of the advancing (not beaten) army of the Living God, has been scarcely missed, and soon forgotten. Such has been the fate of the two brethren, some slight recollection of whom it is the object of this and a succeeding paper to revive.

The materials for this task are surprisingly scanty. I cannot discover that either of the brethren kept a regular diary, or any diary at all, that could be of use to me in these attempts. I have had, therefore, to depend upon scattered notices in minute books, chapel schedules, and communications kindly furnished by the following brethren—contemporaries with the subjects of these articles:—Revs. R. Robinson, W.R. Widdowson, W. Cutts, W. Clayton, and Messrs. G. Tucker, G. Edwards, and S. Keeling. Other and younger brethren, now labouring on stations once under the care of Messrs. Carthy and Jefferson, have been at pains to search in minute books and circuit documents for records of facts and incidents which might have added interest to these sketches. But the gleanings in those fields have not repaid the time and labour spent upon them. The following is a fair sample of the letters received. "I have searched high and low; looked up every old book and document for some data re Carthy and Jefferson; but in vain." My thanks are nevertheless due, and are hereby tendered to all the brethren who have aided, or sought to aid, me in this task.

I propose to devote this paper to the late Rev. Wm. Carthy, and the next to the late Rev. Wm. Jefferson.

It is of less import to know when and where a man came into the world than what he was and did after he arrived therein. Hence, I shall make no serious attempt to reconcile the discrepant accounts of Carthy's nationality and birth-place. There is a tradition that he was an Irishman; that his ancestors bore the name McCarthy, which, if true, would indicate a Scoto-Irish descent. In support of this tradition, it is said that the late Joseph Bailey, a great man at that time in our Ikeston Israel, and a Deed Poll member, having occasion to go to Ireland on business, Carthy went with him, and found whilst there the church in which he was baptised, and that he took a copy of the register of his birth and baptism. If that were so—and the story is circumstantial

enough to be true—it seems strange that Joseph Bailey, with whom I was intimate for a couple of years, never mentioned it to me. And stranger still it must appear, that the said "copy" was never officially used. It was my duty to draw up "a short account of Wm. Carthy, deceased," for the District Meeting and Conference of 1862. This account appears verbatim in the published minutes of that year. From that it appears that Mr. Carthy was born at Alrewas, Staffordshire, in the year 1805, that he was converted through the instrumentality of the late Rev. Sampson Turner, who missioned that part of the country in or about 1820" (1821, to be exact). This is all of the "short account" that I need to quote. The question is, Where did I get the facts from? They must have been furnished by Mr. Carthy's relatives or friends; and no exception was taken to them, either at the Ilkeston Quarterly or the Nottingham District Meeting. Anyhow, if Carthy was born in Ireland, he must have been brought to this country whilst quite a child. And it needs no brilliant imagination to figure the future "lawyer" and chapel-builder of the Nottingham District, growing up there in the heart of England as an irrepressible and mischievous lad, inhaling in his rambles and gambols the pure air of the glades and uplands of Needwood Forest, and developing and hardening by sports upon the "green,"—the green which afterwards was to be the scene of his conversion—the muscles of a frame capable of marvellous activity and endurance. Ah! if England only knew how much she owes to village-green preachers!

