

CHAPTER VII.

Side-Lights from Minute Books, etc.

A GREAT deal can be seen through a small window, and if the windows be well placed and there be enough of them, the whole may be viewed, tho' in parts. We have been taking large views of Circuit Life. In this chapter we look not from the top of the tower, but from the windows thereof, and through the sharpshooters' chink, and take piece-meal views of men and things.

In Primitive Methodism the Quarterly Meeting of the Circuit is of the highest interest and importance.

The appointment of these meetings on QUARTERLY the old plans and in the minute books MEETINGS, has several surprising items for moderns. First, perhaps, we are struck by the inordinately early hour at which the



1. Rev. J. SHEPPARD. 2. Rev. W. HADDOW. 3. Rev. T. KENCH.]
4. Mr. R. GOLDING. 5. Mrs. BLACKMAN. 6. Mr. C. GARDNER.
7. Mr. JAS. RUMMING. 8. Mr. THOS. RUMMING. 9. Mr. J. HITCHCOCK

brethren met, and then at the great length of time required to do the business of the first section of the Quarterly Meeting. Eight o'clock in the morning was the most common time of meeting; seven and nine are quite frequent, and six a.m. was the hour sometimes for commencement. From this hour the meeting went on all day. The preachers meeting was ordered to be closed not later than two p.m. Six hours or more for the preachers Meeting! The rest of the business held the good people till the evening service. Very frequently and for many years the Meetings were held at Mr. Ind's at Whitehill Farm; and at Broad Town, the spare bedroom, prepared for the occasion of course, at Marsdon Farm (Mr. Miles') was the scene of Quarterly Meetings—Hugh Bourne being in attendance more than once. It would be too much to expect "that things were done quickly or always in harmony." "Bread and cheese" dinners were established in 1834, and "Flesh" dinners later, and other stuff was provided that need not again be mentioned. Accounts that have come down from comparatively recent times of these all day Quarterly Meetings show that the brethren had "a good time" at the tables if not in the business, and in such comfortable circumstances, hours passed rapidly.

Orderliness and despatch in business were not easily obtainable sometimes; how to do business had to be learned. Let us peep through the following

"chinks" from the Minute Books. "That there be no private conversation," indicates that more meetings than the authorised one were going on at the same time. "That Bro. T. be allowed till 4 p.m. to finish reading the minutes" shows determination on his part to probe matters to the bottom, tho' it is evident that the Meeting was inconvenienced thereby. Some brethren evidently had a too great desire for the minutes to be read, for it is decided "that the minutes be not read any more till the close of the meeting for anybody"—the business can't be stopped too often or it will never get done. If a preacher neglected to make the collection he had to pay a forfeit, and even "to pay the amount himself."

Secrecy had to be maintained and so no person "shall leave the meeting without permission on pain of forfeiting two-pence." If travelling preachers published any of the transactions of the Quarterly Meeting "so as to cause trouble" they were to be fined five shillings, and local preachers equally wicked were to be deprived of "the liberty of attending Quarterly Meetings for twelve months." Bro. S. or Bro. K. was appointed to collect the forfeits, and there is no trace of Passive Resistance.

Travelling Preachers unfortunately received much attention in those days. Annual Reports had to be filled up giving minute accounts of the T.Ps. The

questions asked were, among others: Is he capable of superintending a circuit? Is he attentive to discipline? Is he a smoker of tobacco?

THE P.M. Is he a long preacher? Is he in debt?

INQUISITION. Is he a peaceable man? etc. *ad nauseam*.

They must have been *very* peaceable to have borne all that, frequently inflicted. The New Testament idea of a Minister is as far from that kind of treatment as the North Pole is from the South, and it is well that it now prevails. "That the preachers be paid their back salaries in books" reminds us at once of the time when the Circuits managed the Magazine and Hymnal sales, and of the self-denial the T.Ps. were ever practising. Town houses "at 2/- a week," with the "young men" living with their supers is another "light" upon those days; four ministers lived in the house where Mrs. P. Webb now lives at Brinkworth. Grand old times! But not a note of complaint is recorded in the Journals of the preachers. The love of Christ filled their hearts, and they and their wives were prepared to "bear all things" for Him. Gifts of "a ton of coal," "a present of 10/-," "an allowance of 13/- for plan-making week," etc., lightened the burden a little now and again.

