

Work of God, Halifax Circuit.

Primitive Methodist magazine January 1865 pages 51-54

An almost unexampled tide of prosperity has been flowing in this station for the last two years, an account of which will be acceptable and profitable to the readers of this periodical. For a great number of years we have had but one chapel in the town, while some of the larger and more thriving villages in the neighbourhood were without chapels. Small cottage bed rooms, fitted up with suitable furniture, and in out-of-the-way situations, being the only places in which we carried on our religious enterprises. This state of things kept the town society in about a stereotyped condition (for unless a church of Christians seeks to aggress it is seldom that it will grow), whilst those societies in the villages referred to were more likely to die out altogether than to "increase and multiply."

A few years ago, while brother John Jobling had hold of the reins of this station, Joseph Crossley, Esq., put an extra preacher on the station, himself paying his salary. Soon after performing this truly wise act of Christian benevolence, he sent for the brother named, and said, "Now that you have got an additional agent you ought to turn your attention to the population over the North Bridge"—a part of the town in which dissenters at that time had little or no interest—"and," continued Mr. Crossley, "if you will take a room, I will pay the rent for a time." Thus stimulated, a room was taken, a Sunday school started, and an occasional preaching service was held. The school flourishing, though no church was raised up, the friends interested in that part of the town determined to erect a small chapel and school. This was a little more than two years ago. On entering the station in July, 1862, I found that the friends had agreed with the Messrs. Crossley for the purchase of a piece of land, beyond which no other arrangements had been made.

About four miles from Halifax there is a large and rapidly increasing village called Brighouse. In this place our people from time to time made sundry efforts to secure a footing, and, after several unsuccessful attempts, they succeeded about eighteen years ago. During the greater part of that time they worshipped in a chamber such as those named in the former part of this article, but finding that they could not prosper beyond a given point, despite all the efforts put forth, it was determined to arise and build. With this view my predecessor, Mr. Worsnop, canvassed the society and town for donations, and succeeded in raising £9 in cash, and a goodly sum in promises. This was the state of the enterprise two years ago.

I will now give the history of our new chapels, in the order of their commencement and completion.

There is, in the neighbourhood of Sowerby Bridge, our principal country station, a hilly, moory district called Norland. More than forty years ago Jeremiah Gilbert, of blessed memory, missioned this town ship, and met with great success. Among others who were affected by his ministry was a rich worldling, then on the borders of the grave. This man whose name was Hitchen, made up his mind to give the Primitives a piece of land on which to build a chapel, and to bequeath them £300 wherewith to build it. He conveyed the former by a deed of purchase, and left the latter in his will. Dying a few weeks afterwards, the money was lost through the action of the law of mortmain, but the land remained the property of

the connexion. Circumstances, however, prevented the building of a chapel thereon, but one was built in the valley beneath, namely, at Sowerby Bridge. The society there had a struggling life until a few years ago, when, owing to the wise disciplinary acts of brother Richard Davies, the then superintendent of the station, a pleasing reaction took place, and since then the cause has gathered vigour and power. The chapel having become too small for our school and congregation, it was seen necessary either to build another place of worship, or to enlarge the old one, and recollecting the first-rate site of land on the top of the adjacent hill, from off which many scholars came to our school, and hearers to the chapel, it was resolved to put up a sanctuary there in the name of the Lord. Out of sixteen original trustees, the writer found that five were living, after a lapse of forty-two years. These he summoned to a meeting, and put it to them either to carry out their trusts, or transfer them to another body of men. Choosing the latter alternative, he formed a new trust of active earnest men, and supplied the place of the old deed, which was singularly unique and foolish, with a new one. The neighbourhood was canvassed for aid ; this was granted, and after the usual trials and griefs of chapel building, the writer had the privilege, early in last spring, of dedicating this beautiful little sanctuary to the worship of the divine Saviour. It contains an area of about eleven square yards, one half of which is fitted with pews. The entire cost (exclusive of land) is about £300, towards which we raised over £150. We have a flourishing Sabbath school, a happy church, and a crowded congregation. Soon we shall have to put up a detached school room, as all the pews are let, and twenty sittings wanted, which we cannot supply.

While this building was going on, we were anxiously seeking a plot of ground at Brighouse. After suffering many disappointments, we at length purchased a piece for £108, in an eligible situation, and of the right character. The stone was laid in January last amid mingled feelings of hope and fear, and a vigorous canvass for money was made. Our poor members (for they are all poor) worked with a hearty good-will, and amid much praying ; and although the building, from the dearness of material and labour, is necessarily costly, we rejoice to say that we are in comfortable circumstances, and likely, with care and prudence, to do well. The writer opened this chapel a few weeks ago. It is a beautiful structure, and capable of holding 300 persons. About half the area is occupied by pews, the rest by free sittings. Since the opening a toll-gate house, which flanks the chapel, has been added to the trust property, which will enable us hereafter to greatly extend our premises. In the meantime it will be the abode of the chapel keeper. The entire cost of the building and purchase is £700, towards which we have raised £300, a splendid achievement for thirty one poor members to realise. Nearly 100 sittings have been let, a Sunday school is set on foot, and as a sign of growth in hearers, I have sold more than £2 worth of hymn books.