A good portrait of the outer is often an index, more or less reliable, to the inner man. Of Carthy, I possess only the steel engraving (here given) which appeared in the Magazine many years ago. This, I am told, is a good likeness of the man as he then was. It represents a person of middle height and size, and one who might pass through life without provoking note or comment. But, looking into it more intently, one seems to see in the well-proportioned head, crowned with dark, grow-as-you-please hair; in the spacious brow, puckered a little at the base, the irregular lines being most observable just above the nose; in the shrewd, wide-awake eyes, slightly crow-footed in the comers, indicating a capacity for humour, and perhaps laughter—not "loud, long-continued, uncontrollable, like the neighing of all Tattersall's," but rather a suppressed inward chuckling; in a sufficient nose, faintly suggestive of the Roman type; in the firm mouth and chin—in all these features, I say, one seems to see a striking corroboration of the descriptions and estimates of the man given by those who knew him. For, condensing what they say, I find that, physically, Carthy was of middle size, lithe, active, and capable of almost any amount of continuous toil; that he possessed a pleasing and expressive countenance; was a close observer of men and things; that he was a keen and clever controversialist, and a cheerful colleague and companion; that his native talent was above the average; by means of which he reached a fair position as a preacher, and would have risen higher in this respect had he in early life been instructed in the management of the voice. Some even give it as their opinion that he might have shone in the ranks of scholarship, but for the multifarious and pressing duties of a Primitive Methodist preacher's life. From this judgment, however, I am compelled to dissent. For nearly everything that characterises the scholar—if by this term "learned author" is meant—the sedentary habit, the pale cast of thought, the ignorance of "affairs," and so on, was conspicuous by its absence in him. Indeed, not to pursue the contrast further, Carthy was active and punctilious to a fault. "He would run from end to end of a circuit to prove or disprove a report which should have been utterly beneath his notice." Let us proceed to other and less qualified traits. True as steel to friends, he was terrible to causeless and impenitent enemies. Combined in him were the strength of a man and the pity of a woman. Hence, wrongdoers, whatever their station in life, feared, whilst their victims trusted and loved him. He not only never evaded any claim, upon his time or purse, but "the cause which he knew not, he searched out. He delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had no helper." He would, as the phrase runs, go through fire and, water to rescue and right oppressed innocence and worth; would walk miles and devote days and nights to the investigation of the case and the vindication of the character of man or woman whose only claim upon his efforts lay in their common human nature. This may sound like fulsome exaggeration. But, apart from the fact that I have no interest in writing thus except to tell the truth, there are a few persons still living who both could and would, if necessary, testify that what I have written above falls short of, instead of overstepping, the truth. Numerous illustrations might be given, but *ex uno, disce omnes*. A decent, industrious, and struggling tradesman, not a member of our Church, I think, if of any, through affliction and misfortune fell behind in his payments. One of his creditors pursued and threatened to ruin him if a ten pound claim were not met by a given date. Hearing of the case, Carthy inquired into it, and believing the debtor to be honest, went to his creditor, discharged the debt, and his own feeling at the conduct of the creditor at the same time.

Carthy's strength of will and determination of purpose were not to be baulked by any amount of opposition. He had his share, more than his share, some think, of this, but whether the overplus might not have been avoided without any sacrifice of principle had the iron-hand been properly gloved, is, perhaps, open to question. Indeed, the sterling qualities of the man, his fearlessness, openness, hatred of meanness and tyranny, and sympathy with the wronged, or whom he supposed to be wronged, unwedded as they were to coolness of judgment and rigid impartiality, were sure to create him plenty of enemies as well as friends. His readiness, too, to espouse the cause of any client, connexional or other, and to fight it through thick and thin to victory, was productive of the same result. But in such contests as were fought out on the floors of church courts, or that arose out of official misunderstandings, Carthy's almost unrivalled knowledge of connexional rule and extensive acquaintance with civil law, gave him an immense advantage over most of his opponents. His legal attainments, which won for him the appellation of "district lawyer," were gained at the feet of one Mr. Enfield, a Nottingham solicitor of mark, who, for years, was the kind and gratuitous Nestor of our ministers of the Nottingham District. Carthy made such a good use of these opportunities that within a few years Mr. Enfield said to him, "Carthy, it is of no further use your coming to me; you know as much about law as I do myself." Thus, armed with an extensive acquaintance with both civil and ecclesiastical law, and with a courage which feared the face of no man, Carthy was a dreaded opponent in debate. "I never knew him foiled in argument," says one who often listened to his contentions. Besides, his legal acumen and stoutness of heart stood to win in cases which would have baffled and beaten men of other qualities. I knew, for example, a trustee of one of our chapels, who, by his overbearing and sulky temper, had wearied out both co-trustees and ministers, and was in consequence, "monarch of all he surveyed." This man found in Carthy a foeman worthy of his steel. The first time they met they instinctively fought; and the next time Carthy was planned there he found the chapel door locked against him. Learning that this was no accident, or piece of forgetfulness on the part of the chapel-keeper, but a deliberate device of the "monarch" to curb and annoy his "minister," the latter promptly fetched a blacksmith, forced the door, and conducted the service, the said trustee, a late-comer, forming one of the audience. This bearish man was informed by the resolute minister that worse would follow if he did not back down into his proper place. Believing that discretion was the better part of valour, he did so, and never remounted the high horse of autocracy whilst Carthy remained on the station.