The supply of appointments in a large Circuit has always been a difficulty. To avoid NEGLECTS. neglects our fathers adopted various devices. In cases of inability to go "a preacher must get a supply"; then, "he must send

word to the Circuit Committee, or "to the Circuit Steward," or "to the Minister," and now we have returned to the first of these, which is the best after all. Punishment was inflicted by ruling "that for every neglect a preacher shall sink one figure on the plan." So every Quarterly Meeting for many years resolves "that Bro. S. sink one figure," "that Bro. S. sink," or "that Bro. S. sink two figures." In Sept. 1858 it was decided that this rule "be done away with," but it still happened for several years that brethren who neglected "sank" or "dropped." At last it came to moral suasion only, to earnest reminders of "disappointed congregations," and to "regret that Bro. S. has neglected the congregation at ——." Truly, if the thought of a waiting congregation does not appeal, nothing more can be done, save what our fathers did, and so in the event of continual neglect "the name of Bro. ——" has to be removed from the Plan.

Cases of "Morals" occupied considerable time occasionally, and among the lighter cases those of "selling beer without a licence," "selling uncustomed goods," "pulling up two stakes from a plantation and being fined by the magistrates," were discreditable to the Church and brought expulsion from MORALS the plan, or from the society, upon the AND offenders. Serious cases were dealt with FASHIONS. quickly and firmly, and every determination is shown, as it ought to be, to keep the standard of Christian Morals high. Sometimes,

doubtless, Morals and Manners or Fashion were viewed as of almost equal importance. The Dress of members and of the preachers troubled the minds of our fathers. Beauty in dress was earnestly avoided. "Let it be plain" was the motto. Concerning ministers, the question was asked annually, "Does he conform to rule as to the style of his hair and dress?" Therefore we have it "That a request be made to District Meeting that preachers be not allowed to wear cloaks." These cloaks got on the nerves of some, for "Bro. Ind is chargeable with having called Bro. Harris' cloak the **Devil's Cloak**, mark that." Bro. Ind continues to rave, and is respectfully asked "to preach the gospel to sinners and not to rail at his brethren;" "if he do not cease to make reflections on his brethren, his name shall come off the plan," and finally, wise resolution, "that W. Ind have liberty to raise a society at Wootton Bassett and train them to dress in his own way." That settled the good brother, for neither he nor his suggested society are heard of any more on this subject. Nevertheless, in spite of his eccentricities, Bro. Ind was a "fine man."

Here is a remarkable resolution of March 1835, "that Bro. W. B. have a note written to him concerning his sideboards." This stands "SIDEBOARDS." alone; we want light here. Was it wrong to wear sideboards, or not to wear them? If permissible, then this brother grew sideboards either too big or too little; which? One

wonders how long they debated this matter, this highly important business. This was seventy-two years ago, but it was matched some thirty years later by the following: "What do you say? J——, S——, wears a moustache? If he do *I'll* not hear him preach." A peep through the door revealed the moustache, and the shaven veteran fled.

A series of items recur from the commencement into recent times similar to the following: "that we rent the house (for preaching) at Kempford at £3 per year." This was an undertaking of difficulty and in Bro. Preston's time it was resolved "that the Brinkworth Circuit pay no more rent for rooms, no more *for ever*." But if rents were not paid, RENTS. grants were made, and a Circuit Chapel Fund formed, to which the Circuit Fund made contributions, and so building projects were materially assisted. This should be remembered by trustees, some of whom have not yet learned cheerfully to contribute to the Circuit Fund, in the time of their prosperity. The matter was dealt with by the Quarterly Meeting of March '44 thus: "that where chapels are out of debt, the chapel money shall be left at the disposal of Quarterly Meeting."