The next chapel in order is the Halifax one. This, I have already said, arose out of the mission sustained by Mr. Joseph Crossley. But it was languidly taken up by nearly all, except by a few ladies belonging to our Ebenezer chapel. These, of whom Mrs. John Sutcliffe and Mrs. James Hartley were the chief, started a bazaar more than eighteen months ago, and when we, the stronger vessels, were downhearted and ready to halt, they roused up our attention by their vigorous exhortations, and spurred us on to action by their stimulating example. Space only forbids our giving all their names ; but their record is on high. To their zeal and faith we are indebted for this pretty little chapel. They held up my

hands ; they stood by my side when most others would have forsaken me. The chapel was opened on the 11th of September last by Mr. Jobling. Its entire cost will exceed £000, but we expect to have no more than £300 left as debt. We have let nearly all the sittings, and a large number of hymn books has been purchased.

I have now to speak of Elland new chapel. Elland is a large village in the same valley as Brighouse. Here we have had a preaching station, on and off, for more than forty years. When I entered the village for the first time my heart was pained to see the state of Primitive Methodism therein, and I said to the only active man we had amongst us, "If we don't build a chapel here we shall die out." "We all know that," he said, "but we cannot build a chapel." "Try," was the reply. The next time I went he said, "If you will begin a chapel we will help you." "Agreed," was the response, and right well he and the rest have helped. Soon after we resolved to build, a grand site of land presented itself, which we bought. We gave the town and neighbourhood a thorough canvass for subscriptions, and although we only got one £5 and about two £2 donations, yet we have got, in innumerable small sums, more than £100. Failing to secure a liberal gentleman to lay the stone, I got two young men belonging to our Greetland society to beg me a sum to lay on the stone, and I would lay it myself. They set to work in good earnest, and when I stepped forth to perform the ceremony they put into my hands ten guineas in gold as my donation, thus making me a gentleman for the nonce. This chapel is admirable for its neatness and eligibility. It is twelve yards square, and contains 112 sittings in pews. The entire cost will be about £400, towards which we have realised more than £200. This is a surprising sum for eleven poor members to secure. We have let about half the sittings, and last week and this we have been holding religious services every night with good success. Hymn books here, too, are selling well.

While preachers who have laboured on this station in the past will be pleased with these achievements, their pleasure will be heightened when they are told that poor old Bradshaw Lane has "renewed its youth like the eagle," for we have there a large and zealous society, and are building a chapel which will put many large town chapels into the shade. Were I to give you all the particulars of this enterprise, the providential hits we have made, the sorrows and trials we have passed through, and the singular deliverances wrought out for us in answer to prayer, my readers with myself would rejoice in the proofs they afford that there is a God in the earth that doeth wondrously. But my paper is swelling to undue proportions ; hence I must pause till I write (d.v.) the account of the opening.

I have another and yet another chapel to write about. Many old preachers who have travelled here will remember Round Hill chapel, near Queensbury (lately Queenshead). This chapel was built by us forty years ago. It had a staff of twenty six trustees ; but oh, such a trust ! some being literally "fellows of the baser sort." It cost £480, and had £400 left on it as debt. The trustees, I am told, pocketed the seat rents, and soon the mortgagee had to take possession of the chapel, and make the best of it. Since then it has had a strange history. About eighteen years ago a friend of the connexion bought it for about £125, and offered it to the circuit for that sum, but it was not deemed prudent to buy it. Services, however, began to be held in it once more, the owner making what he could by seat rents, collections, etc. By and bye he added largely to the burying ground, and built a beautiful school room. This embarrassed him, and he had to seek a mortgage. It was not long before his mortgagee had to foreclose,

and then we became tenants of chapel and school at an annual rent of £5. Last spring it reached my ears that the property was for sale, and as we were then in a state of spiritual prosperity such as had not existed from the beginning, I determined to buy it if possible. With proper sanction I set to work, and after a vast amount of trouble, we secured the chapel, school, and grave yard for £110. £50 have since been spent in law, repairs, alterations, and painting, but I hope when we make up our accounts we shall be able to say we have but £90 left as a debt.

Finally, one of our suburban societies is at a place called Booth Town, a rapidly - increasing township. Here we worship and teach a flourishing school in a large room. Our members here are all poor, yet they are determined to have a chapel. But we have been obliged to let the project sleep till we have more time and a better opportunity. We have however bought a good site of land, and have organised a bazaar committee, who are plying the needle with zeal, and I hope when another spring shall put forth her leaves we shall be busy with mattock and spade, and in erecting here a house for our God.

A grateful emotion will not allow me to put away my pen without telling the reader of the great and generous aid rendered to the new chapels by the Messrs. Crossley. On becoming acquainted with my project they offered me 5s. to every 16s. I begged for each and all of them. This percentage secured for Norland chapel, £39 15s. ; for Brighouse, £75 5s. ; for Halifax, £83 10s. lid., and for Elland, £51 5s. 8d. We have yet Bradshaw .and Booth Town help to get, but it will be ours when it is asked for.

The best of all is, the spiritualities of the station have been not only maintained but promoted. Places which have been low for years, as Bradshaw and Round Hill, have risen into power and influence. A bold but prudent declaration of monetary obligations made by the writer to the different societies in the station, together with a free circulation of the society rules, has had the effect of increasing our revenue more than £10 per quarter. There is every prospect of the station assuming a, higher stand -point still. We want less worldliness and more prayerfulness in our town society, and a liberality which gives as well as desires others to give to the Lord. We want "holiness to the Lord"* written on the heart, and not con fined to the shape or colour of bodily dress. I cannot conclude this hastily written paper without saying that my late colleague, brother Jonathan. Calvert, rendered good service in collecting money for Norland and Elland chapels.

John Simpson.