

Brinkworth Jubilee Chapel and Congregation at the School Anniversary, May 1st, 1871.

Victory in the Villages:

THE HISTORY OF THE
BRINKWORTH CIRCUIT

BY

Rev. William C. Tonks

*(The Superintendent, for the time being, of the
Brinkworth Circuit).*

WITH FIFTEEN FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.



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1907

IN GRATITUDE

TO

The Sunday School Teachers of
The Village Churches of Burntwood and
Chase Terrace,
In the Lichfield Circuit; and to those of
Mexborough, in Yorkshire,
Who led the Writer into the Life
that is in Christ,
This Book is Dedicated.

PREFACE.

IN sending forth this book, I have hope that it will be of use to the young people of Primitive Methodism in the Brinkworth and Swindon District. It will also give pleasure, I trust, to those still remaining who have fought the battles and rejoiced in the victories here recorded or suggested. Particularly do I desire that the book will form a text-book, that shall be used as a basis for fuller information which the veterans can give to the recruits.

It was written to place on record some things worth remembering, that were likely soon to be forgotten. I hope the book will be found permanently valuable for its chronological details and illustrated pages.

I have to thank many friends for placing so readily at my disposal old magazines, photographs, and personal reminiscences. The photographs of the chapels, and those of Messrs S. Riddick, C. Maslin, J. Sweeper, E. L. Gardner, Rev. T. Smith and myself have been done freely by Mr. J. Riddick, of Wootton Bassett, and have materially added to the interest of the book.

While it has not been possible to verify every fact stated, or date given, this has been done in nearly every case, and by reference to old magazines, plans, account books, minute books, biographies, etc., it is hoped that accuracy has been achieved.

PREFACE.—(Continued.).

The articles by Mr. T. W. Turner, of Newbury, son of the Rev. S. Turner, on "Pioneer Work in the Brinkworth District," in the *Large Magazine* of 1900, have been of great assistance, and where first hand information was not attainable the Connexional Histories by J. Petty and H. B. Kendall have been relied upon. Unfortunately the Circuit minute books prior to 1834 seem to have been destroyed, but perhaps nothing material has been lost, tho' additional light might have been gained therefrom.

Had the book been written ten years ago, in some respects it would have been better. Men and women were then living whose memories went back to the earliest times, and personal touches now wanting might have been added. This advantage, however, is our to-day: that we stand, as seers may see, at the dawn of a new day, and both the backward look and the forward look are more inspiring than was the case ten years ago.

My prayer is, that the book may cultivate a spirit of thankfulness to the fathers and to their God; and a spirit that shall lead to the highest consecration for the assaults on the gates of hell, which shall not withstand us.

WILLIAM C. TONKS.

May 2, 1907.

CONTENTS.

Chapter	Page
I. Primitive Methodism (Introductory)	9
II. The Circuit as it is	18
III. Eighty years ago	27
IV. A Circuit of Note	36
V. The Making of the Circuit	68
VI. The Makers of the Circuit	86
VII. Side-Lights from Minute Books, etc.	104
VIII. The Story of the Churches	122
"The Mother of us all"—Brinkworth	122
"A far reaching Force"—Broad Town	125
"Strong and Helpful"—Wootton Bassett	127
"The Fire before the Lord is always burning"— Tockenham	135
"A Cottage near a Wood"—Grittenham	136
"A struggle with Hyper-Calvinism"—Bradenstoke	138
"Through Struggle to Power"—Purton	139
"A hot-bed of Primitive Methodism"—Purton Stoke	143
"Dogged does it"—Hook	145
"A Wayside Chapel"—Leigh	146
"A Heroic Struggle"—Ashton Keynes	147
"Against Drink and Bigotry"—Cricklade	151
"A Good Alliance"—Goatacre	154
"Sixty-six years in a Cottage"—Preston	156
"Heir to the Courageous"—Winterbourne	158
"By Common Consent"—Bushton	162
"Bells on the Horses"—Lydiard	163
—Minety	166
"A Chapel of Ease"—Callow Hill	167
"Queen Street"—Braydon	168
"After Eighty Years"—Broad Hinton	169
"Shall the Last be First?"—Lyneham	170
IX. Conclusion	171

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
Brinkworth Sunday School Anniversary ..	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Centenary Officers	8
Present Ministers	9
Circuit Stewards	24
" " " " " " " " ..	25
First Plan of Circuit	41
Revs. J. S. Nullis, R. Davies, G. Warner, T. Cummin, D. Harding, S. Turner, I. Hedges, R. Jukes, S. West	56
Revs. G. Fowler, J. Smith, T. Russell, L. Norris, J. Ride, Mr. N. W. Sutton ..	72
Mrs. Gingell, Mr. and Mrs. W. West, Mr. S. Westmacott, Mr. H. Hitchcock, Mr. J. Haskins, Revs. H. Yeates, W. Driffield, G. Wallis, J. Petty	88
Revs. J. Sheppard, W. Haddow, T. Kench, Messrs. R. Golding, C. Gardner, J. Rumming, T. Rumming, J. Hitchcock, Mrs. Blackman	104
CHAPELS — Brinkworth, Grittenham, Callow Hill, Minety, Leigh, Braydon	121
Wootton Bassett, Tockenham, Bushton, Winter- bourne, Lydiard, Hook, Preston ..	136
The Pickett Family	137
Purton, Cricklade, Broad Town, Ashton Keynes, Broad Hinton, Purton Stoke, Goatacre, Bradenstoke	152
Lyneham Green	176

CHAPTER I.

