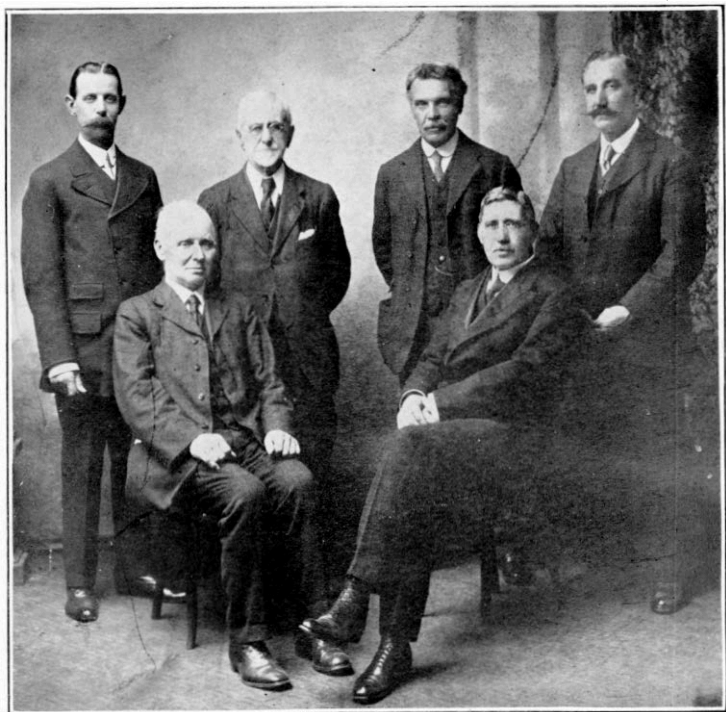


THE HISTORY
OF
TILEHOUSE STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH
HITCHIN

BY
REV. JAMES M^CCLEERY



From left to right -

Standing: FREDERICK GEORGE, MATTHEW H. FOSTER, W. B. CATWARD,
A. E. H THEOBALDS.

Seated: G. W. RUSSELL, REV. J M^CCLEERY.

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Hitchin :

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PREFATORY NOTE.

The occasion of the the publication of this history is the 250th Anniversary of the Church.

The high prices of material and the cost of labour, owing to the continuance of war conditions, make it impossible to produce a better volume.

Many photographs could have been interspersed through the pages, but in the interest of the purchaser they have had to be omitted.

INTRODUCTION.

IN order to set the history of Tilehouse Street Church in the right perspective, it will be necessary to give a brief sketch of the condition of things in England at the time when it was formed.

The year 1660 is memorable as the year when the Commonwealth, established by the genius and energy of Oliver Cromwell came to an end. On his death his son Richard succeeded to the office of Protector, but he was not the man to fill it. It furnishes a notable instance of the failure of the principle of heredity. Missing their great chief, the soldiers became dissatisfied and mutinous, and after five months Richard resigned.

Then followed the invitation to the exiled Sovereign, Charles II, who gladly accepted it and immediately returned to his native land. Great was the joy of the people. But no sooner had the king got into power than the Cromwellian doctrine—that no man should be called in question for differences of opinion so long as he did not disturb the peace of the kingdom—was ignored. The Triers who had been appointed by Cromwell to grant licenses for preaching had allowed both Presbyterian and Independent ministers to fill the parish pulpits. Charles, however, and his advisers were determined that there should be no form of Church government and worship but that of Episcopacy. Gradually the Bishops were re-established, the Book of Common Prayer re-introduced, and penalties the most severe were placed upon those who ventured to use any other form of worship.

Toleration, for the time being, was at an end. The Cavalier Parliament—the Long Parliament of the Restoration—passed Act after Act against those who refused to conform to the practices of the Established Church. First came the Corporation Act in 1661. By

it all bearers of office in corporate towns were compelled to take the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England, also an oath that resistance against the king was unlawful under any circumstances.

Then followed in 1662 the Act of Uniformity. It enacted that all ministers of religion should be ordained by Bishops, and should use the Book of Common Prayer; and it required every minister to declare openly and publicly before the congregation assembled for worship his unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all things presented in the Book, in certain words set forth and in no other. The House of Commons passed it by the small majority of six. Because of it more than 2,000 ministers were ejected from their Churches and their livings. Among them were such godly and learned men as Richard Baxter, John Howe, John Owen, John Flavel, Stephen Charnock, and Joseph Allene. "The Spirit of the Act," says Prof. Stowell, "was that of haughty and vindictive retaliation, beneath the dignity of statesmen and unworthy of the character of Christians."