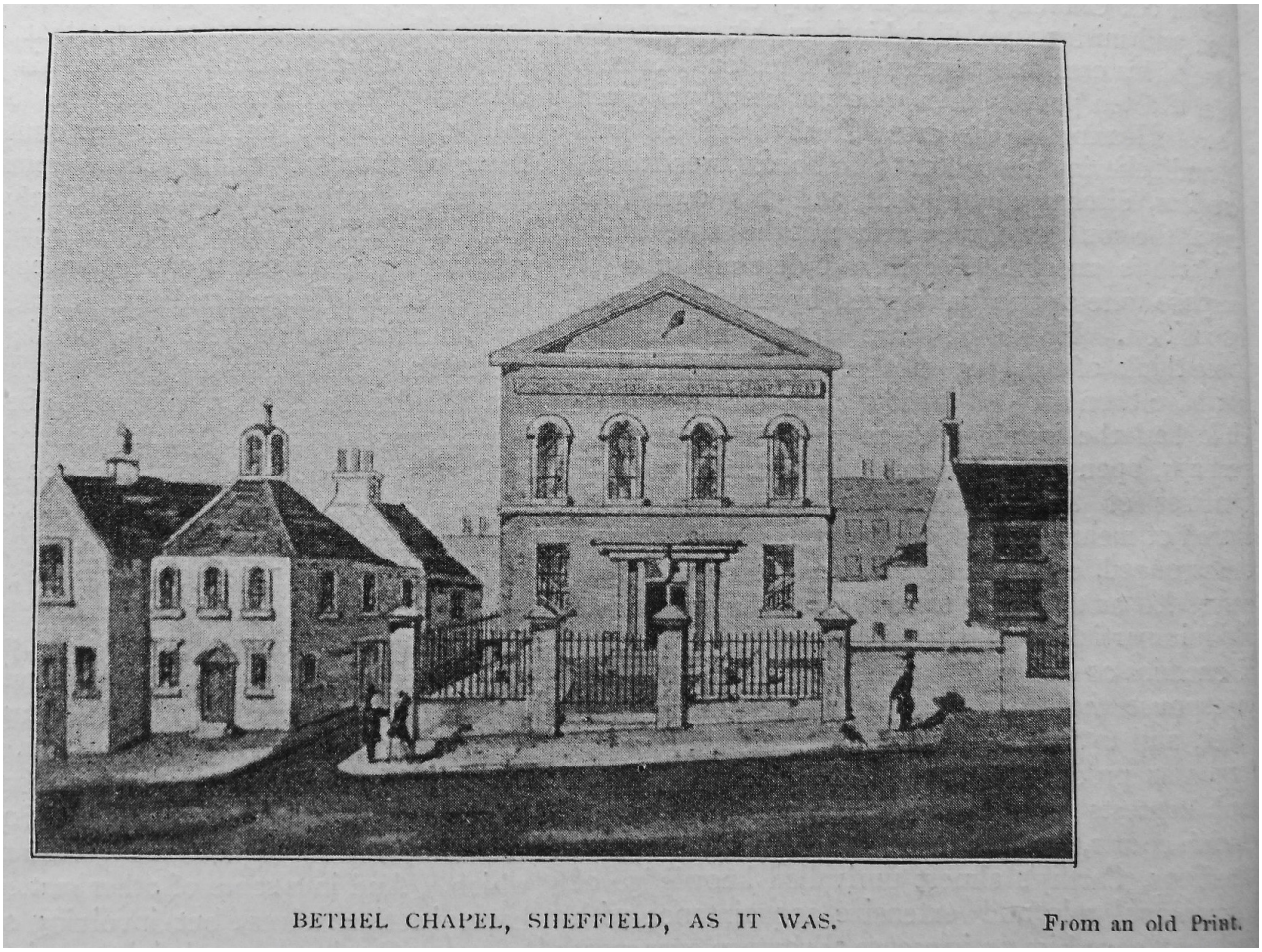
Another illustration of Carthy's power "to keep the de'il off him" may be given here. He was having some shops erected in connection with the Ilkeston Chapel, and had caused to be put up hoarding to protect the public from falling materials. This hoarding, a parish official, "dressed in a little brief authority," ordered to be pulled down. That done, he sent the bill for the workman's wages to Carthy, by whose orders the encroachment, or fancied encroachment, on the street had been made. Carthy refused to pay and was sued in the Derby County Court for the amount. The intrepid man appeared, conducted his own case and won it. Similar legal victories were gained by him, e.g., at Donington, where he attacked the mismanagement of the Grammar School, and brought the mal-administrators to book; at Thoroton, in the Bottesford Circuit, where he, by legal means, wrested our chapel out of the hands of the "Squire," or prevented it from falling into them, I am not quite clear which. And in a score of other matters, small, perhaps, in themselves, but involving serious consequences, Carthy opposed right to might, and by accurate information and dogged determination, succeeded in most.

