CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAKING OF NORWICH DISTRICT.

At the beginning of 1823, the Nottingham Circuit had six branches—Boston, Spalding, Norwich, Fakenham, Cambridge, and Lynn. Of these, Norwich and Fakenham became circuits in June, 1823, and Cambridge and Lynn in March of the following year. By 1825, Yarmouth and Upwell (afterwards Downham Market) had also become heads of circuits. As these six circuits geographically formed one group, the Conference of 1825 made them into a new District, of which Norwich, the capital of the Eastern Counties, was naturally constituted the head. No doubt this step was taken because it was thought it would conduce to the more economical and effective administration of the stations themselves. Such at least is the conclusion to which we must come after reading what Hugh Bourne has bluntly written on the subject: "In 1825, Norwich District was formed of six shattered circuits from Nottingham District, with 1546 members. These had been injured by employing
improper characters.” After this, we must not picture to ourselves these first East Anglian circuits as starting on their careers with the vigour and freshness of young athletes. There is much that we cannot know, and need not care to know, implied in those words “shattered circuits.” All the more remarkable, then, is the progress which the Norwich District made between 1825 and 1842; for by that time the Norwich District had become practically co-extensive with what we know as East Anglia.

We propose, then, in this chapter to show, first, how Primitive Methodism reached and rooted itself in these primary circuits of the old Norwich District, and then, how from these circuits as the nuclei it was carried here and there by missionary efforts, until the greater part of East Anglia was covered with a network of circuits. Unfortunately, there is little information obtainable as to the first planting of our Church in Fakenham and Upwell Circuits. It was so when Mr. Petty wrote his *History*, and it is now too late to hope that the facts can be recovered. Of our Church-origins in the remaining primary Circuits, especially in Yarmouth, something more is known. We begin with Norwich, and in what follows we shall freely use the information which has been kindly supplied by the Rev. W. A. Hammond, who knows so much of East Anglian Primitive Methodism.

**The Primary Circuits:**—I. Norwich.

The first Primitive Methodist services in Norwich were held on the great open common known as Mousehold Heath, familiar to every student of history as the camping-ground of Ket, the tanner of Wymondham, whose army of 20,000 men
gathered in rebellion against Edward VI., and was only defeated by Dudley, Earl of Warwick, after much desperate fighting. Here stands the oak—still known as Ket's Oak—under which the insurgent sat to administer justice. Here, too, is the Lollards' Pit, wherein the early Reformers used to gather for Divine service as in a mighty amphitheatre. Here, as in another Gwennap, they gathered, row upon row, to listen to the Word. To this historic spot the early missionaries wended their way and held services, so that it soon got a new name which needs no guessing. For many years crowds gathered at least once a year for a camp meeting at the old trysting-place.

It was not long before the missionaries found their way into the city. Pockthorpe, its most degraded quarter, was not far from Mousehold, and soon the services were transferred to one of the yards for which Norwich is famous—Rose Yard by name, not, however, so called because it was fragrant with the scent of summer roses, but because a public-house named "The Rose" stood at its entrance. Here the open-air services were continued and at last a chapel secured, and the foundations of Primitive Methodism in the city laid. Encompassed with formidable difficulties the infant cause pressed on its way—sometimes almost crushed with financial difficulties (for some of its early trustees were cast into prison), and sometimes its very existence threatened by dissension; yet, for all that, it had such vitality and vigour that its preachers went through all the country-side preaching the gospel. Not only did they enter the villages contiguous to the city, but, as we shall see, they sent their evangelists to Yarmouth and Wymondham, and even to Colchester, sixty miles away.

Other openings in the city were eagerly tried and cottage-meetings and open-air services held, the most important of which was Lakenham. Here a loft was secured, and services commenced, and, in 1823, a chapel built at a cost of £360—not a large outlay for providing accommodation for five hundred people. Subsequently, however, £900 more were expended upon it, and Lakenham chapel became the headquarters of Primitive Methodism in the city. Out of the way, up a narrow "loak" * called Chapel Loak, that a stranger would have had some difficulty to find, this building yet became the home of a strong church. Crowds gathered to listen to such preachers as John Oscoft, Thomas Charlton, G. W. Bellham, Richard Howchin, Thomas Batty, and Robert Key. Meanwhile, the Rose Yard society emerged from the old yard, purchased an old brewery and, in 1842, built the present Cowgate Street Chapel at a cost of £750.

* "Loak," a lane closed in with gates, or through which there is no thoroughfare.
in which good work has been done in a very needy neighbourhood. In those early
days, Norwich Branch with its "appartments" (sic), as the outlying districts were
strangely called, carried six preachers, two of whom were stationed at Yarmouth
and one at Colchester. In 1825, Norwich had 192 members, Colchester 19, and
Yarmouth 112, with seven chapels and twenty-four local preachers all told. The
missionary character of the work carried on is evidenced by a resolution of one of
the Quarterly Meetings ordering five hundred hymn-books to be bought and one
hundred plans printed. Local preachers were to have their licences paid for out of
the missionary money, and no person was to be allowed to sing who curled his hair
or behaved disorderly during the service.

Lakenham Old Chapel and School.

Notwithstanding all difficulties and drawbacks the work grew and prospered. A new
cause was commenced in the west end of the city, and, in 1864, a good chapel was
erected at a cost of £1300, to which schools have since been added, at a cost of £960,
largely through the energy and liberality of Rev. R. Key. In 1872, the old Lakenham
Chapel gave place to the present fine suite of buildings in Queen's Road. In 1879,
a new mission was opened in Nelson Street, beyond Dereham Road, and a chapel and
schools built at a cost of £1200; and, in 1892, a mission was opened in Thorpe, and
a school-hall built at a cost of £900, which has now given place to the beautiful Scott Memorial Church, erected by Rev. John Smith at a cost of some £6000.

Norwich has had a long succession of devoted, earnest officials. Far away back were William Wilson, William Dawson, John Huggins, and William Elmer. Later on, we have the names of Samuel Jarrold, founder of the well-known publishing house, and Messrs. Reeves, Eggleton, and Spinks. Nor must Elizabeth Bultitude, our last female travelling-preacher, be forgotten. She was converted in 1828 at a camp meeting on Mousehold Heath led by Samuel Atterby, and preached her trial sermon in old Lakenham Chapel. In 1832, she was called to the ministry by Norwich Circuit, and for thirty years discharged

the full duties of an itinerant, chiefly in the old Norwich District, at a time when the work was arduous, the salary poor, and the difficulties many. At her superannuation in 1862 she settled in Norwich, where she died in 1891, at the ripe age of eighty-one years. The Conference, in its annual address to the stations, noted the disappearance of her name from the list of preachers where it had stood so long, "as though to remind us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were without distinction of sex."
It is clear even from the brief outline just given that, like many other circuits, Norwich had its intermediate period of reaction and distress. When we find the circuit reduced to one preacher and 109 members, as was the case in 1829, it must, one thinks, have been within measurable distance of extinction. Certain minutes recorded in the books of the Hull Circuit throw unexpected light on this trying period, and when their origin and purport are explained they show that, at the prompting of W. Clowes, Hull was ready to lend a helping hand to a struggling circuit. It could come down from its "high popularity" to act the part of the good Samaritan. W. Clowes visited Norwich in 1830 and again in 1831. In the former year he assisted at a Missionary Meeting in Rose Yard Chapel. He remarks in his *Journal* that the city of Norwich, notwithstanding its thirty-six parish churches and numerous clergy, is fearfully wicked. On his next visit, "after conversing with our friends belonging to Rose Yard Chapel, I saw," says he, "the necessity of a preacher being appointed to officiate therein, and to mission sundry places around the city."
PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH.

The outcome of this may be seen in the following enactment of the Conference of 1831:—

Q.—"How shall Rose Yard be managed?
A.—"That chapel and its dependencies shall be annexed to Hull Circuit."

And so it was. In June, 1831, David Beattie was sent as a missionary, and in September he was asked if there was room for another. Six months he laboured at Rose Yard, and was succeeded by Thomas Bennett. In 1832, Norwich reported 533 members, and the tide had turned.

II.—King's Lynn.

When, in the year 1821, Messrs. Oscroft and Charlton, finding their Lincolnshire Circuits over-manned, skirted the Wash to begin their mission in Norfolk, King's Lynn was naturally, from its position and importance, one of the first places they visited. From the very first they met here with an encouraging measure of success; so much so indeed, that a letter written at the time affirms—"the Primitives are carrying all before them in King's Lynn." The leader of the first class formed is said to have been Mr. Streader, whose son was to share with John Ellerthorpe of Hull, another of our co-religionists, the distinction of having saved so many lives from drowning that the mere recital of their exploits makes up a goodly volume.* But, unfortunately, disaster soon overtook the promising cause; for when Hugh Bourne wrote of "shattered circuits," and of the employment of "improper persons" as the cause of their shattering, he was certainly thinking of Lynn, and of the disloyal and divisive conduct of the preacher once in charge. We have already alluded to these unhappy occurrences, and

need not dwell on them further.* The history of Lynn Primitive Methodism began anew in the year 1825, when G. W. Bellham, who had done such good work in the Loughborough Circuit, was appointed to Lynn, his native place, and began his twenty-four years of service in the Norwich District, then in but a rudimentary condition. He had a heavy task before him; but he bravely set himself, in the spirit of Nehemiah, to repair the breach. He brought back concord to the society, built a small chapel, and began a Sabbath school which became, as it still is, one of the most flourishing schools in the District. He also enlarged the bounds of the Circuit by missioning Swaffham,

Litcham, and other places more in the centre of the county. It was at Litcham, while holding a service near the stocks, that the familiar trio of parson, lawyer, and constable came on the scene. In the end, Mr. Bellham was given in charge of the constable, and next day was brought before Col. R——, of Lexham Hall.

“What Act am I taken up under?” asked Mr. Bellham of the Magistrate.

Magistrate.—“The Vagrant Act. You are a common vagrant.”

Mr. B.—“I did not do anything to obtain money.”

* See vol. i. p. 322.
Magistrate.—"I meant the Riot Act. You collected a great number of persons together, I suppose to make a riot, as it was late in the evening."

Mr. B.—"If I am taken up under the Riot Act, I have no business here. Commit me to prison, and let me take my trial before more than one magistrate."

Magistrate, with an oath.—"Be off out of my sight."

Mr. B.—"It is wrong to swear, sir. Jesus Christ hath said, 'Swear not at all.'"

Magistrate.—"Then don't provoke me." At last the Magistrate, being rather rusty in his law and getting the worst in the encounter, said : "Go about your business."

Mr. B.—"When I am properly discharged, sir."

Magistrate.—"Are you any trade?"

Mr. B.—"I am a shipwright. I served seven years under Mr. B—— of Lynn."

Magistrate.—"You are a fine fellow—a shipwright, a parson, and a lawyer. Well you may go about your business; I have no more to say to you."

Clergyman to the Magistrate.—"Stop, sir, there is something for him to pay."

Constable.—"Eight and ninepence, sir."

Clergyman to Mr. B.—"Eight and ninepence. You will discharge that bill, and then you are at liberty."

Mr. B.—"I am at liberty, sir. The magistrate has set me at liberty."

Magistrate to the Clergyman.—"Let the fellow go."

Clergyman.—"But who is to pay the eight and ninepence?"

Magistrate.—"Pay it yourself; bringing your fellows here."

Mr. B.—"I'll pay it if it is just and right. But I think the debt belongs to Mr. H."

Magistrate.—"Be off."

Mr. B.—"Good morning, gentlemen."

We are told that Mr. Bellham and the clergyman left the room together, Mr. B. saying to him: "God forgive you, sir; I wish you well"; but the clergyman was too chagrined to reply.

The country thus missioned in 1825 by Mr. Bellham, became, in 1836, the Swaffham Circuit. From Litcham Messrs. James and Mark Warnes went out into the ministry; while Sporle, near Swaffham, was the native place of Horatio Hall and Robert Ward, the Connexion's pioneer missionary to New Zealand.

Another notable advance was made by the Lynn Circuit in 1831, when John Smith (1) became the superintendent of the station. He had come from his native Tunstall District in exchange for Thomas Batty. His name is carved deep in the history of the Norwich District, not because of any special intellectual powers he possessed, but because of the intensity of his zeal and his single-minded purpose to save men. Well might men, as they reflected on what his advent had meant for the churches of East Anglia, say to themselves: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John."

By March, 1832, the membership of the circuit had increased by 234, and the circuit was stimulated to enter once more upon missionary labours. Mr. James Pole was sent to the north-western corner of the county, and missioned Holme, Hunstanton, Ringsstead, Docking, Snettisham, and many other places. The mission proved so successful that, in 1836, Snettisham became the head of a new circuit, afterwards to be known as Docking Circuit. The village of Anmer is in the Docking station. From an
interesting communication we have received from Rev. F. B. Paston, we learn that
the time was when the old squire of the village placed Primitive Methodism under
ban. No services were allowed on his estate. At his death the young squire, whose
acquaintance Mr. Paston had made, removed the ban and showed himself friendly;
but King Edward VII., who acquired the village by purchase and added it to his
Norfolk estate, has shown himself a friend indeed to our Church. He has built us
a beautiful village sanctuary, which was recently opened by the Rev. Thomas Woodall
of Lynn.

In 1833, the membership of Lynn Circuit was reported as 1170, being an increase
of 843 for the preceding five years. It should be noted, too, that about the year
1835 Lynn sent W. Kirby to commence a mission at Peterborough which, in 1839,
became the Peterborough Circuit.

Returning now to the town of Lynn: the next notable event in its history was the
holding of the first of the two Conferences that have met here—that of 1836. The
chapel had recently undergone its second enlargement, and amongst the services
held therein were preaching services at five o'clock in the morning. At this Conference
the Minutes were consolidated by the Conference itself, the onerous duty having appar-
ently been shirked by the General Committee! It had been noised abroad that the
authorities would interfere to prevent the processioning of the streets of the royal
borough on the Sunday. None the less, the procession moved along, and one of the
senior brethren not only preached a short sermon as they went on but also engaged in
prayer. The camp meeting, held on Hardwick Green, was said to have been one of the
largest ever held. Numberless conveyances of every kind—waggons, carts, gigs, besides
single horses—had brought the people from a distance of ten, twenty, thirty, and even
forty miles. Lynn's second Conference was held in 1844.

London Road Chapel was opened, March 31st, 1859. The site on which it stands
had formerly been occupied by the ancient chapel of St. James. At the Dissolution
it became a hospital for "poor and impotent people," and still later a workhouse. The
acquisition of such a site for a Primitive Methodist chapel was regarded as little short
of a scandal by a certain section of the inhabitants, and every available means was
tried to defeat the project—but in vain.
The foundation-stone of this new structure had been laid by Mr. William Lift, of whom a few words must be said. Converted in 1828 when the church was but seven years old, Mr. Lift survived until 1893, thus enjoying sixty-five years' fellowship with the society. For sixty-one years he was a local preacher. "His position in the King's Lynn station was simply unique. He grew up with it, he lived through two generations of members and hearers, he helped to nourish and make it what it is, and in turn he was nourished and sustained by it. In truth we may say that he was in turn both the child and the father of the station. He gave thought and time and strength to promote its spiritual growth, and his wealth to aid its material expansion and financial prosperity. The evidence of this is found in the fact that his name is cut into the foundation-stones of twenty-one chapels or schools, and what is surpassingly better, his name is cut into tables, 'not of stone,' but in tables that are hearts of flesh. Hundreds revere his memory, and hold his name and work in undying remembrance. Having grown up with the station, and become inseparably associated with all its interests and movements, it was but natural for the Quarterly Meeting in 1853 to appoint Mr. Lift as its Steward, and to renew that appointment no less than one hundred and twenty-six times." *

III., IV.:—Fakenham; Upwell.