Long before the passing of this Act, separate Churches had been founded by Baptists, Independents and Quakers, but the ejected Nonconformist ministers gathered numerous other congregations where the principles of Puritanism were cherished apart from the Established hierarchy.

Having gone so far, Charles found it necessary to go still farther. In 1664, what is known as the Conventicle Act became law. It forbade all religious meetings except in accord with the Church of England, where more than five persons were assembled. Such persons so meeting were liable on the first offence to suffer three months imprisonment, or pay a fine of £5; for a second offence, six months imprisonment, or a fine of £10; while for a third offence it was transportation to one of the American plantations for a period of seven years, or a fine of £100.

Still more! In the following year, 1665, there was

added the Five Mile Act. Its object was to compel the ejected ministers, if possible, through fear of starvation, to conform. Those who refused to take the oath were forbidden to reside within five miles of any city or town that sent members to Parliament, or had a Mayor and Corporation, or any place where they had formerly exercised their ministry before ejection. They were forbidden also to keep a school so that they might be prevented from teaching the young their principles.

Such were the laws which a tyrannical King and an intolerant Parliament placed on the Statute Book dealing with Nonconformity and those suffering for conscience sake. What these harsh and unjust Acts meant can never be told. All Dissenters suffered terribly, but especially the Baptists. Great efforts were made by Church and State to stamp them out. The result in general was that very soon "prisons were crowded, families were ruined, and estates were impoverished or abandoned."

Those indeed were days when the religious scruples and conscientious convictions of honest, God-fearing men were put to the severest tests. The wonder is not only that any dissenting cause then in existence survived, but that any new cause of similar character should have come into being. And yet it was in such a time that the Tilehouse Street Church was founded. The date is given as 1669, and the Church records go back to almost that time. Indeed it might be possible to argue for an earlier date!

It has been calculated that from 1660 to 1684 some 60,000 Nonconformists suffered imprisonment, and about 5,000 died there. It was during this period that John Bunyan, that stalwart Puritan and fighter for freedom, lay for twelve long years in Bedford gaol. He declared "he would remain there till the moss grew over his eyes rather than obey the oppressor." Such was the spirit of the men, 250 years ago, who won for us our civil and religious liberties, and who laid the foundations of our Free Churches.

THE HISTORY OF TILEHOUSE STREET (SALEM) BAPTIST CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

FOREGLEAMS.

AT the time of the Reformation, there were Baptists in England. This is evident from the fact that certain laws were passed against them in the reign of Henry VIII, who, we are told, "abhorred and detested their errors, and intended to make examples of those who were apprehended."

They are described as "sundry strange persons called Anabaptist which be lately come into this nation." They were supposed to have learned their peculiar tenets from the Anabaptists of Holland. In the time of the Long Parliament members were imprisoned for advocating Baptist views, but during the Commonwealth they had freedom, and the press teemed with publications on the Baptist Controversy.

As early as 1642 we have evidence of the existence of Baptists in the county of Hertford. At Hemel Hempstead there was a Mr. George Kendall, M.A., who preached and lectured in the parish. Complaint was made by certain of the parishioners that "Mr. Kendall, now a minister in our town, hath from time to time denied to administer the Sacrament of Baptism to our infants when we earnestly desired it." He was summoned before the House of Lords, the accusation being

“ that he doth admit divers men to preach at Hemel Hempstead against the baptizing of infants, which he himself also hath done.”* He was committed to Newgate prison March 14th, 1643, to be kept there during the pleasure of the Lords.

Associated with him was a Mr. Baldwin, who in his preaching “ inveighed much against the baptizing of infants as a carnal ordinance.” At Hatfield in the parish Church he maintained “ that Baptism is not to be administered to infants, because it is not a seal of the covenant of grace.” He too was summoned to appear before the Lords and was sentenced to the prison of the Gate House of Westminster where he was kept for several months.