As a proof of Carthy's invincible resolution to see a thing through that he once undertook, there is the *Cause célébre* in the Nottingham District, of fifty years ago. Without mentioning names, a few persons who yet "linger on this side the brook" will remember the case. It was a case of discipline. Carthy was prosecutor, and the defendant a man of position and influence. The yellow records of the case that lie before me as I write, do certainly seem to place Carthy "upon a rock," to quote a favourite phrase of his. But he had, nevertheless, to fight the case through all the courts. And when, at last, the Conference declared against him, the 'cute and irrepressible prosecutor discovered a technical error in the proceedings, and insisted on going the round again. Then there was the case in which Carthy came into collision with Hugh Bourne. Twice only, I think, was the presence of the founder objected to in the higher courts of the Connexion. Once at an early Tunstall Conference, and again, later, at a Nottingham District Meeting. This meeting was not held at Nottingham, but in another town in the district. I suppress names, although I doubt if any be living now to whom this incident will not be news. A young minister had entangled himself

with a couple of persons of the opposite sex. All that is meant by entanglement here is that the lad had made love to one person and married another. The jilted lady pursued the false one in the Connexional courts, and as the "irregular" brother then happened to be junior colleague to Carthy and crept under Carthy's wing, the superintendent took up his case and fought it out. Before the case came on at the District Meeting, it was known that H. Bourne had "blackballed" it, and that he intended to be there, and to see right done. But, to his surprise and that of others, Carthy objected *in limine* to the presence of the "intruder." "Mr. Bourne," he said, "had no *locus standi* in that court. What circuit did he represent? Who had sent him thither? He protested in the name of all Connexional rule and equity against a case being opposed by a voice that was more powerful than any ten men's there, and by a person who, though dearly loved and esteemed by them all, had not a leg to stand on in that meeting." What the *meeting* would have done with Hugh Bourne, I do not know, but the dear and just old man relieved it of embarrassment by offering to be silent on any question or case in which objection might be taken to his speaking. To this Carthy agreed. That episode, notwithstanding Carthy's almost Irish delight in a scrimmage, was doubtless to him, as I know it was to others, a very unpleasant one. But here is another which, in its result, would cause him unmixed satisfaction. For, whether Carthy was Scoto-Irish or not, there was enough of the *thistle* in him to have justified him in engraving upon his crest, if he had one, the Scotch national motto, "Nemo me impune lacessit."