We regret that so little is known of the earlier history of the Fakenham and Upwell Circuits. These centres, as probably also Wisbech and Cambridge, would be amongst the fifty-seven places found on the plan of the Norfolk Mission, which J. Oscroft says was printed in April, 1821. In 1824, Fakenham Circuit had no fewer than six travelling-preachers appointed to it. In 1826, North Walsham Circuit was formed. This new circuit, as we shall see, subsequently sent Robert Key on a mission which, in 1832, resulted in the formation of the Mattishall—afterwards called East Dereham Circuit. Fakenham also, in 1842, missioned Oundle in Northamptonshire, soon afterwards transferred to the General Missionary Committee.

Upwell's chief claim to notice, in the absence of other information, must rest on the active part it took in early missionary enterprise. In 1828, Brandon, in Suffolk, became a circuit, and it is probable, as Mr. Petty seems to suggest, that it was reached by the first missionaries to Norfolk. At that time, what was known as Marshland Fen, at the western extremity of Norfolk, was a desolate and barren region. Little of it was then under-cultivation, and the moral condition of its inhabitants was conformable to their surroundings. They habitually disregarded the Sabbath, and might have said with the navvy, "Sunday has not cropped out here yet"; for there were no ministers or places for public worship. In 1832, Mr. James Garner

made his way into Marshland, and he was soon followed by other missionaries. For two years services were held in the house of Mr. Collins, then in a lean-to which he erected near his outbuildings. Finally in 1855, largely through the generosity and zeal of Mr. and Mrs. Neep and Messrs. Collins and Taylor, a neat chapel was erected for the society which had done so much for the moral and spiritual enlightenment of that neglected district.

To two missionaries of Upwell Circuit belongs the honour of having materially extended the Connexion in the county of Essex. Messrs. Redhead and J. Jackson were, at the March Quarterly Meeting of 1838, set apart for missionary work; but no precise directions were given them. They went forth almost at a venture, and at the end of a long day's journey, found themselves at Saffron Walden, forty miles away. Here, on the 2nd of May, Mr. Redhead preached in the open-air in Castle Street, and he and his colleague also visited many villages. The entire cost of the mission for two years was £65, which, we are told, was regarded as unusually heavy! The mission continued to prosper both before and after it was turned over to the General Missionary Committee, and in 1850 Saffron Walden became a circuit with 516 members. Upwell also missioned the city of Ely.

The old Upwell Circuit is now Downham Market, a place first missioned, but afterwards given up, by Lynn. Early in the Thirties the Upwell Circuit, under the superintendency of that indefatigable and successful minister, Samuel Atterby, remissioned the place. A cottage was first used for services, and afterwards, in 1834, a barn was fitted up. The first chapel was erected in 1855, largely through the instrumentality of Mr. and Mrs. Kemp, who now resided at Downham Market. We give views of the present Church and Manse, erected in 1871, also of the late Rev. J. Kemish, who spent nine useful years on this station. Downham Market has also been fortunate.
in having had Mr. W. Sexton Proctor as its Circuit Steward for so many years, a convert of John Smith (1), and a local preacher for fifty-six years. It is singular that this Primitive Methodist official also filled the office of churchwarden for twenty one years, and was twice elected by the vicar as his warden. The Assistant Circuit Steward, Mr. Rose, has also been, and is, a stay and support to the Circuit.

Nor does this exhaust the missionary enterprises of the Upwell or Downham Circuit. Ely was prepared for self-government by being its Branch, and it began missions at Ramsey (now incorporated with Peterborough) and Buckden.

Wisbech formed part of Upwell Circuit until 1833, when it was granted independence. It was first visited, in 1821, by the Nottingham missionaries, who took their stand in the Horse-Fair. At first they met with considerable opposition, and had to combat strong prejudice, so that slow progress was made. The first preaching-place was the humble cottage of a tinker who was one of the first converts, and this was afterwards exchanged for a barn. Yet Wisbech, from an early date had connected with it some estimable persons who had also, what was very valuable—staying power. Such were Mr. Gubbins, Mrs. Miller, and especially Mr. M. Taylor and his wife, who were well-known in the district for their hospitality and Christian kindness. A notable acquisition to the society was Edwin Waller, a Wesleyan local preacher, who after mature deliberation, in which he counted all costs, united with the society, and continued to be its staunch friend and supporter until his death, in 1854. We have already met with several bearers of the name of Waller, who have deserved well of the Connexion.
We do not forget the Wallers of the Manchester District, or Thomas Waller, the coke-burner, of Blaydon; and this Edwin Waller, "earthenware dealer," of Wisbech, was evidently a notable figure in the Norwich District in his day. He was for long the corresponding member of its District Committee; often its chosen representative to the Annual Conference, and in other ways he played an influential part. He was, we are told, and we can well believe it, a man of extensive reading, of close thought, and great originality. Being a man in easy, if not affluent circumstances, he was able to render material help to the struggling societies. He became responsible for the rent of the better preaching-room which was now taken, and he willingly incurred the responsibility of trusteeship for Connexional buildings. In addition to this, by his prudent counsels and his abundant labours as a local preacher, he greatly assisted in the development of the Wisbech Circuit and of Holbeach, which was a branch of Wisbech until 1855. The circuit took its part in missionary efforts in Huntingdonshire and at Ramsey, though the shifting relations of these missions to Wisbech, Upwell, and other circuits is too intricate a matter to be unravelled here.

V.—Cambridge.

Our two ancient University towns gave our first missionaries a scurvy reception. Oxford well-nigh smothered G. W. Bellham with filth; Cambridge did its best to starve Joseph Reynolds. In August, 1821, he found his way here from distant Tunstall. The letter he wrote giving an account of his experience is, indeed, "a human document"—a transcript from the life, touching in its very simplicity, and revealing a heroism all unconscious of itself, which even hunger could not subdue. As we have said elsewhere, it might have been written by a suffering follower of George Fox long ago. We give an extract:—

"Dear Brethren,—When I left Tunstall, I gave myself up to labour and sufferings, and I have gone through both; but praise the Lord, it has been for His glory and the good of souls. My sufferings are known only to God and myself. I have many times been knocked down while preaching, and have often had sore bones. Once I was knocked down, and was trampled under the feet of the crowd, and had my clothes torn, and all my money taken from me. In consequence of this I have been obliged to suffer much hunger. One day I travelled nearly thirty miles and had only a penny cake to eat. I preached at night to near two thousand persons. But I was so weak when I had done, that I could scarcely stand. I then made my supper of cold cabbage, and slept under a haystack in a field till about four o'clock in the morning. The singing of the birds then awoke me, and I arose and went into the town, and preached at five to many people. I afterwards came to Cambridge, where I have been a fortnight, and preached to a great congregation, though almost worn out with fatigue and hunger. To-day I was glad to eat the pea-husks as I walked on the road. But I bless God that much good has been done. I believe hundreds will have to bless Him in eternity for leading me hither."

When next the curtain rises on Cambridge, March, 1824, we see it a branch of Nottingham, but about to be made a circuit. Its two preachers are to be lent to it until the District Meeting, and the new circuit is requested not to appoint Delegates to the said District Meeting unless they can pay their own expenses. At Midsummer
of the same year, W. Clowes and John Nelson were at Cambridge for the purpose of re-opening the chapel, which had been enlarged by the putting in of a gallery. Clowes, preaching in the evening, had a sprinkling of collegians in his congregation, while the Wesleyan superintendent assisted in taking up the collection.

Again the curtain drops, and Cambridge is lost to view; unless, indeed, the curtain is unexpectedly lifted by the biographer of the Rev. Charles Simeon,* the famous Evangelical leader. There was, he tells us, in Cambridge,

“A certain enthusiastic Nonconformist labourer named ‘Johnny Stittle’; a kind of well-meaning, self-constituted city missionary in the viler parts of Cambridge, and called by the undergraduates a ‘Ranter.’ He used to hold his meetings in a room, and when the attendance grew too large for one room, he threw down the partitions and used the whole floor of the house; and again enlarged his improvised chapel by taking in also the upper story, cutting out the central part of the bedroom floor, but leaving enough to make a wide gallery all round, upheld by pillars. As he was but a day-labourer, it was understood that Mr. Simeon aided him in the expense of these alterations. This man and his services were the butt of many a thoughtless young gownsman, who used to stand outside and look in at his chapel window and listen for amusement’s sake, and whose annoyance he yet patiently and kindly bore. On some occasion of bitterness he is said to have invited a railing youth to his house to partake of the ‘herby-pie’ supper provided for himself and family, and then persuaded him to stay and join in his simple but hearty family worship, which resulted in the young man’s beginning to think seriously on religion, and ultimately becoming a valuable clergyman.”*

In this extract the “self-constituted city missionary” has given him the same reproachful name our fathers bore; nor, indeed, do we know of any other denomination, besides our own, that, before 1836—the year of Simeon’s death—would have made room for John Stittle and his methods. We have not the least objection to acknowledge him as one of ourselves, especially as the sermon given as a specimen of his preaching would do no discredit to any Cambridge pulpit.

In the course of years, circuits, like soldiers on a long march, are apt to drop out of the ranks. So it was with Cambridge, for a short time. In 1842, it ranks as the eighteenth circuit in the Norwich District, whereas it began, in 1825, as the third. The explanation is that for three years—1834 to 1836 inclusive—it disappeared from the list of stations, but came on again in 1837. The plan of 1842 shows six places, which include Waterbeach, St. Ives, and Huntingdon. St. Peter’s Street Chapel had recently been acquired, and by 1855 the progress of the circuit was such that a second chapel was secured in Barnwell, the eastern district of the town. This was Fitzroy Street Chapel, the first which the Wesleyans had possessed in Cambridge, and had now vacated. This building was secured on generous terms, and opened by Miss M. C. Buck, the most popular female preacher in this period of our history.

Miss Buck was called into the ministry by the Burland Circuit in 1836 and although, unlike Miss Bultitude, she ceased "to travel" in the technical sense, she continued to be in great request for special services. The fact that Cambridge provided for the Conference of 1857 marks the advance which, by this time, it had made.

A word as to the interesting towns of Huntingdon and St. Ives, so full of Cromwellian associations. From the Journals of W. Dawson in the *Magazine* for 1822, we learn that as a preacher of the Boston Circuit, he spent a week in missioning this neighbourhood. Under date of September 2nd, 1821, he writes: "I spoke to a large congregation in the market-place at Huntingdon. Some seemed to wonder, some mocked, and some wept. At two, I spoke at Godmanchester: very many attended. At six, T. Steele, from Tunstall, spoke at Huntingdon, together with a blind young man out of Cheshire." He further says he formed a class of seven members at Godmanchester. Whether Wisbech found any vestiges of this visit when it began its missionary labours in Huntingdonshire, we know not. As for St. Ives, tradition, apparently trustworthy, gives 1837 as the year when Primitive Methodism entered the town. It is said to have been brought by one — Bridge and Mrs. Beel. The former is on the Cambridge plan of 1842 and, as a member of the Circuit Committee, was evidently a leading official. The first building occupied is said to have been the old Baptist Chapel in Water Lane, and much later a remove was made to a building on the Quay, said to be the oldest meeting-house in Huntingdonshire, having been used by successive bodies of Nonconformists for two hundred years. This was occupied until the present new and handsome building was erected.* In 1897, the General Missionary Committee made St. Ives a circuit, and it was annexed to the Lynn and Cambridge District.

*See article in *Aldersgate Magazine*, 1896, pp. 282-6.
VI.—YARMOUTH.

Though one of the primary circuits of the original Norwich District, this strong circuit was in its beginning an offshoot of Norwich. Yet persistent tradition points to a man rather than to a circuit, to individual Christian effort rather than to official action, as having paved the way for the establishment of a Primitive Methodist cause in Yarmouth. One Driver, a Primitive Methodist from the Midlands, drawn here by his employment, is said to have preached in the open-air and, if he did not actually organise a society, to have “made ready a people prepared for the Lord.” However this may be—and one could wish it might be true—we are on undisputed ground in giving 1822 as the date when the evangelists from Norwich took their stand on the Hog Hill, with their backs to the Fisherman’s Hospital wall, and proclaimed the gospel. J. Bramer, a travelling preacher, and Mr. J. Turnpenny are said to have been the names of the missionaries. Periodical visits continued to be paid by the preachers from Norwich, and on February 14th, 1823, a preaching licence was obtained for a house in Row 60. In 1824, Yarmouth was made a circuit, and it appears as the fifth station of the newly-formed Norwich District on the stations for 1825.

Just as the magnificent Church of the Nativity, built by Helena, the mother of Constantine, has deep down at its heart the rocky stable where Christ was born, linking together on the same spot the present and the past in striking contrast, so the Temple, the chief edifice of Yarmouth Primitive Methodism, stands on the identical site of the hay-loft which, in 1829, was the society’s humble sanctuary. The Temple epitomises the history of our Church in the town, alike in its continuity and the striking contrast it presents to the first and successive buildings it has superseded. First there stood here the hay-loft already mentioned. It was the upper storey of a building which had once done duty as a joiner’s shop. Its roof was pantiled, its once unglazed apertures were now filled in with small-paned leaded windows, and it was furnished with stiff rail-backed seats. In front of the loft was an open space, flanked by a saw-pit on one side and by stables on the other. This open space was reached by a path some ten feet wide, having some tumble-down, disreputable town-houses on either hand. For these domiciles the occupants paid no rent; they were mere squatters—unthrifty, idle, depraved; so that intending worshippers had to make their way to the hay-loft through filthy and repulsive surroundings, and run the gauntlet of ribald jests or maledictions. Yet this unsavoury spot had a history going far back; for the hay-loft rested partly on, and partly over, a portion of the old town-wall, and it stood on the Priory Plain, afore-time covered by a religious house. So here, at Yarmouth, as at Lynn and Scarborough, Primitive Methodism put its sanctuary down on the very spot where, in Mediæval times, monks abode, where they paced to and fro in the cloisters and chanted in the choir, until they sank into sloth and vice, and King Henry, as the besom of the Lord, swept them all away.

Stage No. 2 was reached when “the diligent and judicious Samuel Atterby” turned the unpolished building into a galleried chapel. It was in 1827 that this first Tabernacle
was reared, and it lasted until 1850. Then, as John Smith, the superintendent, was in declining health and nearing the verge, Thomas Swindell indefatigably laboured at the scheme of enlargement. This was done for both chapel and school at a cost of £750.