Evidence is not wanting of a strong Baptist following at Kensworth. In the Parish Church there, one named Edward Harrison was a preacher from 1646 till 1657. “ This Edward Harrison was a Baptist minister of considerable talent, and published some tracts upon the controversy..... Like Daniel Dyke at Hadham, in the east of the county, and Henry Denne of Pirton, Edward Harrison in the west was not only a Baptist pastor at Kensworth ; he was the vicar of the parish, and preached in the parish Church. There he advocated his Baptist views and had a large following.”† The Kensworth Church was strong and its influence extended over a considerable part of Hertfordshire—to Pirton, Hitchin, Baldock and into Cambridgeshire.

At Pirton, which is about three miles from Hitchin, a minister named Henry Denne held the living. He became a Baptist, and in 1642 suffered imprisonment. He preached on one occasion at Hitchin a sermon “ which took all his brethren by the ears.” Presumably it was on the question of Baptism. The sermon was published, and Rev. T. A. Rotherham of Ickleford replied to it in a treatise entitled “ *A Den of Thieves.*” Henry Denne was educated at Cambridge, and when the learned Librarian of the University, Thomas Smith,

* “ Hertfordshire Nonconformity ” (Urwick), p. 210.

† Hertfordshire Noncon. (Urwick), p. 212.

B.D., attacked "the preaching Tinker," Denne published a work in defence of John Bunyan. "You seem to be angry with the Tinker," he wrote, "because he strives to mend souls as well as kettles and pans..... He pleads his mission and commission from the Church at Bedford. It behoves you to prove that either this is false, and that the Church at Bedford is not in a capacity to give such commission. The Tinker at Bedford may have from the Church at Bedford as good a commission as Mr. Thomas Smith has from his Church; and Mr. Thomas Smith hath as yet no better commission to preach than the Tinker of Bedford."

Doubt has been expressed as to John Bunyan being a Baptist. It has been stated, however, that he joined the Church of St. John in Bedford in 1653, when he was twenty five years of age, and that he was publicly baptized in the river Ouse by the minister, Rev. John Gifford. He took a broad view of the question of Baptism and Church membership. In his book entitled *Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism no bar to Communion*, he defends "the godly in the land who are not of our (i.e. Baptist) persuasion." He pleads "not for a despising of Baptism, but a bearing with our brother that cannot do it for want of light." In another of his books, *The Heavenly Footman*, he gives his readers such advice as—"Have a care of thy soul, and that thou mayest so do take this counsel: mistrust thy own strength, keep company with the soundest Christians that have most experience of Christ.....Also do not have too much company with some Anabaptists, *tho' I go under that name myself*. "This is plain enough" adds Dr. John Brown in his life of John Bunyan—page 238.

Not far from Hitchin, near the village of Preston, there is a wood called "Wain Wood." In the days of persecution John Bunyan was wont to preach there, in a small natural amphitheatre still known as "Bunyan's Dell." There crowds of people gathered at the midnight hour, under the canopy of heaven, with the rigour of winter's nipping frost and frowning skies, to hear Mr. Bunyan preach. As there was danger of being inter-

rupted by enemies, friends were stationed at the sides of the Wood to give warning of their approach. Up till within recent years the Baptists of Hitchin held an annual commemoration meeting in the Dell. A chair, which according to tradition, was the gift of John Bunyan is in the vestry of Tilehouse Street Chapel.

Taking all these things into consideration it is quite natural to expect, that in the town and neighbourhood of Hitchin, in those days, there would be people of the Baptist faith, and that a Church of their beliefs and practice should have been founded.

CHAPTER II.

THE TIME OF THE DAWN.

IN the days of Charles II, when the winds of persecution were fiercely blowing, a seed of Protestant Nonconformity was carried on the blast and dropped in what was then called Tyler's Street, Hitchin. With the germination and development of that seed we are now to be concerned. Owing, however, to the dimness of the light through the scantiness of the records it is not easy to trace its early cultivation and progress.

The first definite date is 1669. In the old Church Book of Tilehouse Street there is the copy of a letter dated—London 18th of the third month 1669. It was sent from "the elders of several Churches in and about London to encourage the Church of Christ here" i.e. Hitchin; with regard to two brethren named Waite and Beare. They had been members of the Church in Cambridgeshire of which the Rev. F. Holcroft, M.A.,* was pastor, and for some reason had been "cast out."

They came to Hitchin and it would seem had identified themselves with the Tyler's Street Church, from which subsequently a communication had been sent to London asking for guidance with reference to them.