The following miscellaneous resolutions will contribute much to a view of the doings of our fathers. 1834: "that the travelling preachers remain another year with the exception that W. S. be

exchanged for a female!" "That no local preacher be appointed to preach twice in one place" was necessary so that the preacher might get near home for his evening appointment, after taking the distant ones morning or afternoon or both. "That every L. P. bring sixpence, or cause it to be brought, to next Quarter Day in aid of Stratton Chapel" shows another method of helping. 1835: "that a Fast Day be observed on Good Friday;" a frequent order was given for Fast Days, especially "Fasting and Prayer" for a Revival, or for a projected "Mission." "That Bro. S—'s name come off the plan, he having gone to Glory"—sometimes it was "because he has gone to the Happy Land." 1836 gives us: "that the word Rev. be not used by our preachers "REV." in this Circuit on any account whatever," and so we have "Friend Preston," and Mr. Driffield goes one better and gives us "That Driffield" do so and so; the T.P.'s. don't want the Rev. "That Bro. Preston take the Plan," etc., is a reminder that both the printing and the making of the Plan caused "things to be said." In '37 steps had "to be taken to protect female preachers in going to their appointments." "That the preachers kneel during prayer" is a resolution of '39. "Long preaching" was a disease that brought its punishment, but was difficult to eradicate—penitence brought forgiveness. In '43 our L.P.'s were requested not to smoke tobacco as they walked the streets, and later Bro. B. had to "speak to Bro. C.

respecting smoking on the road." It is probable that for a number of years the preachers (T.P. and L.P.) had to be responsible for collections, etc., for it was in 1844 that it was decided "that there be Society Stewards at every place where we can obtain them." As early as '47 this Circuit is sending up "a petition to Parliament against the Sunday drinking and sale of intoxicating liquors." Disturbances of the preacher were not confined to outsiders, for we read

"that Bro. T. be informed by letter

DISTURBANCE. that he acted very improperly in his remarks to Bro. W. while preaching at Christian Malford Camp Meeting." "That Bro. F. be removed from society for contracting debts without a probability of paying them," and "that Bro. R. be requested to desist from baking on Sundays, or he must have no appointments," indicate very close overseership fifty-five years ago. References to "Passports" and "Toll Bars" remind us of the fettered highways of the past. What an admirable minute this is, "that Bro. S. be requested to attend class and take his wife with him." Brethren, please copy! And the next is alike delightful, "that this meeting strongly disapproves of our members playing at the game of Kissing in the Ring"; whoever dared to suggest it we do not know, but a picture of the grave and reverend members of the Quarterly Meeting seriously considering this matter would be enough to move the angels. In 1864, some brother was evidently more than a passive resister against "long

preaching," for he had to be reproved "for taking the Bible away from the pulpit while Bro. J. was preaching." Or was it because Bro. J. was knocking the Bible to pieces? In either case it was a too emphatic and disturbing protest. The "Meal Bible" of early times has passed away by this year, and "all our Societies are requested to make provision for meals for local and travelling preachers." This was better than when W. Rowles and others had to dine on blackberries, and have a blackberry tea after, and supper at home at mid-night. Again we notice the care exercised in reference to travelling preachers; they were treated like Members of the Royal Family; "allowed" or "not allowed" to leave the Circuit by resolution of Quarterly Meeting. Did they take their "Ticket of Leave" with them? It was long before such a thing as a "holiday" was recognised; "a few days to go and see their friends" were given; but no one had holidays in the days gone by except tramps, landlords, civil clerks and such like. All places were not equally liberal in support of the Circuit CLASS FUNDS, and now and again we find such MONEY. a minute as this, "that an inquiry be instituted at S—— relative to the small amount of Class money, etc." These people are dead, but have they no descendants? In '39, Mr. Preston records that "it takes me six weeks to go round the Home Branch of the Brinkworth Circuit, and then I don't go to every place." A reference to "illegal Circuit Committees" in 1876 is a reminder that

people in high places sometimes err; and "Votes of Thanks" to Mr. Gladstone for his work in reference to the Bulgarian Atrocities points to the encouragement that should always be given by Churches on great public moral questions.