Soon after his arrival at Ilkeston, some fifty years ago, the vicar of that parish gave it out that "he would turn all the chapels into hen-roosts before he had been there a dozen years." To his surprise and chagrin, every Nonconformist Church in the place, with the single exception of the Unitarian, had, within that period, acquired a new and more commodious place of worship. Stung to the quick that the tables had been so completely turned upon him, the vicar rashly seized any weapon that offered with which to check and hinder the "chapel building mania." Calling at Mr. S. Keeling's—an official of ours at Ilkeston, and still living—after Mr. Carthy's death, he saw a portrait of the deceased above the mantel-piece. "What's that?" said he, pointing to the offending photo. "Mr. Carthy's portrait." "Why is it there?" "Because of the respect I have for his memory. I never knew a man for whom I conceived so much esteem in so short a time, as for him." Picking up his hat, the vicar strode angrily to the door, exclaiming as he did so, "I never knew any good of him." At a loss to understand such evident animosity against a dead man, especially on the part of a professed minister of Christ—for Mr. Keeling was not on the ground when the offence was given —this gentleman made it his business to inquire into the cause of it. And this is the story that was told him by one who was intimately acquainted with the whole affair. When Carthy was preparing for the erection of Bath Street Chapel, Ilkeston, he waited upon the surrounding gentry for subscriptions. He obtained in this way a respectable list of promises, and took it to Squire Mundy, of Shiply Hall, a gentleman who, living near to the town and employing many "hands" who lived in it, he conceived would help him handsomely. Mr. Mundy said to him on the production of the list, "I am told in a letter that this list is a fictitious one." "Can I see that letter?" "Yes." "May I take a copy of it?" "Certainly." The letter was from the Vicar of Ilkeston. Carthy returned home, wrote the vicar demanding instant retractation and apology. The reverend gentleman replied, expressing regret (if he had been misinformed) that he had written the letter. Carthy re-insisted upon a plain and full retractation and apology within a given number of hours, or else—? The vicar complied, with ill-grace enough, it may be imagined, and the wronged minister took the document to Mr. Mundy, who, having read it, gave a donation of £5 to the building fund, and closed the door of his Hall against the vicar for ever. Thus signally did "vaulting" bigotry "o'erleap itself and fall on the other side."

It only remains for me to record some of Carthy's chapel building exploits. He built in what was then the larger Nottingham District no fewer than twenty-two: chapels, at a cost of £7,743, leaving a debt upon them of £5,455. As will be surmised, some of these structures were small and unpretentious, but suited to the circumstances of the people who worshipped in them. Several of them, for whose erection truth compels me to admit there never was any crying necessity, have since been sold. In fact, had the great Free Church movement of our time been in progress in his, Carthy would, surely, notwithstanding his ultra denominationalism, have stayed his hand. Of the rest, Portland Row, Ripley Circuit, not for its size or architectural distinction, but for the steps that preceded its erection; "Bethel" chapel, in what was "Coalpit Lane," but now, and since the close of the Crimean War, called after the Duke of Cambridge, "Cambridge Street," Sheffield ; and Bath Street, Ilkeston, remain as monuments of Carthy's enterprise and tireless activity.