Primitive Methodism.

PRIMITIVE METHODISM is referred to in a recent Free Church History* as an "influential and picturesque movement, which represents probably the noblest influence of to-day on the life of rural England." It should be added to this that on the life of the mining and manufacturing populace its influence has been almost, if not quite, as powerful as upon rural life.

The landmarks of its origin may be given thus :

1. **The First Camp Meeting in England, on Mow Cop, May 31, 1807.** This was held with the reluctant sanction of the authorities of the Methodist Circuit of Burslem, with the hope that it would be the last as well as the first. The Meeting, described in the Connexional History,† was an unqualified success,

* By Rev. C. S. Horne.

† By Rev. H. B. Kendall,

and left the impression on William Clowes' mind that "myriads of saints and angels will everlastingly laud the Eternal Majesty on account of the day's proceedings on Mow Cop."

2. **The Norton Camp Meeting, August 23, 1807.** This was the fourth Camp Meeting, and it proved to be crucial. Against it was definitely set the official disapproval, then official antagonism and finally the pronouncement of the Liverpool Conference that "such meetings are highly improper in England, and likely to be of considerable mischief; and we disclaim all connection with them." There is not the slightest doubt that Conference acted with the best intentions, but the result was that the Camp Meeting Movement was placed outside the pale of the recognised usages of Methodism. For the Camp Meeting was held. By Hugh Bourne the Mow Cop Camp Meeting was intended to be the first of a series, which should be held through the years as long as God required them and blessed them. Against all opposition he stood firm and saved the movement from extinction.

3. **On June 27, 1808, Hugh Bourne was dis-**membered by the Burslem Quarterly Meeting, as his superintendent informed him, because he had a tendency to set up other than the ordinary worship. In other words, he was dismembered because he persisted in arranging for and taking part in the holding of Camp Meetings.

4. **The First Class Meeting** of "The Camp Meeting Methodists" was formed at Stanley, March 1810, and was taken charge of by Messrs. H. and J. Bourne as a separate Society, May 10, 1810.

5. **In June 1810, William Clowes** was expelled for the same reason as Hugh Bourne had been two years previously. Others were expelled with him. Separate Societies were formed, and what may be called the evangelising fraternity known as Clowesites came into being. Between the Camp Meeting Methodists and the Clowesites, the closest fellowship and co-operation existed from the commencement. A closer union was inevitable, and this was sought.

6. **The First Class-Tickets** were issued bearing the date May 30, 1811, but without a name given to represent the uniting communities.

7. **Finally, on Thursday, February 13, 1812,** the name Primitive Methodist was assumed.

Thus, in an attempt to recover the simplicity of primitive Methodism, Primitive Methodism came into being. Thence onwards to the present time it has maintained its originating spirit, and has proved itself to be an agency of God for promoting the Evangelisation of all whom it has reached. Though not without its ebbs and flows, as a whole and in sections, the tide of its life-giving influence has continuously risen, until to-day its adherents and

1811	June	July	August	Sept.	17. Crompton
	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	1 8 15	21. Steel
Lowell 2 and 6	3 1 2 4 7 5 6 2	4 3 5 1 6 7 2 5	3 5 1 6 7 2 5	3 1 6 7 2 5	22. Bourne
Barnaby 10 Barb, Edge 6	13 16 7 11 5 9 4 12 3	14 15 6 13 16 7 9 6	14 15 6 13 16 7 9 6	7 9 6 13 16 7 9 6	23. Beane
Barnby & Brown Edge 6	16 5 8 14 15 6 11 4 12 7 3 9 10 8 15 6	11 4 12 7 3 9 10 8 15 6	7 3 9 10 8 15 6	8 15 6 7 3 9 10 8 15 6	24. Clarke
Barreter	3 8 8 12 9 4 7 5 8	9 4 7 5 8	7 5 8	8 5 8	25. Bury
Bar Edge & Gratton 4	14 9 9 8 7 6 13 12	7 8 13 12	6 13 12	13 12 6 13 12	26. Black

When it happens a preacher does not attend an endeavor must be made to supply

if any other person be present without the organization wishes to speak, the wish of the congregation must be accomplished with.

FASCIMILE OF THE FIRST WRITTEN PLAN
 OF THE COMBINED SOCIETIES.

friends may with humble thankfulness point to the manifest and permanent influence which it is exerting upon the life of the nation and the race as proof of its Divine origin.