Of destructive controversy the Station has been singularly free, but sharp battles have been fought in reference to "division" both of District and Circuit, and to retain its place and name as the "head of the District," the Circuit fought tenaciously. In March

1847 it is resolved "that Brinkworth
 THE keep its place as the head of the
 BRINKWORTH District." The danger was avoided
 NAME. then, but in 1870 the fight waxed hot,
 and the Circuit records "astonishment
 and sorrow that the General Committee proposes or
 advises the division of the district, and sends its
 earnest and solemn protest against such a course."
 These are the reasons for such protest: 1. Because
 this district has missioned most of Bristol District
 and a considerable part of London District, at a cost
 of much toil, suffering, money and prayers. 2. To
 remove the name of Brinkworth from the head of
 this District, we cannot but look upon as an act of
 injustice which we think the Conference will not
 readily sanction. 3. It would be an act of lasting
 ingratitude to the executive of the district. 4. The
 "Break up of the District" would lead to such
 disaffection in several societies in this Circuit as

would lead to disastrous results. In 1876 a Committee was formed "to watch the interests of the Circuit against the attempts made by the Newbury Circuit to change the name of the District," and to this Committee thanks were afterwards given for their successful efforts. Newbury then, once the Shefford Circuit, the daughter of Brinkworth, is the foe! Too bad, Newbury! And so it was decided "that we deem it necessary to enter a complaint against Newbury Circuit for their treatment in this matter." The District was divided in 1893, after a fierce battle and "No Division" victory at the District Meeting held at Brinkworth itself in 1891. The name was retained, and Newbury finally routed in 1896 (tho' she submitted with good grace at last), when the loyal daughter Swindon added its name to that of the mother Circuit of Brinkworth as the District name. 'Twas a glorious fight, and the general verdict is that the right side won in both cases- -the division of the District; and the retention of the name of Brinkworth at the head, were alike in the best interests of the work of God. Let Peace reign for ever!

Copy of a Preacher's Licence.

I, *John Hitchcock*, in the parish of Kington St. Michael, in the County of Wilts, do solemnly declare in the presence of Almighty God, that I am a Christian and a Protestant, and as such that I believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments

as commonly received among Protestant churches do contain the revealed Will of God, and that I do receive the same as the rule of my doctrine and practice.

I, *John Hitchcock*, do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty, King William, so help me God.

I, *John Hitchcock*, do swear that I do, from my heart, detest and abhor and abjure, as impious and heretical that damnable doctrine and position that princes excommunicated by the Pope or any authority of the see of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or any other whatsoever; and I do declare that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state or potentate hath or ought to have any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual within this realm, so help me God.

I, *John Hitchcock*, do solemnly and sincerely declare in the presence of God, protest, testify and declare that I do believe that in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, there is not any transubstantiation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever, and that the invocation and adoration of the Virgin Mary or any other saint, and the sacrifice of the mass, as they are now used in the Church of Rome are superstitious and idolatrous, and I do solemnly profess, testify and

declare, that I do make this declaration and every part thereof in the plain and ordinary sense of the words read unto me as they are commonly understood by English Protestants, without any evasion, qualification or mental reservation whatever, and without any dispensation already granted me for this purpose by the Pope, or any other authority or person whatsoever, and without any hope of any such dispensation from any person or authority whatsoever, or without thinking that I am or can be acquitted before God or man, or absolved of this declaration or any part thereof, although the Pope or any person or persons whatsoever shall dispense with or annul the same, or declare that it was null or void from the beginning.

(Signed) JOHN HITCHCOCK.

Magistrates Signature.

August 10th, 1833.

As in other churches, so here, the musical instrument has had to struggle for admission to a place in the church as an auxiliary to the singing. The new instrument at Broad Town, was found one morning in a pond. How it got there no one knows

to this day, but it got back again.

HARMONIUMS. At another place the effect of a night in the rain was tried, and quite a secession occurred at the same place when it was decided to have an instrument. In other cases the Harmonium was accepted after a first hearing, as "it couldn't do much harm anyhow."