The letter referred to above came in reply. It was signed by Dr. John Owen, the renowned Independent minister, (who had been Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford during the Commonwealth), and by a George Griffith. It "advised that they—the Hitchin Church—were to honour Mr. Waite for his work's sake

* "He was Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, was ejected from his Fellowship in 1660, and became pastor of a Congregational Church, whose centre was at Bassingbourne, in Cambridgeshire, but whose branches extended to different towns. Associated with him as ministers were J. Oddy, L. Beare, and Mr. Waite." Rev. T. Williams. *History of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church*, page 5.

and encourage him," and adds further "we rejoice in the blessed success that the Lord hath crowned his ministry withal among you."

There is no reference to Mr. Beare.

The casting of them out by the Cambridgeshire Church is referred to in the letter as "a scandal that has come upon the way of the gospel by the precipitate" manner in which it was done, and the writers go on to say—"we are not without hopes that the God of the spirits of all flesh will help them (the members of the Church) to look upon the counsel we have given them as upon an ordinance of Christ which they ought to have a reverence for." Evidently a letter was sent to that Church, in which the "counsel" was given.

This correspondence clearly shows that in 1669 there was a Church in Hitchin; that the two brethren named in it (one of them was a preacher whose work in Hitchin was being blessed) had for some reason not stated been "cast out" from the Cambridgeshire Church; that Dr. John Owen and Geo. Griffith thought there was no justification for such proceeding; and that the Hitchin Church was to continue to revere and encourage them.

What was the character of this Church? Was it Baptist or Paedobaptist? Mr. Urwick in his *History of Nonconformity in Hertfordshire* argues that it was Independent or Congregational. Curiously enough he treats of it under the heading—"An account of the Congregational Church, consisting chiefly of Baptists, meeting near Tilehouse Street, Hitchin." The reasons he gives are (1) that the Cambridgeshire Church, to which he says Hitchin belonged, was Congregational, and (2) that in 1672 two places were licensed in Hitchin parish for Congregational worship. He further states that Mr. Waite was a Paedobaptist, and that "thus far there is no mention of Baptist views." (History p.645).

While Mr. Urwick writes very definitely with regard to this matter, it is, to say the least, very doubtful whether the facts warrant his conclusions. At any rate there is something to be said on the other side. In the

old Church Book there is the copy of a letter sent from the Tilehouse Street Church to the Cambridgeshire Church dismissing five members to their fellowship, and bearing the date April 1677. This, by the way, would indicate that the two Churches were separate. The reason was—"Some scruple of conscience with reference to some things amongst us which yet we account good and godly." What precisely the trouble was is not stated. Isaac James, however, in his *History of the Baptist Church at Hitchin*, says—"This I look upon to be the commencement of the Independent congregation. Mr. John Foster who joined the Church about 1722 always asserted that the Independent congregation began from five (members of the Tilehouse Street Church) who were disaffected to the Baptists." Mr. Urwick's comment upon this is—"It would be nearer the fact to say that the withdrawal of these five shows how greatly the Church at Hitchin originally Congregational and Paedobaptist had declined from its original principles." But in view of John Foster's testimony the comment is hardly justified. His father was connected with the Church for over 30 years, was one of its original members and a deacon, and he himself living so much nearer the time when it happened would be in a position to know the facts.

Whatever the cause of the "disaffection" the Hitchin Church in May 1678 sent a letter to Mr. Holcroft and the brethren, i.e. the Cambridgeshire Church, desiring "reconciliation," and suggesting a meeting, "that if possible we may come together." There is nothing to show what was the result of the overture.

On the authority of Palmer's *Nonconformist Memorial*, it is stated "that the congregation at Hitchin of which Mr. Holcroft was pastor (this evidently was the Independent congregation, still associated with the Cambridgeshire Church) being dismissed to the charge of Mr. Haworth of Hertford, he (Mr. Haworth) used to preach to them in a barn belonging to the other Society in the town." What was the "other Society," and why the existence of two, if there was not some significant distinction?

It is further recorded that "according to an agreement in 1687, they (the members of Mr. Haworth's Church) used generally to go to Hertford on communion days." Without doubt these were the Paedobaptist Congregationalists living in Hitchin. It should be remembered in this connection that John Wilson had become pastor of the Tilehouse Street Church *ten years before* this agreement, and we have every reason to believe he was a Baptist. Since there were two Societies in Hitchin the facts seem to point to one as the Baptist under Mr. Wilson's care at Tilehouse Street, and the other the Congregational Society under the care of Mr. Haworth, of Hertford, originally under Mr. Holcroft, of Cambridgeshire.