While, in 1907, the Bishops and Clergymen of the State Church are tardily speaking of giving Demos a place in the church, of which he ought never to have been deprived, this movement, from the commencement, has been a movement of the people, by the people, for the people. The privileged classes have been and are still, on the whole, its foes. Its frankly democratic system has most effectively attracted "the common people." Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the former a wheelwright, the latter a potter, belonged to the same class socially as Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth. The zeal of its devoted evangelists marks them out as in the Apostolic succession, of a truth, and Mr. Horne rightly describes their religious work as the most striking that the early years of the nineteenth century witnessed. Owing none of its success to men of commanding personality, its progress has been notable, and indeed remarkable. Its resources never included much wealth save the wealth of unquenchable zeal. Because of their love for the souls of their fellows, the evangelists, or to use a truer name, the preachers, both the "itinerants" and "the locals," unhesitatingly, and uncomplainingly went through storm and flood, thro' hunger, poverty, imprisonment

and the most brutal treatment, from those they sought to save. The pioneers were plain, honest, earnest men who daily imperilled their all for Christ's sake. No labour seemed too great for them, and between the "travelling preachers" and "the locals" there was no difference save in the *extent* of their operations and sufferings. William Clowes walked thirty-five miles and preached five times in one day, and William Rowles, of Wootton Bassett, still living and preaching, has risen at three o'clock on a Sunday morning and walked eighteen miles before breakfast to preach at a ten o'clock service, and has then continued his labours till the evening.

Their contemporaries were like them. Long journeys, and little food; often selling their possessions to pay their way; drenched in rain, lost on the road, shelterless at night; such was their common experience. But they won men to God, and that was their exceeding great reward. To quote Mr. Horne yet once more, "In the days of the foxhunting parson they were almost alone in caring for the souls of the villagers, or indeed in crediting them with souls to care for. Their reward was very commonly abuse and indignity and imprisonment. But if faith and love are the sovereign realities, they were men of high rank and noble worth. These plain, blunt, homely, self-educated evangelists of Primitive Methodism belong to the saints and heroes of England."

To-day, there is a Primitive Methodist Church. Through the years, from the disconnected Clowesite and Camp Meeting Societies, to a CONNEXION; through the phases of Circuit predominance and Districtism, the consciousness of Unity has developed. The limbs of the body are now well-articulated, and the life expressed is that of the whole rather than of its parts. Districtism especially died hard, and references to "Connexional" courts and officers are still made in tones of resentment or opposition, which will only cease with the coming of a new generation which has not known Districtism. Standing shoulder to shoulder with the other Free Churches of Great Britain, the Primitive Methodist Church strives earnestly to do its work. Gathering its membership in the twentieth century less exclusively from the poorer ranks of the people, its influence upon national life steadily grows. In politics, its group of ten Members of Parliament are found unitedly on the side of the forces that fight for Freedom for all, in all directions: Freedom in Religion, Freedom from Class Monopoly, and Freedom or Self-government for the Nations. Hugh Bourne, studying Greek "by the help of God" in the harvest field in the dinner hour, is a true type of the Primitive Methodist preacher. For a century mental culture has been diligently, yea, doggedly sought for, both for local preachers and the separated ministry. The now completed Hartley College at Manchester, the largest of its kind in the country, and thoroughly equipped is

alike a testimony to the past and a guarantee for the future. The minds of the trained ministry will everywhere facilitate the training of the local preacher both by stimulus and by actual contribution to his mental equipment. The Temperance Organisation of the Church reports for 1906, some 400,000 abstainers amongst our S. School Teachers and Scholars. The Christian Endeavour Societies number 2,144, with 61,219 Active Members, and 14,796 Associate Members. There are 4,133 Sabbath Schools with 473,837 Scholars and 60,691 Teachers, and with over 96,000 enrolled members of the Bible Reading Branches. The Book Room is a prosperous business concern, with an annual sale of publications of all kinds of over 3,000,000, and a good profit which materially aids certain of the funds of the Church. Chapel property is valued at £4,692,114, and the debt thereon is a little over a million pounds. Chapels number 4,509; other preaching rooms 617. The sittings therein provided are over a million, the number of churches centred therein is 5,126, and the total membership reported to the Conference of 1907 is over 212,000. The Missions of the Church, called Foreign, are found in Fernando Po., in the mainland of West Africa, opposite to which this island stands; and in South Africa, and South-Central Africa, and are prosperous and therefore increasing. The ministerial staff numbers 1,153, of whom 973 are in the active ministry, and there are 16,209 Local Preachers. The Chapel Aid Association, Chapel Loan Fund,

Extension Fund, and Insurance Company promote stability and constant aggression on lines dictated alike by sound business instinct and Christian Faith.