In connection with the opening of this second Tabernacle, a truly monster tea-meeting was held that is talked of to this day. Seven marquees were joined to form one tent, pitched in front of the Children’s Hospital, and here eleven hundred people sat down at the tables. By the erection of “the Temple” in 1876 the crowning stage was surely reached; but, lest it should be thought that pride had anything to do with the bestowment of the name, its genesis had better be recorded. When it was suggested that the proposed building should be called a “Church,” a veteran local preacher exclaimed: “Church? You’d better call it a Temple straight away”; and Temple it was called. The only untoward event that marred the success of the Temple, was an accident that occurred while it was in course of erection. By the fall of coping-stones a young workman almost immediately lost his life, and Mr. T. Kirk, a trustee deeply interested in the progress of the building, received such hurt as resulted in his death. Mercifully, Mr. T. W. Swindell, who was with him at the time, escaped without injury. As the Rev. T. Swindell had so much to do with the building of the second Tabernacle, so his son, just named, the Steward of the Circuit, by his zeal, financial skill, and fertility of resource, greatly contributed to bring this larger enterprise to a successful issue.

Yarmouth has a good record for its Sunday School work. Very early a Sunday School was established, at which writing as well as reading was taught. It was located first in the Garden Row, subsequently in the two other rooms shown in our pictures, and then
it was removed in turn to the old and to the new school-rooms. The weekly marching of the children—at one time numbering five hundred—through the streets to the chapel, stirred up the church people of the town to establish a school for themselves. Messrs. R. Todd, J. F. Neave, Robert Bell, W. Patterson, and W. Buddery have successively laboured through the years as superintendents or Bible-class teachers, in connection with the school. Of these and others, interesting reminiscences are given by Mr. Arthur Patterson in his monograph on Yarmouth Primitive Methodism, to which we express large indebtedness.* Mr. Patterson, as an old scholar and infant class teacher and "lightning sketcher," has found a congenial task; nor would any history of Yarmouth Primitive Methodism be complete which should contain no reference to what Mr. Patterson has achieved in other directions. By his contributions to our Connexional literature, and by his recent works on Natural History, recording the results of years of careful observation, he has obtained a more than local reputation, while the story of his life of self-help and devotion to natural science is worthy to be placed side by side with the lives of Edward, or Dick of Thurso.

Previous to the building of the Temple, extensions in the borough had taken place by the erection, at the South End, of Queen Street Chapel (1867). Mr. George Baker, J.P., materially assisted in this extension, and afterwards received the thanks of Conference for his gift to the chapel of an organ costing £130.

So far as persecution by the populace is concerned, Yarmouth can show a clean sheet. In the early days, the singing of the old hymns seems to have operated like a charm in mollifying the passions of those whom it drew to the open-air services. Once and again the authorities have backslidden into intolerance, and their attempts to put down preaching in the open spaces of the town have had to be resisted. The worst case occurred in 1854, when several persons were arrested for holding a service at the Hall Quay. At the trial which ensued, the accused were ably defended by Mr. Tillett of Norwich, a staunch Nonconformist. The magistrates found themselves in a cleft stick and, in the end, the case was dismissed. At a later period the authorities had another relapse, but the Rev. John Smith (2) at once took steps to vindicate the right to hold services at the Jetty. It is but due to say that, in 1888, the Salvation Army were much more roughly handled at Yarmouth than our fathers had ever been, and the magistrates incurred considerable odium by instituting proceedings against them—a course which, in the end, produced a strong reaction in their favour.

By successive partitions, Yarmouth has become five circuits at least. As early as 1823, Wangford, twenty miles away, and Beccles fifteen, were within its area, and regularly supplied with preachers. When, in 1833, the Wangford Branch was made a circuit, with Richard Howchin as its superintendent, it reported 233 members. Extensive missionary operations were at once begun in the surrounding villages. More than a score of these were visited, and many of them were morally transformed. The result was seen in the report of 540 members given to the Conference of 1835. Wangford has been, and still is a strong country station, and from the beginning has always had in it a number of loyal adherents of the Connexion.

Lowestoft was an integral part of Yarmouth Circuit until 1870, and Acle and Martham until 1883. Alderman Adam Adams was called into the ministry by Yarmouth Circuit, and stationed there 1852–4; but his health
failing him he became a successful man of business, and has long been one of Lowestoft's prominent and public-spirited citizens. He has been its Mayor, a candidate for Parliamentary honours, and he is a Justice of the Peace. But, it is safe to say, he attaches more importance to the position he holds as a hard-working local preacher and active official. He has few vacant Sundays; his time being equally divided between his own circuit and lending assistance to neighbouring ones. His Connexional recognition came in 1900 when he was appointed Vice-President of Conference, and as such his portrait will be found hereafter in its due order.

We must refer our readers to Mr. Patterson's book for interesting reminiscences of some of the veteran local preachers of the Yarmouth Circuit—men like John Bitton, who was on the plan of 1824, and preached when he was eighty-four, dying at last, in 1886, at ninety-three years of age; William Perry, forty-six years a local preacher; George Bell, who gave thirty-seven years of his life to the same work, and two sons to the ministry; John Mason, a local preacher for over thirty-six years; and Henry Futter, still spared to the Church he has served so long.

Mr. Patterson also gives the names of some twenty ministers whom the Yarmouth Circuit has sent forth. The list includes the names of J. G. Smith, the son of John Smith (1); of George and Benjamin Bell; G. Rudram and F. B. Paston. But of all who in the early days were closely associated with Yarmouth, none left so deep and lasting an impression on the District, of which they were largely the makers and fashioners, as did John Smith (1) and Robert Key. It was at Yarmouth the former closed at once his ministry of twenty-seven years
and his life. It was at Yarmouth, too, Robert Key began his Christian course. The presence at the services of the rough coal-heaver occasioned surprise not unmixed with fear; for it was hard to think anything but a mischievous intent had brought him there. Like Clowes he was a branch, but rougher and more unpromising, of the "olive tree which is wild by nature;" but he was "grafted in"—"brought in" our fathers termed it—and the process was finished on Easter Sunday, 1823, and very soon the new nature began to show itself in the overcoming of the defects of a meagre education and of a strong but undisciplined character. By 1825 or 1826 he had become a local preacher, when local preachers were few and their journeys long and frequent. It is interesting to note that Anthony Race of Weardale, who died at Yarmouth in 1828, was of great assistance to Robert Key by his powerful preaching of the doctrine of entire sanctification, and still more by the exemplification of the doctrine in his own life. The influence exerted upon him by this apostolic man was so great that, we are told, "no wear or tear of years or circumstances was ever able to efface it." In 1828, Robert Key received his call to the ministry.

It is but natural we should desire to know something more than can be derived from

![ портреты ]

JOHN BITTON. WILLIAM PERRY. GEORGE BELL. JOHN MASON.

tradition, however trustworthy, of these men to whom Primitive Methodism in the Eastern Counties owed so much in the early days. Fortunately, we have a sketch of these two pioneers by a contemporary and competent hand. Mr. G. T. Goodrick, who had himself been a travelling preacher for three years, retired in 1835 to Yarmouth, where he became a leading official. He became well known to the Connexional authorities, and their confidence in him is seen in his appointment as one of the Connexional Auditors. Mr. Goodrick left behind him a "Life" of Robert Key, which has never been published. From this valuable work we take the following discriminating characterisation of John Smith (1) and Robert Key:—

"John Smith—a man of God; of all we have met, we think we never did find a man so much under the influence of 'this travelling for souls.' He was not a great preacher. He had no acquired powers of oratory. His pulpit efforts were generally disjointed in arrangement; and, as a man seeking popularity by such methods, he would certainly have failed. But no hearer could doubt his sincerity, nor fail to perceive, if he had spiritual perception at all, that the preacher felt for souls. Indeed, he was a man of two ideas—personal holiness and the conversion of sinners. These were, one or the other, generally both, the burden of his
sermons, and the topics of his conversation. And so constantly and so surely did he think of men as sinners, and the necessity of their salvation, that it sometimes absorbed all other considerations of time and place, and made him silent in the midst of the most congenial society. At other times he would literally groan as if under a burden, and would express himself as if he could not live unless souls were saved. This, to some, seemed to savour of rudeness, indecorum, and even of a pharisaical spirit. But what prayers! what power! what influence attended his words! We have heard him pray until the place was as if shaken. He was as a prince with God, for wrestling he overcame, and streams of mercy flowed among the assembly. We have known him lay his hand upon persons and bring them to their knees without uttering a word; and a whole congregation, as it were, gasp for breath while listening to his impassioned and inspired appeals, in which he was sometimes lost for language, and coming to a sudden stop would electrify his hearers by a single word or shout of 'Glory!'—a shout that was, as a simple countryman expressed it, 'Worth some men's whole sermons.' His soul burned within him to save the souls of others, and, as in other instances, burned too fast for endurance; and after a brilliant career of success in some circuits in the Norwich District, entered into rest, December 7th, 1851, at the early age of fifty-one.

"Between these two men, Brothers Key and Smith, there was a great similarity of feeling, thought, and experience, and if need be, we might almost substitute one mental picture for another; only Mr. Key was of a livelier disposition, a warmer temperament, had greater mental resources, and a greater aptitude for the business and arrangements incident to the establishment of a church or society. He was thus better qualified as a missionary, while his good brother Smith found a field for labour in the already enclosed portions of his Master's vineyard. Both toiled and wept and prayed, 'travailing for souls,' and now both 'rest from their labours and their works do follow them.'"

**Primitive Methodism and the Agricultural Villages of East Anglia.**

The work done in East Anglia between 1825 and 1842 was remarkable, even on the imperfect showing of statistics. Here are the figures for the two years set out side by side, making comparison easy and leading to an obvious inference.

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And yet the figures furnish but imperfect evidence. From the very nature of the case a very large percentage of the direct, no less than the indirect, results accomplished, must have fallen to the share of Churches which seemed to have a strong hereditary claim and had more to offer. Often enough they carried off the full stock to their well-filled granary, and left us only the gleanings of our own harvest. The words of Christ were reversed: We laboured, and others entered into our labours. Especially was this the case in Suffolk and Essex, where the Congregational and Baptist Churches
have deeply rooted themselves. At Bury St. Edmunds, for example, Mr. Petty tells of a Nonconformist minister who stated that he had admitted eighty persons to church-membership, who attributed their enlightenment to the open-air preaching of the Primitive Methodists. This is not written by way of complaint, but simply to show that, in any estimate of the good effected by our Church in the Eastern Counties during this time, account must also be taken of the extent to which other Churches were augmented and quickened by our labours.

But as to these figures themselves: they represent a most active and persistent village evangelisation. Some idea of the network reticulations of this evangelisation may be gained by an inspection of the circuit plans of the time. Here, for instance, is the plan of North Walsham Circuit, in the north-eastern corner of Norfolk, for the year 1835. And what a plan it is! as large as a page of the *Primitive Methodist World*, having on it the names of sixty-one villages and sixty-nine preachers and exhorters. And here is the plan of the Mattishall, now East Dereham Circuit and Saham Branch, not much smaller than that of North Walsham, showing fifty-two villages and forty-five preachers. When we get to know how the Mattishall Circuit was carved out of Mid-Norfolk by Robert Key, this plan becomes a most significant broadsheet. The story of the making of this circuit is an interesting chapter in Norfolk village evangelisation—a chapter which rightly begins by showing us the antecedents of these half-hundred villages in the heart of Norfolk; what was their moral and religious condition before Robert Key set foot in them and went on circuit. Had we a map of the England of that time—a map showing, by its gradations of light and shade, how near any district approached to the recognised standard of good morals and religion, or how far it fell short of such standard, then we should find these parts around East Dereham deeply shaded, while some of the villages thereabouts, would stand out on the map like dark islets.

In justification of what is here written we would adduce the testimony of Canon Jessopp, the genial archeologist, historian, and broad-minded political economist. No man knows the history of his own county, or the past and present condition of the peasantry of Norfolk, better than he. In 1879, he was instituted to the rectory of Scarning, near East Dereham, and in his "The Arcady of our Grandfathers," he has put down what, by skilful questioning of the oldest inhabitants, he could gather concerning the former manner of life of the labourers and smaller farmers of Scarning and the neighbouring parishes. Arcady, indeed! It is no picture of Arcadian innocence
we get from these combined narratives, but rather one of more than Boeotian rudeness. There were, perhaps, fewer public-houses eighty years ago than now, and the drinking of ardent spirits was little known then, though there was much beery drunkenness. There was a strain of cruelty running through social life. Masters beat the boys in their employ, and not infrequently their serving-men; wife-beating was so common as to attract little notice. Cock-fighting was the popular sport; football matches were played on the Sunday. Profanity and dissoluteness were crying evils, while a good part of the little religion there was, ran into superstition or gross formalism. At the annual fair-time men indulged in a surfeit of wickedness and pleasure, as though they would make up by a debauch for the enforced abstinence of the working year. Crime, too, was rife: "During the nine years ending in 1808, there were actually committed to the four prisons at Wymondham, Aylsham, Walsingham, and Norwich Castle, the enormous aggregate of 2336 men and women, to whom we may be sure little mercy was shown."*

Testimony, corroborative of that given by Canon Jessopp, is also furnished by Mr. G. T. Goodrick, already named, who was one of the ministers of Lynn Circuit in 1832, and residing at Swaffham when Robert Key was prosecuting his East Dereham mission. He writes as one who had been on the ground and had an intimate knowledge of the people. The quotation from him here given has a value beyond its special local reference, as it fairly and fully presents the claim of our Church to have fastened on the agricultural villages of our land when others passed them by. He probably had the villages of East Anglia specially in his mind, but his words are equally true of other parts of rural England in the Twenties and Thirties. After claiming that the Church to which Robert Key was attached had laboured much, and contributed no little, to spread the leaven of righteousness and thereby exalt the nation, he continues:—

"Wesleyanism with its peculiar organisation had won,—and deservedly won, her laurels, and could boast of spoils taken from the hand of the mighty, and these, too, from among the villages and cottages of many a tract of English soil, where the sound of the church-going bell was seldom heard, or if it were heard, it spoke in vain. But it will not be denied that Wesleyanism had not done all that was needed, or all that she could have done; and if the Wesleyans turned their strength to the evangelisation of large towns—so be it; they thought it best, and God is with them. But there was a class to reach, 'a region beyond,' which they had not penetrated; a people to whom religion was unknown except by name, whose morals were loose, and their habits vicious; a class from which the ranks of the poacher, the farm-robber, and the stack-burner were ever and anon recruited. The character of the labouring class in the agricultural counties was fearfully deteriorated; it had become almost brutal. Cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and man-fighting were cruel sports freely indulged in; the cricket club and football had their field-day on the Sabbath, and a drunken orgie at a fair was planned and provided for out of hard-earned wages weeks before its appointed day. Much has been said of the sins of the city, but if we were to care to draw the veil from country-town and village-life of seventy or eighty years ago,† the seeming disparity

† I have altered the figure to allow for the efflux of time since these words were written.
between the moral life of city and country would vanish, or rather the sins of the
former would be eclipsed by the deeper darkness of the latter. But God knew it
all! and, if we may not claim a plenary inspiration for the earlier missionaries
of the Connexion, who will dare deny that the ‘Spirit of the Lord God was upon
them, anointing them to preach the gospel to the poor’? This was, indeed, mission
work—a mission to the heathen in all but in name, and to this work Brother Key
addressed himself in all the vigour of manhood, faith in the divinity of his mission,
and constrained by the love of Christ to seek the souls of men.”—(MS. “Life of
Robert Key,” pp. 49, 50.)