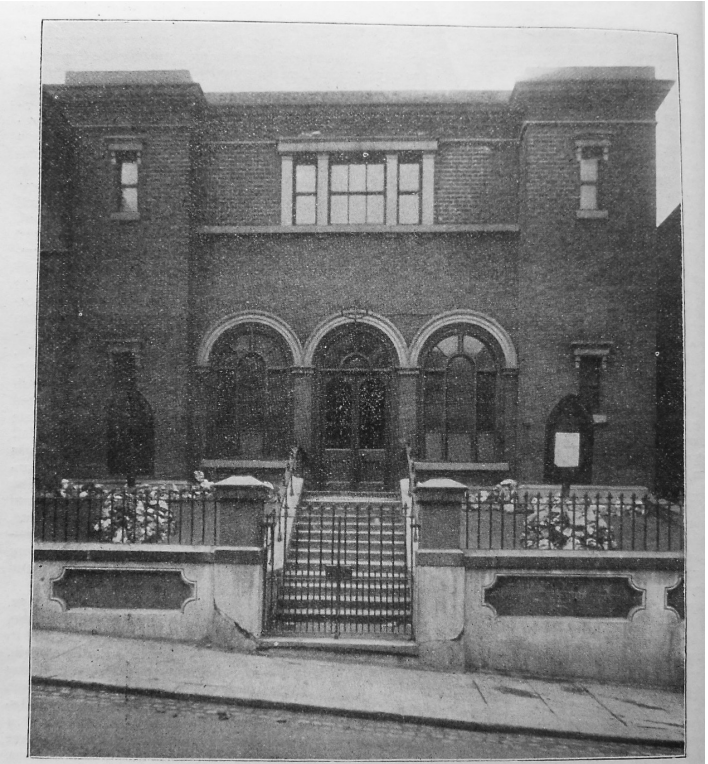


BETHEL CHAPEL, SHEFFIELD, AS IT WAS. From an old Print.

Bethel Chapel, possessing a disused graveyard in front of it, in which repose the ashes of Thomas Morgan, and other local and less known heroes, was erected in 1835, and was, without exception, the most imposing and finished structure the Connexion at that time possessed. It cost £3,000, and the debt upon it at completion, was £2,100. This amount of debt on a chapel of that size would, to-day, cause but little anxiety, but such was the hardness of those times compared with these, the low wages of workmen, and the generally poor circumstances of the trustees and people connected with the place, that it was a question for some time whether its head could be kept above water. I well remember "Old William Wright," as he was called, telling me that the trustees were driven to their wits' end to save the chapel from the hammer, and themselves from ruin. Carthy could build, but not fill chapels, and so it came about that the circuit had to petition Conference—the ground of the plea being the perilous state of the Trust—to station a man to it who could do this latter thing. The Conference appointed John Verity, a man who, by his pleasing and popular style of address, succeeded in conserving the results of Carthy's dash and energy. Some unpleasant feeling was created in the minds of one or two of Carthy's immediate successors, on the ground of the heavy debt left upon the property; and they may, whilst this was brewing, have forgotten "that one soweth and another reapeth," but, in the clearer light of eternity, where matters are viewed in juster proportions, and weighed in fairer scales than they can be here, doubtless those brethren—they are all there now—"rejoice together" in the fact that their divergent gifts co-operated to the production of one grand result.

Bath Street Chapel, Ilkeston, was erected in 1852, and considering the size of the town at that time, and the circumstances of our people, was a credit to Carthy's pluck and perseverance. But here again, the mark was over-shot in the matter of cost. It may be recollected by a few persons that on Carthy's lamented death, I was sent from the Edinburgh Mission to fill the vacancy. This was in 1861. I found the trustees in difficulties; indeed, writs were out against them. And one of my first duties was, after fishing out the facts of the Trust, to run down to Grantham and beg the suing parties to stay their hands. Of course, I made the most of the mournful circumstances in which the Trust and the whole station had recently been placed, and of my own late coming to the

circuit, and consequent inexperience of its state. The solicitor in the matter kindly listened to me, and on my promising to see his clients righted, arrested the writs. It is needless here and now to detail the struggles we had to meet the engagements into which, on behalf of the trustees, I had entered; but they were met, and the chapel, altered, improved, and with new and commodious schoolrooms added, stands there to-day in
one of the best positions in the borough as an evidence of Carthy's persistent and herculean efforts.



BATH STREET CHAPEL, ILKESTON.