Thus, in the beginning of the Centenary celebrations, the Primitive Methodist Church stands. For it, we thank God. To God, through it, we offer ourselves for the service of man. In it, we stand and feel the thrill of a full tide of life that comes direct from its Divine Founder, and we gaze into the future with every hope that, at the close of the Centenary celebrations, at the close of the actual hundred years of its organised life, our beloved Church will show itself as in the very prime of manhood, alive unto God, clothed with the beauty of His Holiness.

Of the part taken by the Brinkworth Circuit in the making of our Church, and the work it still performs and will perform as a Primitive Methodist Circuit, let the following pages tell.

CHAPTER II.

The Circuit---as it is.

WHERE is Brinkworth? These words passed the lips of a distinguished minister recently when driving through the very middle of the parish. On learning that Brinkworth was a village of only about 1,100 souls, his astonishment was very great, but the contribution given to him for his work in London by the congregation which he addressed was quite satisfactory. His astonishment was surpassed, however, by that of the writer, when, in October 1889, he, then on the Reserve List, came down into "these parts" from Yorkshire. After anxious and vain search on the map for a railway station, he had to content himself with the conclusion that it must be somewhere near Purton, at which place he was to locate. As there was plainly a Brinkworth Circuit there must be a Brinkworth somewhere within it.

To-day Brinkworth has its railway station, on the Badminton route of the G.W. Railway, which branches out from the Wootton Bassett Junction. Its situation was anciently described as 92 mls. from London, 30 from Bristol, 24 from Gloucester, and 23 from Bath. Since the world is shrunk, travel is more common, localities are better known, and it may be described as being 5 mls. from Wootton Bassett, 6 from Malmesbury, and 9 from Swindon, on the main road between the two latter places. The Parishes of Wootton Bassett and Brinkworth join, and a straight line four miles long, drawn between the two chapels at these places almost divides the Circuit in half. A straight line drawn from Ashton Keynes or Cricklade in the north to Winterbourne Bassett in the south, measures about fourteen miles, and this long stretch of country averages about five miles in width.

The nineteen parishes within which the Circuit lies, have an area of about eighty-five square miles. Connexionally, it is bounded on the north by the Cirencester Circuit, east by the Swindon Circuits. To the north-east an extremity of the Farringdon Circuit is in sight, and almost in touch, but an area lying at this point between the five Circuits mentioned, requires, it would seem, to be remissioned by Primitive Methodism. To the west lie the Malmesbury and Chippenham Circuits, and Calne and Marlborough portion of the Hungerford Circuit are on the south.

The country thus indicated has its northern third drained by the upper Thames, and the remainder by the Bristol Avon. The northern ridge of the Marlborough Downs overlooks the whole of the Circuit, with the exception of two villages which lie on the southern side thereof. The rolling country viewed from that vantage ground, is good to look upon. Well-wooded, with innumerable elm trees, in particular, bordering its roads and fields, with peeping cottages, houses and villages, the prospect is one of great beauty. It remains to be said that it contains only two small towns, Wootton Bassett and Cricklade, with monthly cattle markets, and in addition some sixteen parishes varying in population from 154 at Tockenham, to 2,500 at Purton, which has, indeed, the largest population in the Circuit. The whole population within the reach of Primitive Methodist service is about 14,000.

This number, it need hardly be said, is less than it was fifty years ago. Happily, there is every indication that the decline of the villages in this part of Wiltshire, is permanently arrested. If the Land Reforms now before the country are effected, development rather than decline will mark the future. Meanwhile, the rise of Swindon into a corporate town of 50,000 inhabitants, provides a

constant market for the productions alike of the market gardener and the farmer. In addition, some five or six hundred men and boys from the Circuit area find employment in the G. W. Ry. Works there, and are accommodated by workmen's trains to Wootton Bassett and Purton, morning and evening. The farms are now almost entirely given up to dairy productions (milk and cheese), cattle growing, pig rearing, and the requirements of the market gardener, and general prosperity is manifest. Small holdings are common, small landowners are also, fortunately, increasing, and independence of all kinds shows a cheering growth. As to wages, it is here as elsewhere. Some farmers pay, as wages, as much as they can, and employ as many men as they can; others pay what they must, and employ only as many as they are compelled. The former rejoice in common with their "men," the latter grumble and toil till they've hardly time to pray. Farm laborer's wages vary from twelve shillings with house and garden, to sixteen shillings with similar additions. Marvellously thrifty are those who, on the former so called wage, can live in honesty and cheerfulness, and rear a family. Where health is vouchsafed it can be done and is done, but the advent of the gaunt spectre of continued ill-health has marked the doom of thousands, and they have in the past, died, crushed by inevitable poverty. Note the following, dated 1892. A general election is in progress, and our farm laborer is being canvassed by one who seeks his vote

for one who belongs to a "Party of Reform." His reply is: "No, I shan't trouble to vote this time." "Why?" he is asked. "Well, I don't think I shall ever trouble to vote again. I've done my best, and I've given it up as a bad job. Here I am; I get twelve shillings a week, and there are twelve of us to keep, none earning anything but myself, and twelve shillings barely pays for bread for us all. I've tried to be honest but I can't. I've given up trying." His death a year or two after was the result of starvation, shame, and failure, more than anything else. Thank God, times are mending, and for some, they need to mend, too, and that right early. In these days, there is once more hope for the farm laborer. God grant he may not again be disappointed. Meanwhile, let him do as thousands of Primitive Methodist farm laborers have done in the past—trust in God, preach a gospel of Brotherhood in Christ, and fight hard for his rights—his rights of manhood, and what is requisite to sustain it.