As the Mid-Norfolk of 1830 may be taken as a typical Norfolk village-mission-field—
though it must be confessed the type is very pronounced and at its highest power—so
Robert Key may be taken as the type of the East Anglian pioneer missionary. If we
had written “the ideal East Anglian missionary,” we should not have been far wrong.
Robert Key began his ministry in North Walsham Circuit in 1828, and thence was
sent to open his mission in central Norfolk. The task that lay before him was such
as would have tested the physical stamina of the strongest, the courage of the boldest,
the resourcefulness of the most experienced. He had no one “to hold the rope.”
He had to make his own way, like a movable column in the enemy’s territory, with no base to lean upon. He preached in the
open-air or in houses that might be offered him, and suffering as well
as labour was his lot. Instead of being welcomed and encouraged
as a herald of the gospel, he was by many treated as a pestilent fellow to be got rid of at all costs. Certain places in the district
made themselves specially notorious by the bitterness of their
opposition. “Shipdham, Watton, and East Dereham,” says Mr. Key,
“might have been matched against any other three places of similar
size for brutal violence and inveterate hatred of the truth.
Of the three places I think Shipdham was the worst.” At
Watton, some years before, a Wesleyan minister had attempted
to preach the gospel in the open air, but he was shamefully treated, and barely
escaped with his life. Here, on August 16th, 1832, Mr. Key took his stand in
the Market-place. It was soon pretty evident that mischief was abroad. A number
of men who had been primed with drink by some of the “respectables” of the town,
gathered round, and first tried to drown the preacher’s voice by clamour and by percussion.
Then, a rush was made; the preacher was knocked down, trampled upon and kicked.
He struggled to his feet and got on his chair again—still preaching. Another rush—
with the result that Key was tossed backward and forward like a football. Then
missiles began to fly, and it looked as though the unprovoked riot would end in murder
when, suddenly, deliverance came and from an unexpected quarter. Some of the
ringleaders, though still under the influence of drink, were seized with compunction
and changed sides. They rallied round the breathless and battered preacher, planted
themselves round him as a body-guard, and got him away with difficulty, shouting:
“You are right and we are wrong, and no man shall hurt you!” This unlooked-for
development was, we are told, a disappointment to the “respectable” men who had
instigated the disturbance, one of whom was the person entrusted by a paternal state with the cure of souls.

As for Shipdham, Mr. Goodrick fully bears out what Mr. Key has said of it. "It made itself infamous by its long course of bitterest opposition to the preachers, and no wonder; for, if Satan had a seat upon earth it was there," and more, and stronger words he writes, which we need not give. We will also pass over the details of the annoyances to which the preacher and his little flock were so long exposed, since these had not even the small merit of originality. One little fact, however, we chronicle here, partly to show what spirit the people were of, and partly to embalm the memory of a poor widow, "destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy." A poor Frenchwoman of Shipdham became a special object of persecution. Upon her was heaped ridicule, taunts, and blows. She was driven from one lodging to another and, had it been possible, some would have denied her even a pauper's bread; and all because she dared to become, and declared herself to be, "a thorough Primitive."

Though Robert Key had many marvellous escapes from bodily injury, he did not bear a charmed life. Once at Reepham, for example, he was hit with a stone thrown by the hand of the zealous parish clerk, and bled profusely. "But why," it will be asked "were not such miscreants brought to justice?" We answer: once, and once only, was a summons taken out against persecutors, and why the experiment was not repeated the sequel will show. It was at this same Reepham, Key was followed by another preacher who, borrowing a chair, began a service; but he was pulled down, and by clamour and violence compelled to desist. The attack was so outrageous that, in order to avoid worse consequences from the rough and ready action of the justifiably incensed populace, Mr. Key reluctantly consented to seek legal redress. The result shall be stated by Mr. Goodrick:—

"To the everlasting disgrace of the magistrates, the chicanery of the legal adviser, and the subterfuges of the law itself were so well used that, although everybody else saw through the whole thing, justice was blind, and her constituted ministers dismissed the case! and, by way of administering some soothing palliative to the outraged feelings of the influential and respectable blackguards of Reepham, condescended to stoop so low as to pour a tirade of abuse upon Mr. Key, which for virulence of language might have been borrowed from Billingsgate. Such has often been the result of an appeal to the law for protection, especially when the clerical magistrate occupies the bench and derogates from his character as a minister of the gospel by professing to administer criminal law."—(MS. "Life of Robert Key," p. 76).

The language is vigorous, but not one whit more so than that employed by John Foster who, in speaking of these attacks on the inoffensive preachers of the gospel, once so common, says: "These savage tumults were generally instigated or abetted, sometimes under a little concealment, but often avowedly, by persons of higher condition, and even by those consecrated to the office of religious instruction; and this advantage of their station was lent to defend the perpetrators against shame, or remorse, or just punishment, for the outrage."* No wonder that, after his first experience of Justices'
justice, Robert Key should say: "Never more! Come what may I will suffer it, and leave my cause with God."

The outer conflicts Robert Key had to wage during his Mattishall Mission, had their reflection and counterpart in the inner conflicts which formed so remarkable a feature of his experience at this time. As we read of these we are reminded of the views held by J. Crawfoot, H. Bourne, and others of the fathers as to the nature of spiritual conflicts. They would have said, in explanation, that such conflicts were to be expected; that he was taking upon him the burden of souls; that there was "a conflict of atmospheres." Sometimes a darkness which might be felt would come upon him, and a feeling of hardness, and he had to hold on grimly by naked faith, and wrestle until the day broke, and his heart softened again as with the dew of the morning. So it was on his first visit to Saham Toney on June 10th, 1832. While he was preaching in the open-air the heavens became suddenly overcast, and the rain came down in torrents. His appeal for a house or place of shelter in which to finish the service, was met by the offer of a house—formerly a workhouse—capable of holding two hundred people. Many followed him there, but for the first twenty minutes "all appeared hard and dark, and nothing moved." Then the cloud passed, and men and women began to fall to the ground, while others hurried away as if the house were on fire, in impenitent terror and defiance. "Did his spiritual foes," asks Mr. Goodrick, "on leaving Mr. Key, attack his hearers, to drive them from the place?" It was an eventful service. In the fiery trial of that night was forged a link in the providential chain of events which led to the conversion of C. H. Spurgeon; for, amongst those who were won that night, was Mary Eaglen, whose changed and Christly life so impressed her brother that it was one of the main factors in his conversion, which took place soon after. Mr. Eaglen spent two of the thirty-six years of his active ministry in Ipswich Circuit, of which Colchester was then a branch, and it was he who, on a snowy morning in the winter of 1850, directed the youth of God's election to look and be saved. The pulpit in which Mr. Eaglen then stood is preserved in the Stockwell Orphanage. On October 11th, 1864, Mr. Spurgeon preached in the old Colchester Chapel (erected 1839) from the text used in his conversion; and it
was quite fitting that Rev. W. Moore should, in 1897, place a tablet in the chapel commemorative of the event.

Despite the opposition of some unreasonable and evil men in East Anglia (most of whom afterwards got their deserts), "the word of God was not bound," but rather had "free course and was glorified." Some mighty camp meetings gave it impetus and helped it forward. That such numbers of people could be brought together in districts not thickly populated, attested the hold the new religious movement already had got on the rural population. But not as aggregations of people merely, or as imposing demonstrations of growing influence, were these camp meetings mighty. The word belongs to them rather because they were generators and distributors of spiritual force; they were "mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds." Mighty in all these senses was the camp meeting held at East Tuddenham on June 12th, 1831, which may therefore serve as type and representative of many another similar gathering in various parts of East Anglia.

"It was thought there were thousands of people present" at this Mid-Norfolk camp meeting. "This," says Mr. Key, "was the most powerful meeting I ever witnessed. It was thought that more than fifty were set at liberty."

We come across traces and echoes of some of these camp meetings in our accepted literature. Readers of *Lavengro* will recall the fine description of a Norfolk camp meeting in that fascinating book. We challenge that camp meeting for a Primitive Methodist one; for, as surely as it took place as pictured, so surely would no other denomination save our own have owned it at the time, and it is too late now for any other to prefer its claim. Let our readers turn to this passage in *Lavengro*. Our present concern with it is to adduce the testimony of George Borrow—who spent his later years at Oulton, near Lowestoft—as to the ameliorative influences which camp meeting preachers and preaching exerted upon the rural parishes of East Anglia:

"There stood the preacher, one of those men—and, thank God, their number is not few—who, animated by the Spirit of Christ, amidst much poverty, and alas!"
much contempt, persist in carrying the light of the gospel amidst the dark parishes of what, but for their instrumentality, would scarcely be Christian England.”

Dark parishes they were, indeed, in the ‘Thirties, not only in East Anglia, but in many other parts of rural England. While the misguided emissaries of “Capt. Swing” were burning down farmsteads and destroying machinery, Robert Key and his coadjutors were amongst them, practically doing national police-duty, and doing it without pay or recognition, and what is more, they often accomplished by their village evangelism what police patrols and magistrates were unable to effect. The biographies of the time bear witness to the wide-spread alarm which these agrarian disturbances created. Here, for example, is a reminiscence of the childhood days of J. Ewing Ritchie, spent at Wrentham, in Suffolk:

“I can never forget the feeling of terror with which, on those dark and dull winter nights, I looked out of my bedroom window to watch the lurid light flaring up into the black clouds around, which told how wicked men were at their mad work, how fiendish passion had triumphed, how some honest farmer was reduced to ruin, as he saw the efforts of a life of industry consumed by the incendiary’s fire. It was long before I ceased to shudder at the name of ‘Swing.’”

Robert Key, we repeat, was down amongst the rick-burners. In one parish, the miscreants had plotted to burn down all the farm-houses in the district, and had actually succeeded in burning down seventeen, when their incendiarism was stopped by the advent of the Primitive Methodist missionaries, bearing no other weapon than the Gospel. Said a grateful farmer to Robert Key: “It cost me two shillings a night all through the winter to have my house watched, and then we went to bed full of anxiety lest we should be burnt out before morning. But you came here and sang and prayed about the streets—for you can never get these ‘varmints’ into a church or chapel. But your people brought the red-hot gospel to bear upon them in the street, and it laid hold of their guilty hearts, and now these people are good members of your Church.”

Great, indeed, have been the changes for the better brought about in those parts of East Anglia we have glanced at, since Primitive Methodism was introduced into them, and in effecting those changes it has had a chief part. No longer is North-East Norfolk called New Siberia because of the backward condition of its inhabitants, as it was called when R. Key began his labours in the North Walsham Circuit. In this corner of the county is the newly-formed Holt and Sheringham Circuit, carved out of Briston and Aylsham Circuits. The rising watering-place and fishing village of Sheringham is now as bright a spot on our Connexional map as Filey, or Cullercoats, or Staithes, or Bausks, of which places it reminds us. In its pretty village-chapel Christians of various communities love to join with the fishermen in their hearty worship, and occasionally, like Dr. Fairbairn, taste a fresh experience in relating their Christian experience at the call of a guernsey-clad leader.

We have glanced at the missioning of North-West Norfolk by Lynn Circuit. The Rev. F. B. Paston tells us that, even in 1862, when he began his labours on the

* “East Anglia, Personal Recollections and Historical Associations,” p. 31.
Docking Station in this division of the county, the villages of which the circuit is composed, were in a sad condition of ignorance, poverty, and servitude. The squire and the parson ruled. To eat, to drink, to sleep—this was the routine of the labourers' life. But a few began to think and read and discuss, and got their eyes opened to discern their wants. As formulated, these were—the establishment of a trades union, direct Parliamentary representation, and a living wage. Thirty years after, when Mr. Paston returned to the station, the objects aimed at had been gained. The day of emancipation for the agricultural labourers had come at last. Joseph Arch, the founder of the Labourers' Union and a Primitive Methodist local preacher, was member for North-West Norfolk. The composition of the Parish Council showed that the long sowing and waiting had not been in vain, that the East Anglian peasant had won his freedom and knew how to use it.

We have already quoted Canon Jessopp as to the former condition of the peasantry of Mid-Norfolk. The same high and unexceptionable authority may be quoted as to the influence our Church has exerted and still exerts in East Anglia, where, he tells us, the immense majority of those who attend Nonconformist chapels are Primitive Methodists. This reference to our Church must not suffer curtailment, and it is with a pride, surely pardonable, we give it place here.

"Explain it how we will, and draw our inferences as we choose, there is no denying it that in hundreds of parishes in England the stuffy little chapel by the wayside has been the only place where for many a long day the very existence of religious emotion has been recognised; the only place in which the yearnings of the soul and its strong crying and tears have been allowed to express themselves in the language of the moment unfettered by rigid forms; the only place where the agonised conscience has been encouraged and invited to rid itself of its sore burden by confession, and comforted by at least the semblance of sympathy; the only place where the peasantry have enjoyed the free expression of their opinions, and where, under an organisation elaborated with extraordinary sagacity, they have kept up a school of music, literature, and politics, self-supporting and unaided by dole or subsidy—above all, a school of eloquence, in which the lowliest has become familiarised with the ordinary rules of debate, and has been trained to express himself with directness, vigour, and fluency. What the Society of Jesus was among the more cultured classes in the sixteenth century, what the Friars were to the masses in the towns during the thirteenth, that the Primitive Methodists are in a fair way of becoming among the labouring classes in East Anglia in our own time."*

THE RAMIFICATIONS OF BRANDON AND WANGFORD CIRCUITS.

Brandon, made a circuit in 1828, demands an additional word. No one, judging by the present shrunken proportions of the "Brandon and Methwold" station, would suspect that its precursor figured so largely in the early history of the Norwich District. James Garner's mission to Marshland has been referred to.† In 1833, Brandon reported 660 members. In 1840, through the labours, in turn, of Messrs. Bellham, Moss, Knock,

Winkfield, and their colleagues, the membership had risen to 954. But between these years Rockland Circuit was made with 472 members, so that the actual increase for the seven years was 766. This numerical advance was the more remarkable as, during the earlier part of the septennate, persecution had been bitter and the poverty of the people extreme. At Thelnetham, Rushford, and Bridgham the societies were deprived of their preaching-places. At Tottington, Mr. and Mrs. Cheston (the latter the mother of the Rev. R. Church) were turned out of house and home, and their goods left on the open green for three days and nights because they “harboured the Ranters.” Ultimately they found shelter at Thompson, two miles away, and as

they opened their house for preaching, their settlement there was the means of strengthening the village society.* It was in the face of difficulties such as these that the Brandon Circuit extended itself.