Portland Row is a mining hamlet in the parish of Selston, Ripley Circuit. Here, for years and years, we had a good and flourishing society, but no building, except a house, to put it into. All the land thereabouts was in the hands of one statesman, Lord Melbourne, after whose death it fell to Earl Cowper; a minor, and could not, it was said, on account of his minority be either sold or leased. Lord Palmerston married the widow, Earl Cowper's mother, and so was drawn into the negotiations that were being carried on about a site. Carthy was our chief agent in them. The minutes drawn up, and letters written on this case, would drive any man compelled to read them to despair. At length, Carthy suggested that as writing had failed, himself and Joseph Bailey should go up to London and see Lord and Lady Palmerston. They went, and discovered that the noble pair were down at Broadlands, at the far end of Hampshire. "Let us follow them,"' said Carthy; and away they went. Arriving in the evening, they were received by his lordship with great *bonhomie*, and after refreshments had, were invited to stay the night. This they did, and the following morning found that the house— Lord Palmerston being at that time the head of the Government—was full of English and foreign guests. Carthy, being a minister, and the only one present, was given the place of honour at table, and asked to do duty as chaplain. This he did, but at breakfast was in a quandary as to what he should ask for, as neither he nor his colleague knew the names of some of the dishes on the sideboard. Bailey, a shrewd man, whispered Carthy to this effect, "Let us ask first for something we do know the name of, and listen to what the others ask for, catch the names of the same, and follow suit." By this stratagem they managed to play themselves off as "diners out," and at the same time to gratify their palates with unaccustomed viands. Afterwards, however, when Carthy's openness and honesty re-asserted themselves, he said to his comrade, "What a precious couple of hypocrites we were!" After years of writing, working, and waiting, a site was granted and a chapel built.

Less effort, but no less shrewdness, was needed to secure land for a chapel at Kimberley, Notts, a large village then on the Ilkeston Circuit, but now, and for years past, the head of a station. This story, in which Lord Melbourne figures again, is extremely interesting, but too long for telling here, and I must hasten to a close.

I have said little or nothing about Carthy's inner experience and Christian life, for the simple reason that I have no information on the subject. Had he kept a diary and I had had access to it, doubtless this lack could have been supplied. In its absence, one may almost certainly conclude from the esteem in which he was held by pious persons, inside and outside our churches, and from the general mourning at his death, that he was not only a man, but a saintly man. From all that has come under my notice I judge him to have been good, but not goody. There was nothing flabby or flashy about him; no "building with untempered mortar, nor crying peace, peace, when and where there was no peace." If he appeared, as at times he did, harsh and partial, this was because his fine moral qualities existed side by side, so to say, and did not blend so as to soften

and subdue each other into a true and tuneful harmony. On this account some persons misread him; but they had only to re-read, or rather, read the next page of his life to find out their mistake. Had Carthy been a different man from what he was, he could not have accomplished the work, weathered the storms, or conquered the difficulties which awaited, overtook, and confronted him in his busy life. The material that he had to whip into shape, as one or two persons still living know, was of the most gnarly and intractable kind, demanding that the tools and the workman should be suited thereto.

The modern phrase, “We cannot live on the past,” expresses only half a truth. It is equally true that we cannot live apart from, independently of, the past. It is still truer to say that had the past not been what it was, the present would not have been what it is. The present grows out of the past as the branch out of the bole of the tree, or the flower out of the plant. We are, in a large and important sense, what the past has enabled us to become. And, applying this view of things to the present generation of Primitive Methodists, one may reasonably affirm that it would prove itself very ungrateful for, and unworthy of, that glorious heritage into which it has entered, could it forget or under-value the hard conditions, the self-denying and consuming toils, and the poor earthly rewards which lay back of it and which furthered its development. “Poor Carthy!” writes one, “he did a great amount of work for the Connexion for which he was very poorly paid; but he is at home now.” Yes; at home and at rest; and doubtless, if permitted to review his career in this world, would, had he to recommence it, prefer the same lot to that of the richest modern sybarite.

Reference
Primitive Methodist Magazine 1899/33