During the past decade the prosperity of the people has considerably increased, and in this prosperity Primitive Methodism has fully shared. Its members and congregation are drawn from all classes except it be Lords of the Manor, etc. These, we regret to find, have not yet come under its beneficent influence; but mechanics and labourers, tradesmen and schoolmasters, tenant farmers and

those who farm their own land are blessed by its ministry, and by the Grace of God serve their day and generation. This abundant service is manifest in all directions, for the Brinkworth Circuit Primitives have a mind to work, and are found in their places, all classes of them, in schools and pulpits, in council chambers and in the larger business of national politics.

The number of Churches of all kinds in the Circuit area is fifty-six, made up of twenty-two Primitive Methodist, nineteen Establishment, six Congregational, four Wesleyan, ECCLESIASTICAL and five Baptist. Thus, to a large MATTERS. extent, and especially as regards the Free Churches, "the country is ours." Hereabouts, the "Methodists" are the "Primitive Methodists," while the mother Methodist Church is known as "Wesleens," as it is often pronounced. The twenty chapels and two preaching rooms have sitting accommodation for 2,800 hearers, and save two or three of them, are very well attended.

The Chapels cost £8,800, including the two ministers' houses, and the total debt thereon is £576. The following is the list of places, with some statistics as reported March, 1907:

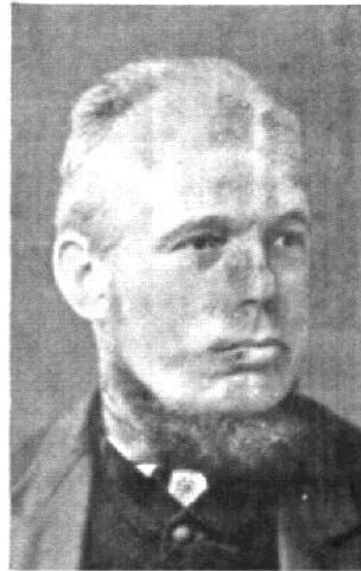
	Church Members	S. School Scholars	C.E. Members	B. of Hope Members
Brinkworth	42	52	22	15
Broad Town	28	30	11	—
Wootton Bassett	72	70	30	44
Tockenham	32	44	—	—
Grittenham	22	27	18	30
Bradenstoke	17	20	—	20
Purton	91	126	30	130
Purton Stoke	76	106	15	57
Hook	15	58	—	19
Leigh	24	83	—	—
Ashton Keynes...	9	—	13	—
Cricklade	27	38	12	—
Goatacre	30	41	23	—
Preston	7	24	—	—
Winterbourne	17	37	—	34
Bushton	23	36	—	—
Lydiard	43	80	23	41
Minety	32	35	—	60
Callow Hill	23	45	—	50
Braydon	25	23	19	30
Broad Hinton	21	28	—	—
Lyneham	9	—	—	—
TOTALS	685	1003	216	530

The workers supporting this are two ministers in active work, with a H.L.P. in winter; two super-annuated ministers, and fifty-seven local

Circuit Stewards.



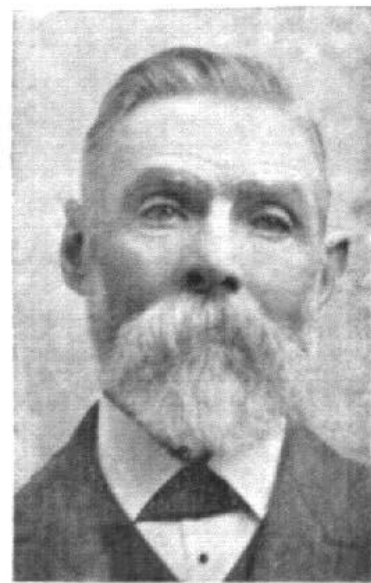
Mr. S. GANTLETT,
1861—1885.