Bury St. Edmund’s, Thetford, Watton, and Diss, each now the head of a circuit, are all found on the early plans of Brandon. Bury was successfully missioned in 1829 by G. Appleby and G. Tetley, and formed part of the Brandon Circuit until 1842, when

* See the Magazine for 1861, p. 232, which also contains the account of the opening of a chapel at Thompson by Messrs. R. Church, O. Jackson, and W. H. Meadows, very familiar names in East Anglia.
it became a circuit in its own right. Sudbury Circuit has since been formed from Bury. Our Church found it no easy matter to get footing in the ancient town of Thetford, once the capital of East Anglia, a bishop's seat even before Norwich, and boasting of its eight monasteries and twenty churches. The first efforts of our missionaries were unsuccessful but, in 1836, John Kent tried it again, preaching in St. Nicholas Street, and suffered temporary arrest in consequence. After this, a society which proved permanent was established, and a chapel opened in 1839. Under the able superintendency of G. Tetley the Thetford Branch became an independent circuit in 1859, and, to-day, it takes rank as a good country station with some twelve or thirteen separate interests.

Lopham, another old-world place, is on the Brandon Circuit plan of 1834. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century Mr. George Wharton, a good specimen of the old English yeoman, was resident at North Lopham. He accepted Methodism, recently introduced into the village, entertained the preachers, and allowed them the use of his kitchen for their services. His son of the same name succeeded to the paternal estate and, being a lover of old Methodism and camp meetings, he transferred his patronage to the Primitives on their coming into these parts. He granted them the use of a shed roofed with faggots as their preaching-place. This primitive structure had a curious origin. Mr. Wharton was, in his way, a musical amateur, and, on his relinquishing the Grange Farm in favour of his son George, he built the shed to serve the purpose of a music-saloon, to which he might retire at will and play on the bass-viol to his heart's content, without disturbing his wife, who did not appreciate his musical efforts. The old shed, afterwards enlarged and roofed with thatch, became known as the "Old Gospel Shop." Subsequently, we are told, Mr. George Wharton (the third of that name, we take it) built a chapel for the use of the society at Lopham, and also at New Buckenham, Wortham, and East Harling. By his will he devised the chapel to his son John, and, by an arrangement with the devisees, the Lopham chapel and adjoining schoolroom were, in 1861, made over to the Connexion. There is a tablet in the chapel to the memory of "George Wharton, Gent., who died Feb. 4, 1837." "Several members of the Wharton family are buried in and around the chapel, and in a garden adjoining are the graves of Mr. and Mrs. John Rolfe (Lydia Wharton), and Mr. John Bird. The garden is now private property, and owned by a descendant of George Wharton."* The fact that Lopham, beginning as part of Brandon, was afterwards included in Rockland, and is now in Diss Circuit, points to the changes the years have brought.

Rockland was made a circuit from Brandon during 1833, and in 1834 Robert Key,

* See article on "The Lopham People," by Mr. W. H. Berry, in the Christian Messenger, 1900, pp. 328-9.
THE PERIOD OF CIRCUIT PREDOMINANCE AND ENTERPRISE.

fresh from his triumphs in Mattishall, became its superintendent, and continued such for two years. In 1835 the newly-formed circuit reported 710 members, being an increase of 323. Rockland, in its turn, missioned Stowmarket, which was made a circuit in 1835, with only 95 members.

In 1837 Robert Key began a mission at Hadleigh, in Suffolk, a place famous in ecclesiastical history as the scene of a martyrdom and as the place where the Anglo-Catholic movement had its beginning. On a common near the town Key would read the inscription:

"Near the spot where this stone stood,
Rowland Taylor shed his blood."

And, only four years before, the meeting had taken place in the rectory parlour of Hugh James Rose from which resulted the "Tracts for the Times." The conditions under which Mr. Key prosecuted his mission in Suffolk were somewhat different from those which had attended his work in Mid-Norfolk. The people seemed more difficult to reach—harder to impress. There was a good deal of Antinomianism about. Many of the people, too, were accustomed to "good" sermonising and plenty of it, and would not be put off with anything else. It is not suggested that Mr. Key had no message for the people; only, that their ecclesiastical predilections or doctrinal errors were such as made his task more difficult, and drove him to study his message, and how he could best urge it home through the resistant coating superinduced by habit or prejudice. Still, Mr. Key met with a measure of success, though not on the scale to which he had been accustomed. Some of the remarkable displays of Divine grace witnessed by him about this time he has duly recorded in his "Gospel among the Masses." One of the places missioned was Polstead—a veritable "Satan's seat," on which a lurid light had recently been cast. A crime perpetrated there was the sensation of the day. For a time everybody was talking of the Red Barn and the murder of Maria Martin. Robert Key tells us that when he visited Polstead it was little better than a den of thieves. "Seventeen houses in the village were unlicensed beer-houses! Barns, malt-houses, shops, and sheep-folds were visited by gangs of armed men for the purpose of plunder, and seldom were the county Assizes held without some criminals from Polstead being indicted." In this notorious place his labours were crowned with marked success. Hadleigh was made a circuit in 1838 with 150 members. In recent years it has been divided up between Ipswich and Colchester Circuits.

We have already seen Wangford, as an offshoot of Yarmouth, attaining circuit independence in 1833. It fell to its lot to work in the easternmost part of England, where the land bulges out like a bellying sail, although the sea has done its best, or its worst, for a thousand years, to throw back the coast-line, so that Dunwich, once a famous city of East Anglia, which fitted out fleets, and through whose brazen gates armies passed, has shrunk to a poor village, the mere wreck of the ancient city, though, until 1832, it returned two members to Parliament. Covehithe, Southwold, and Wrentham, as well as historic Dunwich, are found on the early plans of Wangford Circuit. The making of Beccles and Bungay Circuit is quite recent. Kelsale, near Saxmundham,
has had a chequered history. Originally part of Wangford Circuit, it, along with Melton and a few other places, formed a distinct circuit for two years—1837–8. Then it became the Kelsale Mission of Wangford, and so continued until 1862, when it was taken over by the General Missionary Committee, and remained under its care until 1881. The year 1862 was noteworthy for a feat in chapel removing. In 1860, a site of land was purchased at Melton, in the Kelsale Mission, for the erection of a chapel. The site was contiguous to a villa occupied by a barrister. Some few months after the completion of the building, the owner of the villa brought an action against the trustees for an alleged interference with his light. The trial was heard at the Bury Summer Assizes, 1861, and went against the trustees. The animus of the Church party was notorious, and it had won the day. At this juncture Mr. H. Collins suggested that the chapel should be removed bodily. The suggestion that at first seemed so strange was soon taken up seriously. Additional land was bought, and, by an ingenious process we do not stay to describe, Mr. Collins and his brother, as engineers, effected the removal of the chapel. "A Great Moving Day" was announced, and hundreds of people assembled to witness the successful carrying out of the operation. Even then the owner of the villa was not satisfied, but threatened another action because the chapel had not been removed far enough. Counsel's opinion being taken he advised that as the trustees had yet four feet of land intended for a path, this
should be taken advantage of, and the path made to run by the side of the villa for the satisfaction of its occupants. This was done, and the chapel was moved in all some twenty feet eight inches without a window-pane being cracked, or the building suffering the slightest damage. An illustrated account of this triumph of mechanics over bigotry appeared in the "Illustrated London News" of the time. The cost of the transaction was but £31 12s. 6d., though there was a heavy bill of legal expenses which brought the entire cost up to £800.* This, we are told, was paid off, and a few years ago the trustees took over £50 of the debt of a struggling cause at Shottisham.

* "To J. H. Tillett, Esq., solicitor (Melton Chapel case), £280. To W. Harland, to Norwich and Melton, as per order of Conference, £2 3s."—Minutes of Conference, 1862. The view given in the text, taken at the time, has been kindly supplied by Mr. Henry Collins, millwright, etc., Melton, through Rev. J. H. Geeson.
CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIMITIVE METHODISM IN LONDON.

A Retrospect and Forecast.

The history of Norwich District would be incomplete were we to omit all reference to the fact that for seven years—1828 to 1834—London stood on the stations of that District. During part of this time, Sheerness and other places in Kent were on the plan of London Circuit, so that the Norwich District, before 1842, had stations or missions in Essex, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Lincoln (Holbeach), Northampton, Middlesex, Surrey and Kent, besides Norfolk and Suffolk, in all some ten counties. We see that this connection between London and East Anglian Primitive Methodism was more than a nominal one—that it had practical consequences—when we find John Smith (1) and Robert Key walking all the way from Norfolk to London in order to attend the District Meeting of 1833. That year the District increase was 1638, an evidence of success which no doubt greatly encouraged the delegates. It was during the District Meeting week, while speaking at a missionary meeting in Blue Gate Fields Chapel, that R. Key brought down his fist with such emphasis on the table as to split it in two, while Hugh Bourne picked up the scattered candles. London’s connection with Norwich District had some more lasting results; for, while Norwich District gave such preachers as James Garner (1), J. Oscroft, and R. Howchin for the London work, London, in its turn, was the means of strengthening that District by giving it such men as W. Wainwright (1) and G. Tetley. The latter was one of the early fruits of Leeds Primitive Methodism, became a notable figure in the Norwich District, and attained to the Presidency of the Conference of 1855. If for no other reason than the same-time connection of London with Norwich District, we have reached a convenient point for setting forth how Primitive Methodism was introduced into London and how, in spite of great difficulties, it rooted itself there and grew. But there is a further reason. The narrative now called for is historically knitted to what has already been related, and to what yet remains to be told. London has been reached from the north and the east. Leeds and Hull and, after Norwich District, Hull once more, have had a hand in the development of our Church-life in the metropolis. While this has been going on on one side of the island, Tunstall District has been consolidating itself, and preparing for the future Manchester, West Midland, Liverpool, and Shrewsbury Districts. It has also, by its Western and other

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missions, been making its way down the Severn Valley and the Thames Basin. On this side, the outstanding fact is the creation of the Brinkworth District from Tunstall, just as, on the East, the outstanding fact was the creation of Norwich District out of Nottingham. The missionaries of Brinkworth will not be found labouring in London itself, but they will be found labouring very near to it—in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and in the home-county of Hertfordshire. Looking forward a few years, we shall see how, when in 1853 the composite London District is to be formed, Brinkworth District becomes one of the largest contributors, surrendering the important circuits of Reading, High Wycombe, and Luton, as well as Maidenhead, towards the formation of the new District.

In this transitional chapter we confine ourselves to the beginnings of Primitive Methodism in London.

**EARLY ABDOTIVE MISSIONS IN LONDON.**

Hugh Bourne and James Crawfoot spent a fortnight in London in the autumn of 1810. Was this merely a pleasure-exursion, or an evangelistic mission? If only the former, then it belongs to the biography of Hugh Bourne rather than to this History. But it is clear, from the very first mention of the project in his *Journal*, and from subsequent references to the visit, that Hugh Bourne himself regarded it as a "religious excursion," as likely to afford him the opportunity of trying his methods of evangelism in a new and tempting field. While going in and out amongst the Independent Methodists at Stockton Heath, W. Clowes, he says, "Informed me that John Shegog [a Staffordshire man resident in London] wanted me to go to London, and that there seemed to be a call, and that my way was open there. This kept me awake a good while; but I left it to the Lord, and it seemed as if the Lord directed me to go to London. O Lord, Thy will be done." Arrived in London, Hugh Bourne and his companion did not entirely neglect seeing the sights. They saw the king's palace, and climbed nearly to the top of St. Paul's, "and had views of the city. It is wonderful," adds H. B.; "but, O Lord, what shall be done for the multitudes of the inhabitants? O Lord, have pity on them." Lancaster's Free School was visited, and the notorious Joanna Southcote, whom H. B. "thought was in witchcraft." But still their main pre-occupation was evangelism. Each preached in the open-air in Portland Street and Kentish Town. They held various cottage-meetings, at which converts were won. Much space is given in the *Journal* to the astonishing cure, through the prayers and faith of James Crawfoot, of Anne Chapman, a pious young woman and visionist, who, after being seven months in hospital, was dismissed as incurable. What were the results of this short visit? Under date of October 23rd, 1810, Hugh Bourne writes in his *Journal*:

"Clowes has received a letter from Mr. Shegog, of London, stating that Anne Chapman was at the chapel last Tuesday, and was enabled to stand up and join in the singing, to the astonishment of the congregation; and that her
miraculous restoration from what appeared to be the bed of death has raised an inquiry in many as to the deep things of God. He says they greatly desire to see us again; and that the converts the Lord gave old James and me are going on well, especially sister Chapman and two brethren. He also says that he is endeavouring to fan the flame which the Lord enabled us to kindle in London."

This record explains why, in the autumn of 1811, we find John Benton labouring in London. If he shrank from entering Leicester, we can readily understand why he should feel out of his element in London, and soon return to more congenial spheres of labour. Still, Benton met with considerable success, as Hugh Bourne's Journal clearly shows. In proof, we have such entries as these: "Sept. 16th. I received a letter from Mr. Shegog, of London, informing me that John Benton had great and rapid success there." And, a little later: "They have joined about forty-five since John Benton went to London." Then in October, 1811, some four months after the new denomination had been formed by the coming together of the Clowesites and Camp Meeting Methodists, we find Hugh Bourne including High Wycombe and London amongst the societies claimed by the denomination which, in February, 1812, was to take the name of Primitive Methodists. But the society in London was too far away to benefit by efficient oversight. Thus cut off and exposed to all the erosive influences of London life, such an isolated society would be likely soon to fall to pieces and disappear. It is, therefore, all the more surprising to find Hugh Bourne, seven years after, referring to the "London Primitive Methodists," and noting that one of these—W. Jefferson, has been selected to preach the opening sermons at Dead Lane Chapel, Loughborough, and that he is one of the Loughborough Circuit preachers for 1821.* These London Primitive Methodists of 1818 are one of the puzzles of our early history. How shall we account for them? Were they, after all, the representatives of the four classes formed by Benton in 1811, or had a new section of religionists in the meantime sprung into existence and assumed the name Primitive Methodists, while remaining unattached to the Staffordshire movement? No answer to these questions is as yet forthcoming. That there were Primitive Methodists in London in 1818 seems to be indisputable; that none could be found in December, 1822, is equally indisputable. This will be clear from the subsequent narrative, which also forces on us the reflection that, in the earlier stages of the London Mission, Divine Providence again and again very considerately made up for the deficiencies of human providence.

The Real Beginning of London Primitive Methodism.

