

CHAPEL OPENING

Courage Chapel – Shefford Circuit.

At Courage, a Hamlet in the parish of Chieveley, in the county of Berks, about three miles from Newbury, we have had a small society for some years, and although quite poor, we believe them to be piously devoted to God. They sometimes worshipped in a cottage, sometimes in an old malt-house, and very frequently out of doors. It came to pass not long since, that, to all human appearance, there was no other way than for them to worship out of doors continually, or in the old malt-house, which was still worse.

At this time the people felt their need of a chapel, and began to think how delightful it would be if they could obtain one of the smallest and humblest kind. Some of the friends began to look out for a piece of land in a suitable situation, which they soon found, and which we easily obtained, and the trustee deed was soon completed.

But when we had got this far, we were perfectly set fast for want of money, and no way seemed to open for money to be obtained. The people became anxious and quite agitated; and indeed, they thought I did not sufficiently try to obtain money for them, as my efforts had hitherto been ineffectual. And according to all appearance, a chapel could not then be obtained. I was very much concerned about it, and the concern lay with weight on my spirit. Being there one evening at my appointment, after preaching, I related to them the following anecdote: Some time since, two pious members being delegated by the rest of the society, came late one night a distance of three miles to my house, to request me to go to the noble Earl of Radnor, (to whom all their parish belongs,) and ask him to give them a piece of land to build a chapel upon, stating that the cottage in which they worshipped was much too small. I said, "I think it is almost the wildest thing I ever knew, to expect for a moment that the Earl will give you land. Don't you know," said I, "that a chapel in the next parish to yours, formerly used by the Baptists, has now fallen into his possession, and he has razed it to the ground." "Yes," said the men very calmly, "we know all that, but we have *prayed*, and *we still believe*." "Well," said I, "I cannot think of exposing myself to the folly of making what must be at least a useless application." After much conversation they departed; and when they were gone, my wife, who was in the next room, and had heard all that had passed, said, "That she felt very much for the poor pious men, and was perfectly ashamed of the course I took in the matter. The course you should take," said she, "appeals to me to be this, Go and take some respectable well-known person from the town with you, and ask the noble Earl for the land; and although you should be denied, (which is not quite certain,) it will then appear to the good people that you have done your duty, and not till then!" The next morning I called upon Mr. S., then a respectable tradesman living in the market-place, he consented to go with me. We went at once to the steward's office-yard, about two miles from the castle, and at the very moment I was concluding my application to the steward, the head of a noble horse appeared at the glass door of the office. The steward said, "Here is the Earl of R., and you may now speak for yourselves." In a few moments we were introduced into the Earl's presence; I made our application, and he granted the *very*

spot of ground they had prayed for, and all we asked for, in the most pleasant manner. I had rather smiled at them for praying for the very best spot in their village for building a chapel upon, and got rather laughed at after for my unbelief, when they had obtained it. They are now in the full enjoyment of their comfortable little chapel.

After I had related the above anecdote, I added, "I know of no way by which you can possibly get a chapel at Courage, but by praying for it. I know you can pray." The people's minds were composed, and they turned their hearts to prayer, and mightily wrestled with God to open their way. Some expressed a belief that he would do it. I said, "I knew he could do so:" and they pressed on in prayer.

The small way in which they begun immediately to contribute, would have been despised by many. One of the most active I appointed to collect, and she went far and near to obtain some very small donations. At length this collector having a sister-in-law living as servant at Thomas Baker's,

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Esq., of Reading, Berks, whose name is Susan, made application to her sister-in-law by letter for a small donation to assist in building a chapel at her native place, and the place where her brothers, sisters, and aged parents still reside. She was informed, that at present I know not where to get money for them to accomplish their object. Now Susan is pious, and she knew the whole concern, and felt, I dare say, beyond expression for her native place, and for her many relatives there, a number of whom are members in society. The whole concern came upon Susan's spirit. I know not by what means, but the matter came to the knowledge of her liberal minded and benevolent master, who immediately dispatched a letter of enquiry, and I immediately sent to him a full statement of the case. Mr. Baker then proposed a plan for a chapel at Courage, of a size suitable to the Hamlet; and gave us a challenge that if the circuit would pay the remainder of what it cost, and completely free the chapel from debt, at or near the time of opening it, (which time he also specified,) he would give us the noble sum of sixty-five pounds! This noble offer the circuit gratefully accepted, and the chapel was completed at the time, in seven weeks from its commencement.

On Sunday, Sept. 27, 1840, according to Mr. Baker's request, the chapel was opened, and Mr. John Ride appointed to preach in the morning, Mrs. Ride in the afternoon, and myself in the evening. The opening collections amounted to five pounds, one shilling, and five-pence, given chiefly by the poorest class, and composed of the smallest pieces of money.

The chapel is twenty-four feet by eighteen within, and built of brick and slate, nine inch walls, of a very suitable height; four sash windows, and boarded floor, with a brick aisle. We have a few back rail seats to let; the other part is filled up with forms, and the whole of the work is done in the best manner. "It is decidedly," said Mr. Ride, "the neatest chapel I ever saw of the kind; and I have seen many." In a few days after the opening, every bill was paid, and the chapel made perfectly clear of debt. It is Mr. Baker's wish that the whole income of the seats of this chapel should be sacredly applied to the lessening of the debts on other chapels in this circuit, and the little expenses of the chapel paid by the anniversary collections. I beg leave to say that this act of benevolence has so raised the gratitude of many pious people towards Mr. Baker and his family, that they make constant mention of them in their prayers. We return thanks to Mr. Baker, and to all our friends who so nobly came forward to meet the benevolence of Mr. Baker, and enabled us to raise a house for men's good, and for God's glory. I am just returned from Reading, where Mr. Ride, Mr. Harland from the Isle of Wight, [sic] and myself, had an interview with

Mr. Baker; when after I had given an account to Mr. Baker of the chapel, &c., we kneeled before the Lord, and Mr. Harland had great power in prayer for Mr. Baker in his afflicted and confined state. I remain, yours affectionately, in behalf of the C. Committee, HENRY SHARMAN.