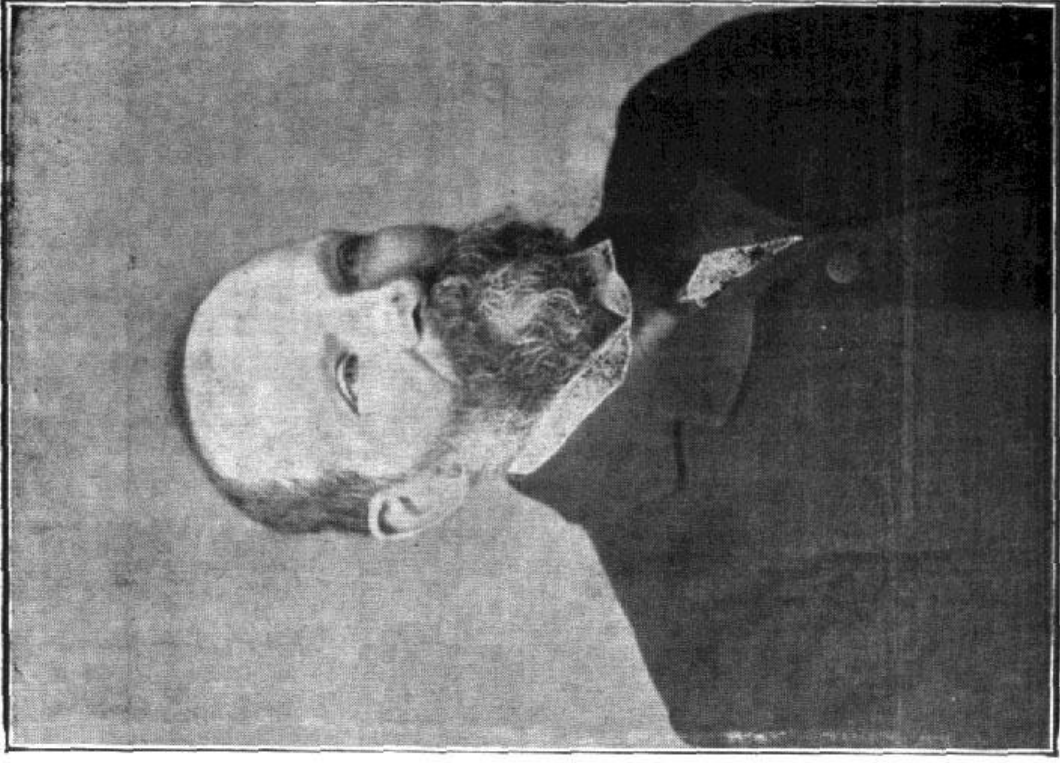
Mr. G. WATTS,
1885—1889.



Mr. C. MASLIN
1889—1902.



Mr. J. SWEEPER
1902—1904.



Mr. J. PARSONS, Circuit Steward 1904-6.



Mr. S. RIDDICK, Circuit Steward.

THE CIRCUIT—AS IT IS.

preachers, and a hundred and seventy-four S. School teachers, together with the local officers of each church. Occasional neglected appointments in pulpit and class, with disappointed congregations and scholars are painful reminders that the work is not done perfectly, but on the whole it is done heartily and faithfully. The Churches are located in excellent strategic positions. The parishes are large, quite a number of them reaching four miles in length, and the Primitive Methodist Chapel is, as a rule, then found placed in its own distinct "neighborhood." These "neighborhoods," and their occupation by our churches are quite a feature of the POSITION OF CHAPELS. Circuit. They prevent undue collision with the State Churches, and avoid anything like overlapping. In the parish of Brinkworth there are three of our churches; in Purton parish three; in Lyneham parish three; and the final and glorious result is that wherever the people's homes are found, a place of worship is within reach; and, now that churches have been established in Broad Hinton, and in the centre of Lyneham, there is not a single "neighborhood," or village, or hamlet within the Circuit bounds beyond the reach of the ministry of our church. Thus the country side is in our hands to serve and to bless in the name of God. The "Primitives" are everywhere, and everywhere the true "Prim." is a blessing.

Now standing, like the Primitive Methodist Church as a whole, firmly consolidated, relatively stronger than it has ever been in its own locality, the Brinkworth Circuit man is proud of his home, and thankful for a record of eighty years of service of almost unbroken success. Of how this has been done, and of the part played therein by some few of God's workers past and present, the following pages will tell.

Meanwhile the Circuit is bending its energies to the task of raising a contribution to the Centenary Fund of the Church of £1000. Such a task it is well able to perform, and is joyfully entering thereinto. When accomplished, this thankoffering will place the Work of God in a still more advantageous position in the Circuit, and it is earnestly sought that God shall so bless and help His people that the attempt shall be crowned with complete success.

CHAPTER III.

Eighty Years Ago.

PRIMITIVE METHODISM has always possessed movement. From its commencement it has, without pause, extended the area of its operations from year to year, and the cessation of labor in one direction has been followed by extension in others, as manifested in recent times by the separation of Australian Primitive Methodism from the British Conference, and the increased extension of our labors in Africa.

By the Conference of 1824, this onward march had reached all the Northern Counties, and strong Churches and Circuits had been established therein.