Leeds Circuit, finding itself in the possession of a respectable balance, resolved to expend it in starting a distant mission. But where? Sunderland, it is said, was fixed upon as the centre of the intended mission, and Paul Sugden was instructed to make his way there. But Sunderland was now within the area of Hull's new Northern Mission, so the objective of the prospective mission was changed to London. Sugden was accompanied by a zealous unpaid volunteer named W. Watson. When the two alighted (December, 1822)

* See Vol. i. p. 316.
from their coach in the yard of the "Swan with Two Necks," in Lad Lane (now Gresham Street), they were the joint possessors of one shilling, which soon passed into the pocket of the coachman who had touched his hat for the accustomed gratuity. When the guard also approached and touched his hat, they told him frankly they were penniless, and what had brought them to the great city. The guard was a kind-hearted Christian man, who knew guilelessness from its subtle counterfeit. He took the missionaries home with him, and not only gave them breakfast, but bought a hymn-book of them so that their next meal might be assured. The lot of the missionaries was no enviable one. They were practically stranded in the biggest city in the world,
yards from Shoreditch Church, where Hackney Road begins. Access to this thoroughfare was gained through a low, flat archway, or rather, through a door-shaped entry; then, passing some shabby cottages, you had the chapel on your right. In those days the locality did not improve in looks as you went further on, nor was its reputation of the best; for Nova Scotia Gardens, where the notorious murderers Bishop and Williams had lived, were not far away. As for the chapel, well may Mr. Yarrow call it "one of the quaintest of chapels."* Eighty years ago there were hidden away in odd nooks and corners of London many such old conventicles. They recalled the days when Dissenters thought it best to keep their places of worship out of sight as much as possible. Even now, you may occasionally stumble upon a building given up to the most secular uses which yet shows something of the old conventicle look. But

ENTRANCE TO COOPER'S GARDENS.

the number of such buildings is becoming smaller every year. Cooper's Gardens Chapel was a small, almost square building, being about twenty feet each way. Small though it was it boasted three galleries, each reached by a separate flight of stairs. The pulpit was stuck against the left or eastern wall. The chandelier was a hoop suspended by ropes from the ceiling, with tin sconces affixed, and tallow candles were the illuminants. No picture of Cooper's Gardens first chapel is now procurable; hence we have been the more particular to give some idea of its situation and appearance, because this was our first Connexional base and centre in the metropolis. Three generations of chapels stood on this site. Cooper's Gardens first chapel lasted until 1835, then came the second of the name, and in 1852 the third. For fifty-three years—1822 to 1875—

* "The History of Primitive Methodism in London." By William H. Yarrow. 1876.
this spot in Bethnal Green was familiar and dear to Primitive Methodists, the home of a strong and aggressive society, and the birthplace of many souls.

After Cooper's Gardens Chapel was taken, P. Sugden was called in from Kent, and J. Coulson walked from Leeds to supply the place of W. Watson. He walked, because the "cause" could not afford to pay for an inside seat in the coach, and it was too cold to ride on the outside. He entered London late in January, 1823, with three shillings in his pocket, and no very clear idea as to the direction he should take to find chapel or colleague. He had a hazy notion that Cooper's Gardens was somewhere near Shoreditch Church, and so, as he made his way along Old Street, he kept anxiety at bay by lifting up his heart to God and saying, "Lord, it would be a little thing for Thee to let me meet with Paul Sugden." This child-like confidence was not misplaced.

The colleagues did meet, and that "right early"; for, as Coulson a little later passed along a certain street, he was seen by P. Sugden, who happened to be in a shop at the time. To run out and welcome his colleague was the work of a moment. We may call it a remarkable coincidence, but the men more directly concerned saw the hand of God in the rencontre.

On yet another winter's day, in January, 1824, W. Clowes took charge of the London Mission, and remained in charge until September, 1825. His coming opened a new chapter in the history of London Primitive Methodism, the first chapter having ended disappointingly. During the year 1823, the few and feeble societies had been formed—and prematurely formed, one cannot but think—into a circuit. Local difficulties led to a still further and most unwise division of the circuit into East and West, with the result that might have been anticipated. The societies soon found themselves
in difficulties, and an appeal was made to Hull Circuit to save them from utter wreck. The appointment of Clowes at this crisis was a wise step. Never, perhaps, during the course of his active ministry did he give more manifest proofs of the possession of administrative ability, as well as of evangelistic aptitudes, than during his twenty months labours in London. He enforced discipline; curtailed expense wherever possible; reunited the divided East and West, and set himself to restore the societies to solvency. In effecting this last he was greatly indebted to Mrs. Gardiner, one of those "honourable women" of whom there have been "not a few" in the history of our London churches. Mrs. Gardiner is said to have been led to identify herself with our cause in London through the preaching of J. Coulson. She had both the means and the will to further the work of God. The poorly paid, and often insufficiently fed pioneer preachers, were welcomed to her table and followed by her thoughtful kindness. At this juncture, W. Clowes appealed to Mrs. Gardiner, who at once lent him a hundred pounds on his note of hand. With this sum he was enabled to pay off outstanding bills, and relieve the financial pressure on the societies. As for the promissory-note, it was, not long after, taken out of the escritoire and put into the fire as a burnt-offering to the Lord.

Clowes found, as many both before and since his time have found, that London evangelism has its own special difficulties, making heavy demands on faith and patience. Not here, least of all, can the outworks of evil be carried at a rush, but only by the slow process of sapping and mining. Clowes had a sanguine temperament, and had come to London fresh from revivals on a large scale, and so his Journal reveals a certain disappointment with what seemed to be, in comparison, the meagre results of his labours. Now he writes: "London is London still, careless, trifling, gay, and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." And again: "Often have I preached within and without the room [in Snow Fields, in the Borough], and laboured with all the powers of my body and soul; but the pride, levity, and corruption of London appeared to be unassailable; the powers of hell reigned fearfully triumphant, the pall of midnight darkness rested upon thousands of all orders of society. Oh, for God's mighty arm to be outstretched, to shake the mighty Babylon to its centre!"

Any one who reads the accounts Clowes has given in his Journal of some of his experiences as an open-air evangelist in London, will cease to wonder that he uses strong language in writing of its moral condition, as he found it in 1824. Let the reader take a brief summary of one or two of the incidents he gives.

As he passes through Clare Market his soul is stirred within him as he sees the awful profanation of the Lord's Day. He takes his stand among the people and beseeches them to turn from their evil ways and seek the Lord. The next Sabbath, true to his promise, he is in Clare Market again. He begins to sing, but is stopped by a policeman and forbidden to disturb the market-people. When asked for his authority, the officer pulls out his truncheon, and says: "This is my authority." An open window is offered him, and from that vantage-ground Clowes "pours the thunders of the law upon the rebels against God and the King." From Clare Market he goes down to Westminster, and stands up again in the open-air. "The Philistines," says he, "were again upon me; the abandoned of God and man, like incarnate devils
raged and howled around; however, I cried to the infuriated multitude to repent and believe the Gospel, and, contrary to my expectation, I finished my address, and retired without suffering any injury." We may recall another scene, also enacted in Royal Westminster. While Clowes is leading a camp-meeting, three men, whom a publican had primed with liquor and dressed up with horns and wings and tails, execute a sort of devil's dance on the camp-ground. They yell and rush about amongst the people. The women scream, and for a time the meeting is thrown into confusion. But the preachers do not flinch, and their followers soon rally to their support. Presently, two of the masqueraders slink away, while the third and principal one—a gigantic and fearsome figure to look upon—is surrounded, and sung and prayed over, till he has no spirit left in him. There is something grotesque about this incident, but its sequel was tragic enough; for, in this case, as in a similar one that took place at Walworth, retribution speedily overtook the persecuting buffoons. The ringleader of the Westminster trio was shortly after convicted of pocket-picking and hanged at Newgate, whilst his underlings were transported to Botany Bay for house-breaking.

Clowes now left London for his mission in Cornwall. He had worked hard during his twenty months of service, along with such colleagues as J. Hervey, G. Tetley, and especially John Nelson, who, like himself, had been extraordinarily successful in the North; and yet, in September, 1825, the combined membership of the London societies was but 170. Well might he sorrowfully write: "I have continued to labour in conjunction with my friends in London day and night for the salvation of sinners, but the chariot rolled on slowly and heavily." Still the chariot did roll on; London continued to make some little progress, so that in 1826 the societies were formed into an independent circuit which, for that and the next year, stood on the stations of the Hull District. Then, as we have seen, from 1828 to 1834, London formed an integral part of the Norwich District and then disappears, to emerge in 1842 as a branch of Hull. A second crisis had occurred, making the friendly intervention of Hull Circuit indispensable. The crisis was mainly of a financial character, as the following extract from the Journal of W. Clowes will show:—

"On February the 27th [1835] I left Hull for London, in order to take the broken-down circuit of the latter place once more under the wing of Hull Circuit. The preachers stationed in London were brothers Oscroft, Coulson, and Bland, and the number of members was 294. On the Sabbath after my arrival I preached at Blue Gate Fields; and on the Monday, I had to advance, on the part of Hull Circuit, £16 to pay the preachers' deficient salaries. The chief of the circuit was in a state of decay, the chapel being involved and most of the places in a shattered condition. After preaching several times, and arranging for the taking of the circuit, I returned to Hull to communicate the result of my mission to our March Quarterly Meeting for 1835."

John Flesher was sent to London in 1835 to save the situation, just as he had been sent to Edinburgh in 1830 for the like purpose. It was a magnificent act on the part of Hull Circuit to give up its ablest minister at this crisis; nor was this magnanimity a merely transient impulse, but rather a well-defined policy, dictated by a consideration of what was best for the Connexion. For a series of years some
of the best preachers on its staff were drafted to the London work. The affairs of Blue Gate Fields Chapel formed the crux of the difficulty Flesher was called at once to face. Its history can soon be told. As early as 1825 we find a society worshipping in New Gravel Lane, in Shadwell. The preaching-room, which was a loft over a stable, was a strange place for one of the best and most well-to-do of the London societies to forgather in; for, over and above the disadvantage of its location, the odour of the stable was often unpleasantly assertive, and the sound of the chaff-cutters at work below jarred on the sensibilities of the worshippers. Yet, for some years, this upper room was the home of a vigorous society, and a Bethel ashore to zealous Primitive Methodists who sailed from North-Eastern ports. In 1829, James Garner (1) began his two years’ superintendency, marked by peace and some progress. In 1830, the membership of Cooper's Gardens had risen to 76 and that of Shadwell to 64. When, next year, John Oscroft succeeded to J. Garner, it was felt the time had fully come to give the Shadwell society more eligible headquarters, and, in June, 1832, Blue Gate Fields Chapel was opened. The entire cost of the undertaking was £1300, a sum out of all proportion to the financial strength of the society. What follows is the old familiar story—a crushing, dispiriting debt, accumulating arrears of interest, angry creditors becoming vindictive. From the perusal of private letters of the time and the carefully written minutes of the Trustees’ Meetings, we see John Flesher here and there in the Connexion preaching and making collections on behalf of Shadwell Chapel, while, in London, his colleagues were begging almost from door to door for the same object. Thomas Watson, the popular boy-preacher, had worn out three suits of clothes with the severity of this work; and some of Thomas Ratcliffe’s begging reminiscences may be read in Mr. Yarrow’s book.* But, in spite of all that could be done, Blue Gate Fields Chapel had, in the end, to be sacrificed. All, however, was not lost. Much had been gained. Connexional honour was saved; the just demands of creditors were satisfied; and the society, poor but honest, chastened, and wiser for the experience of the past, could face the future with hope. Mr. Yarrow is careful to inform us that when, in 1837, Blue Gate Fields Chapel was sold for £500, the Connexion did not own a shillingsworth of property in London. True, Cooper's Gardens second chapel had taken the place of the dilapidated structure already described. But this, for the time being, was the private property of John Friskin, one of the most prominent and active officials of the early days. Seeing clearly what was needed, he had bought the old building and some of the adjoining property, and built a chapel which was, in every way, an improvement on the old. This was let to the society at a moderate rental, and subsequently bought on easy terms. From this it will be seen how comparatively recent is the material advance our Church has made in the metropolis, and how considerable and creditable to all concerned that advance has been. In 1837 the membership was 286, and the property owned nil. In 1847 the membership was 700, and the value of the three Connexional chapels then owned

* Yarrow’s “History,” pp. 53—215. Our authority for the wear and tear of the three suits of clothes is the following resolution of the Trustees’ Meeting: — “That the £4 entered in the Account Book as a present to Thomas Watson while begging, be granted; as he were out three suits of clothes while begging.”
was £2500. Now, in 1904, there are 9827 members, 115 chapels, and the value of the Church property is £284,308.

After the loss of Blue Gate Fields Chapel the society found a temporary lodging in Ratcliffe Highway, worshipping in a room that could only be reached by an almost perpendicular ladder. Interesting is this resolution in the old Minute Book, written August 9th, 1838: "That we approve of Brother Flesher's having purchased the lease of a house and ground on which to build a chapel, in Crane Yard, Sutton Street, Commercial Road." Then follow other resolutions which show that much was expected of Brother Flesher. He was to "purchase bricks, timber, and other requisites for the building of the chapel"; to superintend the erection "in all its branches," and borrow the money necessary to complete the building. If tradition be trustworthy, Mr. Flesher did even more than was expected of him, for occasionally he might have been seen dressed as a navvy, wheeling barrows of earth for the foundation. On Tuesday, August 14th, 1838, the sermon in connection with the foundation-stone laying was preached by John Stamp, who, it will be remembered, was at this time on London's Sheerness Mission, which next year obtained circuit independence. 1835-7 was the turning-point of our Connexional fortunes in London. From the time John Flesher took the helm of the labouring ship it righted itself and made headway. The story of the passing of the crisis, as revealed in these old letters and documents, is of more than local interest. It suggests that there was a side to the ministry and character of John Flesher that we have scarcely seen the importance of. We have thought of him as the Chrysostom of the Connexion, "one of England's untitiled noblemen," the accomplished editor, the hymnist; but it gives us a sort of shock to see him absorbed in such salvage work as fell to his lot at Edinburgh and London. Could the Connexion find no more fitting work than this for John Flesher to do? It may tend to allay what we regard as our justifiable heat to learn that the real John Flesher was essentially a man of affairs—a man big enough for large affairs, and not too big to find delight in small details. Had he not, unfortunately, destroyed his papers, abundant evidence would have remained to make this fact one of the commonplacest of our history. But it is not too late to form a just estimate of what he did for the Connexion; for, in recent years, from various quarters, letters and documents have come to hand which conclusively prove that, from 1830 to 1850, John Flesher was one of the busiest.
and most influential men in our Church-life. He had an intimate knowledge of connexional affairs, and held the threads of many of them in his hand. He was the confidant of William Clowes, W. Garner, W. Sanderson, T. Holliday, and other men of like age and standing, and he was looked up to by the younger men who were afterwards to have the guidance of affairs. In his person were represented the ideals and strivings of a wider, more liberal connexionalism. In short, we make bold to say, that John Flesher was the man of the transition period which culminated in 1843, but which had begun ten years before. “When any difficulty arose he was sent for. Often John would leave me after the Quarterly Meeting, and I did not see much more of him until the next.” So said his faithful, self-sacrificing wife. On his retirement, he could claim that, “whilst it was never my policy to start divisions and disturbances, it was often my work to have to allay them when raging, and to deprive them, to a certain extent, of the power of a resurrection.”* As by common consent, when the denomination or its ministers was defamed in the public press, the task of vindication was left to John Flesher. So, to name but one instance out of many, he had to defend the Connexion against misrepresentation in what it may suffice to call the Stamp Affair, and no little obloquy did he incur by so doing. To him, more than to any other single man, was due the epoch-making events of the transference of the Book-Room from

* Quoted from J. Flesher’s Letter of Application for Superannuation, 1852.
Bemersley to London, and the establishment of the General Missionary Committee. To him, also, was owing the improvement of our serials, by giving them a wider outlook and a more literary form. The characteristics of the man—his lawyer-like mind, and his fond, almost finical handling of details, reveal themselves in his very original Consolidation of the Minutes (published 1850). Because he had done many things so well, it was thought he was just the man to prepare the Hymn-Book that was wanted; and here he was misjudged. But one failure leaves untouched the essential greatness of the man and the value of the work he did. The policy John Flesher had worked for, and which he lived to initiate, will come under our notice again, but we may briefly set down here the main facts in his personal history which yet remain to be told. Even when, in 1842, he entered upon his editorial duties, there were already premonitions of a physical breakdown. The throat-trouble had begun to show itself which, with its complications, was to disqualify him for all public work. His affliction deepened so that, in 1852, he sought superannuation. He retired to Scarborough, afterwards to Easingwold, then to Harrogate; and finally, having sequestered himself at Forest Moor House, between Knaresborough and Harrogate, he passed away, beloved and revered, July 16th, 1874, and his remains were laid in the Harrogate Cemetery. It is a coincidence that John Flesher and W. Sanderson should both have been superannuated and have died in the same year; yet more striking, that our two most eloquent preachers of the early period should both have been smitten by disease in such a way as "made their music mute."