The Circuit has also had its heresy hunt. A controversy theological raged thirty years ago. For the peace of one Society, the "heretics" were turned out, but were gladly welcomed into another, and Messrs S. & H. Westmacott with others became great helpers at Ashton Keynes, Purton Stoke and Purton. We will not blow upon the dead ashes of the controversy; suffice it to say that the Westmacotts and their friends led many to a more intelligent idea of the ways of God among men, and thus to a deeper reverence and love.

We may close this chapter fittingly with an account of a peculiar business transaction. One of the difficulties of Reformers has been that of securing that men shall vote on the merits of a question, instead of playing the game of "Follow my Leader." "Measures not of Men" is the desirable principle, and the Vote by Ballot is one attempt to secure the independent voter from undue influence. In church meetings, to get men to think and act for themselves is right, and especially if a leading spirit is in opposition. A case arose in which the Party of Reform was faced by a strong leader, whom many would blindly follow. On the merits of the case, the Reformers ought to win, and the children of light this time were wise in their generation. A hint to the "super" is enough; a few words of explanation as to

this novel way of voting, and then "Eyes Shut"; "Hands up those who approve of the motion"; and the point is gained, with much secret jubilation.

An account of an Old Time Camp Meeting.

By Revs. J. Ride and S. West.

"Brinkworth and Shefford Circuits, June 15th, 1834, held a Union Camp Meeting on Bishopstone Down, in Berkshire. . . . It has become an Annual Camp Meeting, between the two Circuits. For some time past it has excited great interest in the country for many miles round. Multitudes of people have annually assembled to spend a day in worshipping the God of their fathers, so that now this meeting is become very great, and thousands look up to it with increasing satisfaction. This Camp Meeting has yearly improved both in regard to the congregation and the Divine influence attending the various services; and this present meeting was great indeed, much exceeding any of the former. It was truly delightful to see the friends, between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, coming on foot, and in gigs, carts and waggons, in every direction, singing the praises of the most high God.—For some time we were employed in placing the waggons, gigs and carts (more than 50 in number), in a half circle form.—This being done, we placed the horses on the lee side, and

fixed the preaching stand in the centre, so that the congregation was half bound with a semi-circle of waggons, gigs, carts and horses.

A little after nine o'clock in the morning, we commenced with fervent prayer to Almighty God, a move went through the camp,—faith rose high, grace descended, and the feeling was great. The second sermon produced a very great effect. But afterward, during the morning, the preachers had to contend with a mighty force of the powers of darkness; yet the first going out in companies for prayer was very powerful. But the second seemed to open Heaven. In one of the companies, converting grace was poured out from on high, like a flood.—This company continued permanent, nearly to the close of the meeting; and, during the dinner hour, they went on in their work.

When the time was come to renew, generally, the afternoon services, it was considered proper to suspend preaching altogether, for some time, for the praying had become so powerful, and the influence so great, that the whole assembly appeared more or less affected. Accordingly the preachers all set to work in making large rings in different directions, among the congregations. These rings were made as large as possible, perhaps about 60 yards in circumference, that the mourners and praying people might not be crowded, and that order might be

preserved by giving all an opportunity of seeing every movement.

This plan worked well; as it brought into operation so mighty a force of prayer, and gave an opportunity to bring the mourners together. In these rings the preachers kept walking round exhorting the people; as also preventing the rings from being broken.

And now the meeting presented a scene, of all others the most delightful we ever beheld. It was thought that more than four thousand people were assembled together. Hundreds of pious people on their knees, pouring out their souls to God in mighty prayer. Scores of broken-hearted sinners, crying to God for mercy. Bursts of praises from the different companies, when mourners were set at liberty. Gentlemen and ladies on horseback, and sitting in their gigs with eyes bathed in tears. O! what a shower of grace descended!

Thus the work went on for about two hours; and then, after two short sermons, this glorious meeting was concluded, by singing with uncovered heads, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." From the time the converting work commenced, till it stopped, which was about two hours, we judge, we shall not exaggerate in the least in supposing that more than 50 precious souls obtained a sense of God's pardoning mercy, or were wholly sanctified. To God be everlasting Praise. Amen and Amen."