The Midland Counties had been well gripped, 1824. and southward Circuits were formed at Worcester and Cambridge, in the east at Norwich, and powerful Circuits also in Shropshire. The Membership of the Connexion stood at 33,507, and vigorous

efforts were being put forth in other directions than those just stated. Of special interest to our story is the fact that, in the year named, Societies had been established, though in weakness, at High Wycombe in Bucks, and in London. In 1823, the powerful mother Circuits, Tunstall and Scotter, had opened what was called the Western Mission at Tewkesbury and Stroud, and Blaenavon had been entered in the same year. Apart from these five places, in the whole of England lying south of a line drawn from west to east through Worcester and Cambridge, there was no Primitive Methodism.

With the successful development of that Western Mission our story has nothing further to do, save to note that it swept down the western side of Wiltshire, round the southern third of it, and through Dorset. Bristol was entered, but no secure foothold made therein until it was re-missioned by the Brinkworth Circuit some years later.

Thus, eighty-three years ago from the time of writing, North Wiltshire was untouched by the agencies of our Church. It is ours to describe

THE in this chapter the beginning of a work
WILTSHIRE that has changed the moral face of the
MISSION. country, not only in North Wiltshire, but
thence, in particular, the counties of Berk-
shire, Hampshire, and parts of Gloucestershire, and
Oxfordshire too. The work was begun by the decision

of the Shrewsbury Circuit to send Mr. S. HEATH to open a new Mission in place of one which had been relinquished in Wales. Mr. Heath, who had volunteered for this Mission, first preached at Cirencester. Here he was stoned and generally ill-treated. The country presented itself to his mind "like a field of unripe oats which could neither be cut nor fed," and he decided to pass on to the south, and over the border of the county into Wiltshire. Here he found a field which could be reaped, and he commenced the gathering in of a great harvest of souls. This was not done without opposition, nor without suffering, but, as will presently be seen, the results were immediate and great. Meanwhile we pause to consider the moral and spiritual condition of things, into the midst of which our Missionaries came, "led of the Spirit of God." They found that, from many miles of country, Evangelical Clergymen were entirely absent, and that few Dissenters were to be found. The Wesleyan Methodists had left this region almost entirely alone, probably because JOHN CENNICK, "the Evangelist of North Wilts," had perambulated it, and established

Societies therein at numerous places. But

JOHN CENNICK. John Cennick was Calvinistic in his teaching, allied himself to George Whitefield instead of the brothers Wesley, and the Churches he founded were Moravian, Plymouth Brethren, or Baptist. His soul was of heroic mould, his zeal and success were great, but lack of organisation made his work to be of a temporary nature. He

died in 1755, and from that date, the Societies he had formed in connection with the Moravian settlement at Tytherton, all declined, until the one at Malmesbury alone remained. A Baptist Chapel was built in 1777 at Clack by members of Cennick's family. But though the fruits of this heroic evangelist's toil seemed to pass rapidly away, there is no doubt at all that the good seed sown lived on; and when, seventy years after his death, our Missionaries entered upon their task, that task was easier, the harvest was greater because of Cennick's work. Where he was opposed by blows they generally met with words; or where they were faced with sticks, he had had to face swords. The rioting and cruelty of the Berks and Hampshire Missions afterwards endured by our fathers was not at all approached in the Brinkworth region of Wiltshire, and this preparedness to receive the gospel was surely the result of Cennick's zeal.

At what point in North Wilts any considerable impression was first made, it is difficult to determine, but into this region in the early part of 1824, Mr. Heath came. He found Brinkworth "proverbial for its wickedness; deplorable ignorance, glaring vice, and barbarous practices were predominant." Mr. Petty, who himself was a minister at Brinkworth, says that "such was the notorious wickedness of many of the inhabitants that for years it had been deemed perilous to ride through the village alone, and

from these ruffians considerable persecutions had to be endured." Clergymen of the State BRINKWORTH Church nowadays desire "inside facilities" for religious instruction in schools at everybody's expense; but when our early preachers stood on the village green at Brinkworth, and the crowd sat on "his" churchyard wall to hear, the clergyman of that day objected to granting "outside facilities" to Methodist preachers, and from the graveyard angrily pushed the hearers off the wall, one by one. Many went to hear with their pockets full of stones to cast at the preacher. The preachers shot first with the arrow of truth, the stones were quietly dropped on the road instead of being hurled at the preachers' heads, and the persecutors sought and obtained pardon for their sins. A great moral reform swept over the place, persecution ceased, and the powerful Brinkworth Church was founded.