The plan of the London Mission for 1847 is now before us. When this plan was printed Primitive Methodism had been introduced into the metropolis just a quarter of a century. The plan in question shows some eighteen preaching-stations, including places as far removed from each other as Brentford and Acton on the west, and Woolwich on the south-east. Of the three Connexional chapels on the Mission—Cooper's Gardens, Sutton Street, and Grove Mews, the precursor of Seymour Place, Marylebone—Cooper's Gardens stands first in order, as it was first in numerical strength, having a membership of 260, while Sutton Street comes next with 211. Both before and after 1847, Cooper's Gardens enjoyed considerable prosperity. Joel Hodgson, who laboured in London about this time, speaks of it as a veritable "converting furnace."
The chapel was often too small to hold even the members who sought to attend, so that an overflow congregation was held in the schoolroom. To supply the additional accommodation so urgently needed, the third Cooper's Gardens Chapel was opened in 1852. The same year Parkinson Milson began his two years' memorable ministry in London. At the close of a hard Sunday's labour in connection with a series of Protracted Meetings, when "fourteen persons found salvation," he notes in his diary: "There are some blessed and mighty local brethren here." The "Breakfast Meeting," which stands at the bottom of this plan of 1847, was a notable institution of Cooper's Gardens, and one, so far as our knowledge extends, unique in the Connexion. The local preachers on duty—as most of them usually were on the Sunday—assembled at eight o'clock, and after breakfasting together and discussing some topic or other, separated to go, two and two, to their various and often distant appointments.

Dacre Street, Broadway, Westminster, is the third place on the plan. Ever since the days of Clowes' mission we had been at work somewhere or other in this district, where Wesleyan Methodism has at last got a splendid denominational centre. We say, "somewhere or other in Westminster," for a glance over the plans for successive years will show that this west-end society had flitted from street to street and room to room in an extraordinary manner. For more than half a century we clung tenaciously to Westminster, but were compelled at last to abandon it; and now, alas! the Connexion has no footing in this wide and densely-populated district.

A word must be written of Elim Chapel, Fetter Lane, which stands on the plan after Sophia Street, Poplar. For some time services had been held in various places in the centre of London, viz., Gee Street, Whitecross Street, Onslow Street, then in Castle Street Chapel, Clerkenwell. When, in order to carry out city improvements, the chapel in Castle Street was scheduled for demolition, the society acquired a disused Baptist chapel in Fetter Lane, off Holborn. This was "Elim" Chapel, which in its day had had some notable ministers. At the time of its acquisition—1845, the idea seems to have been entertained of subsequently making this very centrally-situated building connexional property, but, in the end, this was not deemed advisable, and the chapel was vacated in the Seventies, some little time before the expiry of the lease.

In this same year, 1847, George Austin, fresh from his experiences of the Irish Famine, began his first ministerial term of service in London, which extended to six years. His coming was signalised by the formation of some of the western societies—Brentford, Hammersmith, etc.—into a mission, taken charge of by the General Missionary Committee; while the rest of the societies were formed into the London Circuit. When, in 1853, the London District was created, the three chapels we have described—Cooper's Gardens, Elim, and Sutton Street, became the heads of the three London Circuits called, respectively, London First, Second, and Third.

Further developments of our London Circuits we do not follow at present. It only remains that mention be made of some of those who, for one reason or other, have
special claim to remembrance. John Friskin, though not a local preacher, was unquestionably the best-known London layman of the first period. J. Booth, whose name heads the list of local preachers on the plan of, 1834, came from Derbyshire in 1826. What kind of man he was may be inferred from a sentence in one of his letters to his mother: "I have worn my coat longer than is respectable but I must help the cause." It was a loss to London Primitive Methodism when, in 1848, he emigrated to the United States; but he at once joined our Church in Brooklyn, and served its interests many years. Jane Phelps, of Shadwell, whose name stands next to John Booth's, was, from 1839 to 1842, a travelling preacher in the Hull District. Mrs. Maynard and Mrs. Jane Gordon were also notable women of the early days. Ever since the former was converted under the wooden chandelier of Cooper's Gardens in 1827, Maynard has been a name familiar to our London societies. Her eldest son, Thomas Maynard, was a useful local preacher until he, too, in 1849, emigrated to the United States, and united with the Brooklyn church. Mr. C. R. Maynard, of the Stoke Newington Circuit, is the present-day representative of the old name.

When last we saw Mrs. Gordon it was at Filey.* She came to London in 1839, and was closely associated with Sutton Street until her death in 1869. Though a class-leader and an occasional preacher, she is best remembered as the champion Missionary Collector. From the Missionary Reports of a long series of years, any one who cares may ascertain the gross sum she collected for missionary purposes; but who shall tell the miles she walked, or the amount of physical labour she expended? Sometimes the canvasser or collector is the less respected the more he is known; but not so Mrs. Gordon. City magnates did not count her annual visit an unwelcome intrusion. She had none of the ways of the importunate beggar; rather, there was that about her which suggested she was on some high mission it would be an honour to have anything to do with. Attired in old Methodist fashion, and with a Christian calmness and dignity all her own, she was an impressive figure as she went about the disinterested work which more and more became her chief business.

The honour of starting the first Primitive Methodist Sunday School in London belongs to John Heaps—a youth in his teens. The school was begun in Baker's Rents, in Hackney Road, in 1832, and carried on there until accommodation was provided for it in Cooper's Gardens in 1835. When the young man had seen this school established, it is said he set his heart upon doing the same thing for Westminster, and that, to accomplish this, he cheerfully walked Sunday by Sunday from Hackney to Westminster, and back again. The life of this young Christian endeavourer was, alas! very brief, but he did good sowing. John Phillips, a watchman at St. Katharine's Docks, in

* Vol. ii. p. 106.
PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH.

conjunction with F. Salter, began a Sunday School in the vestry of Blue Gate Fields Chapel in November, 1832. Phillips was a diligent visitor of the sick, especially of the victims of cholera and fever. He died in 1857.

The portrait of Mr. James Wood, given in the text, links us with the past; for, as a youth, he joined the Cooper's Gardens society as far back as 1839. He was soon put on the plan and was a frequent fellow-labourer in mission-work with John Wilson, who came out of Staffordshire in 1837. Wilson was not easily daunted, or else he would not, after having for two Sundays sought in vain for the Primitive Methodists about Covent Gardens (the address his minister had given him), have persevered in his search till he had ferreted them out in Cooper's Gardens. No doubt it was the zeal and aptitude displayed by John Wilson during the years he was in London that led to his designation, in the Minutes of 1873, as "Lay Missionary," working under the direction of the General Missionary Committee. James Wood who, as we have said, was frequently his comrade, has been equally at home in the pulpit or the business meeting, at the street-corner, or taking part in the discussions of the Sunday morning breakfast meetings. He represents the history of our Church in the metropolis for the last sixty years; for he still survives, and although he has lost his sight and his old-time vigour, he has not lost his interest in all that pertains to the Church of his early choice.

The claims of Thomas Church and W. H. Yarrow to special recognition chiefly rest on what they did in the way of authorship. Edward Church, the father of the first-named, was one of the fruits of London street-missioning. A back-slidden Methodist official, he was reclaimed as the result of an open-air service, held near Whitecross Street prison, by John Oscroft in 1831. He at once joined the Cooper's Gardens society, though he afterwards identified himself with Elim. His son, Thomas, received his first ticket of membership in 1841, and though, in his later years, he was unknown to our churches, yet for a quarter of a century he was a prominent figure, and both by voice and pen did his best to further the interests of Primitive Methodism. He wielded a "versatile and subtle pen," and as he took part in most of the denominational movements and controversies of his time, he came in for a full share of the hard knocks that paper controversialists usually get.* When the much needed Primitive Methodist Bibliography comes to be prepared, it will be seen that

* "Versatile and subtle pen," are T. Bateman's words, occurring in a caustic letter which appeared in the Wesleyan Times of August 29th, 1866. On the publication of the Conference Minutes, a lively discussion arose on the Conference Address, prepared by Rev. W. (afterwards Dr.) Antill. In this discussion Messrs. Bateman and Church were on opposite sides. T. Church had signed himself "A General Committeeman," whereupon he is exhorted "to calmness and propriety of speech and writing, and a manifestation of all the qualifications, mental and spiritual, which are expected to adorn the character and conduct of every member of the Primitive Methodist General Committee." Seven distinct publications of Thomas Church are known to us, the most important of which bear the titles, "Popular Sketches of Primitive Methodism: being a Link in the Chain of Ecclesiastical History" (1850), 351 pp.; and "A History of the Primitive Methodists."
THE PERIOD OF CIRCUIT PREDOMINANCE AND ENTERPRISE.

LONDON

CADEDONIAN Rd.

LONDON FIELDS

STEPNEY

HAMMERSMITH

CAMDEN TOWN

CANNING TOWN

STOKE NEWINGTON

KENTISH TOWN

CHAPELS
Thomas Church was about the first, and certainly the most prolific, of our lay authors, and he must have an early place amongst those who have attempted to write the general History of our Church. Nor should it be forgotten that he was the projector of the first newspaper that has borne the denominational name—"The Primitive Methodist Advocate."

Mr. Yarrow was a man of more sober and more reliable type—an excellent preacher, and one of the founders in 1850 of Philip Street, Hoxton. The esteem in which he was held, and his repute as a preacher, led to his being invited to become the minister of the Primitive Methodist Church of Shenandoah, U. S. A. The invitation was accepted, and he sailed in 1876, but not before he had prepared for the press his well-known and valuable "History of Primitive Methodism in London"—a book which it would be well if some competent hand would bring down to the present time and re-issue.

No pretence is here made that we have mentioned all those to whom it was chiefly owing that the London Mission had, by 1853, become three circuits. By no means. Other names of early workers might easily be recalled who each contributed his quota towards the common result—such names as Hawksworth, Chapman, Beswick, Garrud, Hensey, Hurcomb, Martin, Kemp, Cranson, and Wesson. But what has been said must suffice for the present; only, as showing that 1853 was but the starting-point of fresh developments, we give the portrait of Peter Thompson, a Primitive Methodist navvy from Witney, who that year missioned Canning Town. It is interesting to note that C. G. Honor, who entered the ministry in 1854, was one of the small band of missioners, and that, after experiencing some rough handling by the mob, Peter and he were marched off to Poplar Police Station. John Rackham, converted at Cooper's Gardens in 1842, had then already entered the ministry; and John Wenn, a local preacher on the station, began his honourable course by becoming, in 1853, the additional preacher on the newly-formed London Third station.

We shall have to return to glance at the later and, it may be added, the creditable advance of our Church in London, especially as regards the multiplication of chapels. In the meantime, the page of views here given as an instalment will, in part, prepare us to recognise how great has been the material advance made in recent years.
CHAPTER XX.

LIVERPOOL CIRCUIT,
AND THE BEGINNINGS OF SOME CIRCUITS OF THE LIVERPOOL DISTRICT.

We have already glanced at the "origins," and subsequent development (as far as 1842) of the circuits comprised in the Manchester District that was formed in 1827. One circuit only, then standing on the stations of that District, has been reserved for notice at this point—Liverpool. It is due to a city which by its geographical situation and national importance was, we may say, predestined to become, and actually has become, the head of a District, that we should present what little can be gleaned respecting the beginnings of our Church within its wide area—beginnings small and feeble at first, but which have now happily attained goodly dimensions. We have just told the story of the early struggles of Primitive Methodism to gain a footing in London—the most populous city of the world: it does not seem unfitting now, therefore, that we should do the same for the second largest city of England, more especially as the history of our Church in both cities presents certain points of analogy. Each was visited by a founder and leading missionary, before a cause was permanently established. In both, the cause was introduced about the same time, and, still more noteworthy, both have made up by their later development for the comparative slowness of their growth in the early period. We have already tracked the course of our Connexion's aggressive movement from Yorkshire and the Humber till, by way of the Eastern Counties, it converged on the metropolis. It now remains, in some succeeding chapters, to show how a similar process went on in the West; how from the Mersey and Dee and Severn our missionaries at last reached what we know as the home-counties, and the very suburbs of London. As John Smith (1), a Burland man, became, in Thomas Bateman's phrase, the "bishop of Norfolk," and found his way to Blue Gate Fields, in attending a Norwich District Meeting; so John Ride, whom Burland sent to mission Liverpool, became the Apostle of Wiltshire, and lived to become the successful superintendent of Cooper's Gardens. The movement rounds itself off to completeness.

Besides Liverpool, other contiguous places, which were early reached by our Church, and have had some interesting passages in their history, may be shortly glanced at. As circuits attached to Liverpool District they may be of late origin, but their beginnings carry us back almost to the beginnings of the Connexion. Of these Ellesmere Port and Buckley may be taken as examples.

LIVERPOOL.

Clowes' clear ringing voice was heard preaching the Gospel in the streets of Liverpool as early as 1812. He was on a visit at the time; just as he was on a visit to Newcastle when he preached there, and also in North Shields, in the autumn of 1821. The
Liverpool visit was paid to Charles Mathers, a Burslem potter, who had been Clowes fellow-workman in Hull and his pal in wickedness. Mathers had afterwards removed to Liverpool and, while working at the Herculaneum Pottery, had come under powerful religious impressions that were deepened by the tragically sudden death by drowning, in 1811, of T. Spencer, the gifted young Independent minister. He united with the Wesleyan Methodists, but rather as a seeker than as one who had found salvation. Sick of soul, he bethought him of his old companion who had experienced the great change. He said within himself: "If only I can see Clowes, he will tell me how he found peace, and how I too may find it." Thus motivated he set out to walk to Staffordshire, and the first day got as far as Knutsford, where he stopped at an inn for the night. While at prayer in his bedroom "the Lord appeared in power, loosed him from his guilty chains, and set him free. He then was convinced that the Lord could convert souls without William Clowes." Mathers now travelled on to Staffordshire with a buoyant heart, telling people on the road what the Lord had done for him. "When we met together," says Clowes, "we were glad, and, some time after, I spent a week with him and his wife"; and it was during this visit that Clowes preached at Liverpool, "near the theatre," and also at Runcorn. From the fact that Mather's memoir was written by Clowes, we may fairly infer that he died in 1819 a Primitive Methodist; but as the memoir is silent as to where he died, we cannot be sure that he died a Liverpool Primitive Methodist.

The next event connected with Liverpool's origin known to us, is John Ride's arrest for street-preaching, and his speedy release through the alleged intervention of Dr. A. Clarke. The date of this incident may approximately be fixed as March or April, 1821; for, Thomas Bateman tells us, it was the March quarterly meeting of Burland Branch which sent John Ride on his mission, which embraced "the city of Chester, the town of Wrexham, several growing places in Wirral, and the great town of Liverpool at the end of them."

Next, we have the published recollections of Mr. Henry Howard—one of the original members of the first society-class formed in Liverpool—by the help of which the story is carried a stage further.* According to Mr. Howard, on a certain day—probably May 31st, 1821, a young man, plainly attired, might have been seen trying to escape from a number of persons who were following him and pelting him with mud. He and his assailants had just landed from the packet plying between Runcorn and Liverpool. The young man was James Roles, the Preston Brook preacher, and this was how he came to the Liverpool mission. He had been redeeming the time by preaching to his fellow-passengers, and some of them were now in this fashionrequiting him for his well-meant efforts. The young man's plight was observed by the proprietor of an hotel which stood near the landing-stage. The preacher was invited to enter; his clothes were cleaned, and he was urged to remain until he could leave with safety. Mr. Roles stayed three days with his hospitable entertainers, who afterwards declined all remuneration, and then found lodgings with Mrs. Bentley in Westmoreland Street, where the first class was afterwards formed. Mr. Howard further states that on Sunday, June 3rd, he heard James Roles preach at the top

of Gascoyne Street, Vauxhall Road, in the morning, and at six p.m. in Galton Street, Great Howard Street; and that he heard him again on the Sunday following. Then J. Platt, a native of Faddiley in Burland Branch, took the place of J. Roles, and, on June 17th, a class of seven members was formed. The small society took and fitted up a room in Upper Dawson Street, behind St. John's Market, which was opened by one Jane Gordon.* So far Mr. Howard, whose statements must be harmonised—and probably are harmonisable—with a couple of entries found in Thomas Bateman's Journal of a little later date. On October 2nd, 1821, he writes: "We have opened Liverpool, but it is too far away; we cannot work it as we ought. So we are taking steps to get the Preston Brook Circuit to join us—for them to take it one fortnight and we another." The arrangement thus foreshadowed did, in fact, obtain between Michaelmas and Christmas, and so on January 27th of the following year, Thomas Bateman writes again: "We have given up Liverpool to Preston Brook, our hands being too full, and so many more wanting us. But, alas! for Liverpool. I fear it won't be worked very well." He intimates that Burland was the more reconciled to surrender Liverpool because James Bonsor, "that successful missionary," was at Christmas appointed to Liverpool. He arrived on January 12th, but, if we may judge by his Journal in the Magazine, he remained there only three weeks, then moving on to Chester. Still, while he was in Liverpool he worked hard, as he had done in Manchester and, indeed, as he invariably did. His Sundays especially were crowded with services of one kind or another—indoors and out-of-doors. He speaks of having joined six members at one service, and of having witnessed many conversions. In March, John Abey and Sarah Spittle were appointed, and between the Conferences of 1823 and 1824, Liverpool was made a circuit, and its name duly appears on the stations for the latter year, with Paul Sugden and S. Spittle as its preachers.

The chapel which James Bonsor more than once refers to was possibly old Maguire Street, since Mr. Howard tells us that this was occupied, conjointly with the Swedenborgians, at the close of 1821 or beginning of 1822. The Primitives had the use of it at 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., and the Swedenborgians took their turn at 10.30 and in the afternoon. This singular arrangement, though the result of a friendly agreement, ended as it might be expected to end. The sequel of the joint occupancy reminds us of the cuckoo in the hedge-sparrow's nest. The Primitives grew and the Swedenborgians did not; and in 1823 they vacated the building, and left the more vigorous section in sole possession. It was held on rent until 1828, and then purchased for £600 and retained until 1864. Thus Maguire Street must be added to the long list of plain old-fashioned chapels, of which Cooper's Gardens was the latest example, which, during the early years, played so large a part in the life of our churches in the large towns. We have no picture of Maguire Street to present to our readers, but in lieu of it we have a description given by one who knew it well:—

"Externally there was nothing but a dark gable-end, with a dwelling-house on each side, which formed part of the front, and not in the least detached. A door, level with the street, led into a passage between the houses, and running their

* It is hardly necessary to say that this person was not Mrs. Jane Gordon, of Filey, who was not converted until 1823.
depth; at the end of which, on the ground-floor, was a large room used for Sunday School and other purposes. On each side, at the end of the passage, was a flight of stone steps leading to the chapel. Internally there was nothing to alter my estimate of our position in this large and wealthy community. A few rows of pews and forms in the centre of the floor, and a single row of three pews fixed lengthwise to the wall on either side, made up the accommodation below; while a gallery crossing the end of the chapel, and reached by a flight of stairs, to be seen when you had ascended from the passage on the right-hand side, afforded all the accommodation above. A large dome-like window in the roof, and two large circular-headed windows, looking into some crowded courts behind, afforded all the light admitted into the place. The pulpit, fixed against the wall between the long windows, faced you as you entered. The singers occupied the space on the left of the preacher, the pulpit-stairs that on his right.”

The situation of the chapel had little to commend it, nor were its approaches at all prepossessing. The opening of the new docks had changed the character of Vauxhall Road and the streets branching from it, much for the worse. There was a large Irish element in the population of the district, and legalised drunkerries abounded, so that those who would worship in Maguire Street had often to run the gauntlet of unseemly sights and brawls. But, despite these drawbacks, there is evidence to show that the old building could inspire warm affection in those whose "due feet" did not fail to attend its ordinances. "Friends," said Samuel Atterby (who travelled here in 1841-3), "if it should please God to end my period of work while in this circuit, let me be buried in this 'Glory hole.' I can ask nothing better." There would be many who could appreciate this enthusiastic outburst, for many a stirring meeting was held in the schoolroom to which he referred and in the chapel above. W. Clowes was at Maguire Street; June, 1829, when several persons "were in distress for their souls, and cried to God for mercy." It was the Sunday after he had assisted at the embarkation of the first missionaries to the United States. William Knowles, who was Liverpool's only minister when the Conference of 1829 met, was one of these pioneer missionaries. Thus early did Liverpool's sympathetic connection with the wider missionary movements of the Connexion begin to show itself. All down the years we meet with other indications of this connection. Thomas Lowe, an early enthusiast of African missions, went out into the ministry from Liverpool in 1836. Captain Robinson, of the "Elgiva," and ship-carpenter Hands, who prepared the way for our mission to Fernando Po, were both members of Liverpool Second Circuit; and W. Holland, who succeeded Messrs. Burnett and Roe, the pioneer missionaries on that island, was also another of Liverpool's gifts to Primitive Methodism. The Liverpool societies have not been slow to speed the parting and to welcome the returning missionary, or to remember him practically while absent on the field—as the provision of a boat for the use of the Fernandian mission showed. In rendering such service, Ex-Vice-President Caton has been conspicuous.

Thomas Bateman spoke truly of Liverpool when he said: "It did not improve as

* "Gatherings from Memory," a series of interesting articles on the early history of Liverpool Primitive Methodism, said to have been written by Mr. H. Simpson, which ran through the Christian Messenger of 1875.
THE PERIOD OF CIRCUIT PREDOMINANCE AND ENTERPRISE.
fast as was desired or expected." In 1829, when the numerical returns of the stations are first given, it reported but 143 members, and the second hundred was not turned until 1832, in which year it had but one preacher. It was not until 1860 that Birkenhead, which had been made a branch in 1857 under W. Wilkinson, became an independent station with 260 members, and with J. Macpherson as superintendent, leaving Liverpool with 500 members and three preachers—J. Garner, J. Travis, and E. A. Davies. From these facts it will be seen how comparatively recent has been the development of our Church in the city by the Mersey, which now has, including Birkenhead, seven stations and an aggregate membership of 1536. We reach the same conclusion if, turning from the numerical returns of then and now, a comparison be instituted on the material side. It is not so much a development we see as a revolution. Since 1849 the old chapels have gone as though they belonged to another dispensation. In the early part of 1834, Maguire Street was the only chapel possessed by the Primitives in Liverpool, though services were held in rooms and houses at various points; but towards the end of the year a chapel was opened at Mount Pleasant, afterwards superseded by Walnut Street Chapel; another chapel in Prince William Street, which had belonged to the New Connexion Methodists, was acquired, and a chapel was also opened at Bebington, on the Cheshire side. Save that Walnut Street has taken the place of Mount Pleasant, the plan for the first quarter of 1849 shows no alteration. Liscard, Birkenhead, Prescot, Lime Kiln Lane, Bootle, Garston, and Wallasey are names of places found on this plan. Afterwards the Seaman's Chapel in Rathbone Street was obtained, and in 1860, under the superintendency of James Garner, "Pentecost" and the "Jubilee" chapels were opened.

Who and what sort of men were they who preached in these old chapels and rooms that, like themselves, have long since passed away? Here, on an old plan of 1834, we have their names. Thanks to documents and reminiscences penned long ago, some of these names stand out in momentary distinctness, so that they become something more than names to us, and we can recognise their individual traits. Here, for instance, as the file-leader of the locals is J. Cribbin, a Manxman, but long resident in Liverpool, a notable figure in his day, who, in the decline of life, will die in distant New Orleans. No. 6 is J. Murray, "a Christian lawyer," whose face, meant for smiles, cannot disguise the marks of care and sorrow. Next to him stands the name of G. Horbury, the circuit-steward, a Yorkshireman, who had been associated with the founders; a stickler for rule; a plain-haired Primitive himself, and who expected all his brethren to "wear their hair in its natural form." No. 13 is Hannah Ashton, who was skilled in helping the penitent out of the Slough of Despond, and often held the hand of those who went down into the dark river. Then comes W. Gibson, once a prosperous merchant, but whose ships founded one after another, so that at last a tablet placed over the door of his residence at Everton had inscribed on it the words: "I was brought low, but the Lord raised me up." No. 17 marks the name of F. Hunt, who died in 1849, on his way into the interior
of South America. Lastly, at the bottom of the list of locals on “full” plan is the name, written with his own hand, of Richard Corfield, who in 1834 had just come from the Oswestry Circuit, and who was to do yeoman service for Liverpool Primitive Methodism until his death in 1900. He came a country-bred youth into the great town. For a time he was almost stunned by the tide of life surging around him. It was some time before he could find his feet or adapt himself to his environment;
everything was so strange and new. He had his struggles with the seductions and distractions continually presented. But he was a strong man and won, anchoring himself among his own people. But as we read in the autobiographic memoranda he has left, of his self-chidings and struggles, we think we can the better understand

the greatness, and the inevitability, too, of the leakage that must have gone on in the early days of our Church, consequent on the migration of our adherents from the villages into the big towns. Many of the best men in the Liverpool societies, like Richard Corfield, were from the country, but these, it is to be feared, were but the salvage of those who had drifted. They were the stalwarts—men like John Gledsdale, S. Wallington, H. Simpson, James Kennaugh, and others who might be named.

Some of the societies no longer forming part of the original Preston Bróok, Chester, or Liverpool Circuits were missioned quite early. For example, the societies of Frodsham and Kingsley, now giving their joint names to a circuit in the Liverpool District, were visited by H. Bourns as early as 1819. Parr, now part of the Earlstown Circuit, in 1836 had been recently missioned by Liverpool, and had a society of twenty-six members. As late as 1839 no permanent footing had been got in Birkenhead, but, two or three years after, the opening of new docks and streets brought an influx of population to the district, amongst which were found some zealous adherents of the Connexion, one of whom opened his house for services, and a cause was established which continued to grow.

Ellesmere Port, at the mouth of the canal which connects the Mersey and the Severn, has an interesting history which links us with the past. In this comparatively modern village our Church holds a commanding, it might even be said a unique, position. It possesses property to the value of about £9000, including a splendid chapel with an average congregation of six hundred, large Day Schools, Public Hall and Institute, the latter comprising Café, Recreation Rooms, etc. The foundation of this success was prepared for in the old cottage at Pooltown (shown in our illustration), where Mr. John Wynne and his twin-daughters resided. For more
than eighty years services were held in this cottage, and only ceased to be held there some few years ago, on the erection of a neat chapel at Pooltown. Mrs. Lewis, one of the daughters, still resides in the cottage; the other daughter was married to Mr. John Stockton, who not only opened his house for the first services held at Ellesmere Port, but in other ways greatly assisted in the establishment of the society which has attained such proportions. He is worthily represented by his grandson—Mr. W. Stockton. Others who by their character and long service contributed to mould and strengthen the cause at Ellesmere Port, were Mr. Richard Woodward and Mr. Thomas Hales. The latter, who came from Shropshire in 1840 to take up the position of canal manager, retired to Ellesmere on vacating his post, and died in 1892. As superintendent of the Ellesmere Port Sunday School, it was, for a number of years, Mr. Hales' custom to write a hymn for the recurring anniversary. Several popular hymns, of which probably the authorship has hitherto been unknown or wrongly attributed, came from his pen in this unobtrusive way—hymns such as "Sabbath Schools are England's glory"; "When mothers of Salem"; "I'll away to the Sabbath School"; "When the morning light"; and "Till Jesus calls us home."

Buckley Circuit, formed from Chester in 1871, as was also Wrexham, is entirely within the Welsh county of Flint. Alltami, missioned more than seventy years ago, may be regarded as the mother-society of the circuit, since in 1838 it built its first chapel and missioned Buckley. The "Tabernacle," which in 1875 took the place of the chapel built in 1841 and enlarged in 1863, is the largest building in Buckley, and shares with the City Temple the distinction of being one of the very few Nonconformist places of worship in which Mr. Gladstone delivered a public address.* "Among the many names cherished in the station," says one who has written of it, "are those of such men as Charles Price, clear-minded, methodical and faithful; Edward Davies, the father of Rev. E. A. Davies; John Roberts, the quaint, emotional Welsh preacher; Peter Kendrick, kindly, loyal to his Church, mighty in deed and word; Edward Davies, of 'The Mount,' who, though not a local preacher, was a devoted member and official of our Church for more than fifty years."† To these names may be added those of Mr. E. Bellis, a tried and trusty friend of the Buckley Circuit, and W. Wilcock, of Penyffordd, who as a leader in the last tithe-war in North Wales had his goods distrained. His cause was ably championed through the press and on the platform by Rev. J. Crompton, who was minister of the Buckley Circuit at the time, and had a long and useful term of service there.

* The address was given at Buckley on Monday evening, November 1st, 1885.