At Wootton Bassett, into the midst of the crowd gathered to witness the cruel pastime of "backswording," Mr. Heath marched and preached "in

Mr. Petty, in his history, thus describes the practice of "backswording:" "On a certain day in the year, strong, fearless men came crowding into the villages or towns, filling the streets, with large cudgels in their hands, to contend with each other for the victory. With savage ferocity they engaged in the contest, earnestly striving to break the skulls of their fellow-combatants. Fiendish yells, loud shrieks, horrid imprecations, and deep groans rent the air; and mangled flesh, broken bones, and pools of blood met the eye in every direction. In these savage encounters, many were maimed and otherwise seriously injured for life, and diabolical passions were inflamed in their minds."

solemn earnestness on death and judgment, heaven and hell." The constable haled him before the

magistrate, but he was soon back again,

AT and duly finished his sermon. Many in
WOOTTON Wootton Bassett were convinced of sin,
BASSETT and also many from the surrounding
villages. A powerful society was also

formed here, and this town became a very strong centre of our church life. Nearly all the villages round were missioned in addition, of which the chief were Seagry and Brinkworth. The brutal game of "backswording" was quite extinguished by the gentle force of the Gospel of Love, and the praiseful songs of redeemed men were heard throughout the countryside. Many of the men who had carried stones in their pockets for the preachers' heads, became the most devoted local preachers and class leaders of the new societies, and now carried the Balm of Gilead for wounded hearts. Preaching generally "twice a day" the missionaries and the helpers they gathered went on from place to place. In January, 1825, Mr. Heath sent to Shrewsbury for another preacher, and Mr. Vaughan was sent. He was followed soon after by

Mr. Richard Davies, a man of great

RUFFIANISM power and influence. At Malmes-

AT bury the opposition was very violent.

MALMESBURY. People of rank and legal authority encouraged the ruffianism directed against our missionaries, by gifts of drink. The windows of the dwelling-house used for preaching

were repeatedly broken, although the place was duly licensed for preaching. Intestines of beasts and all kinds of filth were flung at the preachers and upon their hearers. For taking a Bible out of the hand of a preacher and dropping it into a pot boiling on the fire, one man was fined *one shilling and fourpence*. In contrast let it be noted that Rev. Thomas Russell, for selling ten pennyworth of literature to a policeman, without a pedlar's license, was sentenced to three months imprisonment in Berkshire. Such was the equality of magisterial justice in those days. At last Malmesbury had to be abandoned, not to be entered again by our Church until re-missioned in the fifties by Rev. G. Warner, of which re-missioning more anon. At Cricklade a society was established, though against strong persecution. For a time the members of society was hardly able to go into the streets about their ordinary business, without being pelted with stones, but the church has continued to this day. "By the end of 1825," writes Mr. Davies, "the mission embraced the following towns :--Malmesbury, Chippenham, Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Cricklade, Cirencester, Calne, and Devizes, and all the villages of note round about, Brinkworth and Seagry being the first of them." In a number of these towns, however, as will be seen, a permanent lodgment had to be effected later. At Seagry, the first Primitive Methodist Chapel was built in 1826. Another was soon built at Broad Town, still standing, but turned into cottages, and known as the Chapel Houses.

Then came a "neat chapel" at Clack in 1828, and in the same year a fourth and more roomy chapel was opened at Brinkworth.

Meanwhile, between the Conferences of 1826-27, the Wiltshire Mission was made into The Brinkworth Circuit, and took over the Stroud FORMATION Branch of the Western Mission. The OF latter Conference appointed five THE CIRCUIT. preachers thereto, with Mr. Heath as superintendent, and including Margaret Cutler. The copy of the first plan printed at the end of the chapter shows some twenty-two places at which societies had been established and regular preaching appointments made. The places now in the Circuit and powerful, which are absent from this first plan, are worth noting, as well as such places as Broad Hinton and Dauntsey, the presence of which will perhaps surprise many readers. The spelling of other places is somewhat disguised, but they will be easily recognised. Further let it be noted that in about three years some forty-three local preachers and exhorters have been raised up, and the usual features of a Circuit's life established. As shown above, these preaching places at this time included "CHAPELS" up to 1828, only four chapels. The OF others were in cottages, rented rooms, SORTS. barns, lofts, village greens, cart sheds, and work-shops. Here the fire and energy of Primitive Methodism was kept burning, men

and women were continually added unto the Lord, and the children instructed, until in March 1828, "this new Circuit employed four travelling preachers" regularly, with extra workers added as thought desirable, and contained five hundred members, beside those in the Stroud branch. This had all been accomplished without the charge of a single penny being placed upon the Shrewsbury Circuit, and in fact the large sale of hymn-books, etc., had actually bestowed considerable financial benefit upon that Circuit. As will be seen later, this feature has always marked the Brinkworth Circuit. She has always been a giver and never a receiver in that direction, and has found her blessedness therein. Strong in herself and strong for others, she has ever been a Circuit to help, to stimulate, and even to rescue those around who have needed her assistance. By the end of Mr. Heath's superintendency, July '28, the following places had been added to the plan, viz, Kington, Highway, Purton, Coate, Liddington, Yoaksey, Bremhill, Wroughton, Copid Hall, Liddiard Millicent, and Haydon Wick. Mr. Heath was succeeded by Mr. John Ride as superintendent, and the advent of this great missionary spirit into the Circuit, was the beginning of a still greater advance in the near future, which must be recorded in a future chapter.