In 1688 two members named Edward Hitchin and Henry Fuller were received into Mr. Haworth's Church without a transfer from Tilehouse Street, and two years later in 1690 the members of Mr. Haworth's Church in Hitchin built a chapel of their own in what was then known as Back Street, now Queen's Street.

Such are the historical facts. From them several conclusions may be drawn.

(I) That in the year 1669 there was a Nonconformist Church in Hitchin meeting in Tyler's Street.

(II) That in 1677, at the time when John Wilson became pastor, five members for some reason of conscience, desired to be transferred to the Cambridgeshire Independent Church—Mr. Holcroft's.

(III) That these and some others subsequently became members of the Hertford Church—Mr. Haworth's, and then ultimately formed the Hitchin Congregational Church. And

(IV) That the present Baptist Church meeting in Tilehouse Street, and practising the liberal principle of admitting Paedobaptists into membership, is in the direct historical line with that which met "near Tyler's Street" in the year 1669.

CHAPTER III.

MORNING STARS.

JOHN WILSON. 1677-1717.

ONE of the most notable events in the early history of the Tilehouse Street Church was the settlement of John Wilson as its first pastor.

He was a member of the Bedford Church of which John Bunyan was pastor. A minute appears in the Bedford Church book in the year 1674 stating that "the congregation at Hitchin intreated that the Church would consent to give up our Brother Wilson to be chosen to office by them." Whatever the reason, it was not till 1677 that the consent was given.

In the old Church book of Tilehouse Street there is a copy of the letter transferring Bro. Wilson from Bedford, and bearing the signature of John Bunyan. It reads thus:—

"The Church of Christ in and about Bedford to the Church of Christ in and about Hitchin sendeth greetings

"Holy and Beloved. We, the fellow-heirs with you of the grace of life, having taken your earnest desires concerning our giving up to you our beloved brother John Wilson into serious consideration, with much prayer to God for direction in so weighty a matter, have at last (God having bowed the heart of the Church to consent to what you have both longed, and as we trust much prayed for) granted, and hereby do grant and give up our beloved brother to fellowship with you for your mutual edification and joy of faith..

"We need not as some others to commend him to you, God having before prevented that by commending him to you Himself. Now, God and our Father, and

our Lord Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, make this both our and your well-beloved brother a double blessing to you both in his ministry and membership with you, and also a watchman over you, if God and the Church with you call him thereto. Amen.

“Written for you by consent of the Church and subscribed in their name by your brethren.

JOHN BUNYAN.

SAM FENN, and others.

1st Month, 1677.”

When this letter was written it is evident the Hitchin Church was contemplating inviting John Wilson to be their minister. Most likely he came for a few months on trial, for the next entry in the Church book is as follows:—

“1st of fourth month 1677. Brother John Wilson gave in his answer unto the call that the Church before had given him to the office of pastor to serve the Church in that relation as God should help him, which he accepted before the congregation.”

The 28th of the same month was appointed a day for prayer to God, and brother Wilson was further set apart to the office of pastor over the congregation. Among those taking part was Sam Fenn representing the Bedford Church. It would be interesting to know why John Bunyan himself had not been able to be present on such an occasion. It could only have been a few months previously in 1676 when he was released from his second imprisonment.

It should be regarded as no small honour that belongs to Tilehouse Street Church that its first pastor, like the Immortal Dreamer, suffered imprisonment for the sake of his faith. It shows his courage, his firmness, and his fidelity to our Nonconformists principles when he spent, it is said, seven years in the county gaol at Hertford—“In time of persecution” says Isaac James, “his goods were once carried into the market place to be burnt, but it was prevented.”

Perhaps it was his absence through imprisonment that such an arrangement was made as is recorded in a minute dated Oct. 22nd, 1680 which is to the effect that "The Church having come together at Preston did agree that Bro. John Thorowgood a member of the Church at Pirton should preach among us sometimes when we break bread on the Lord's day, and on the week day either once a week or once a fortnight."

In the house of Bro. Field, who lived in Hitchin, the Church assembled and drew up a covenant in the year 1681. Among other things they agreed and promised, "the Lord assisting to follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another, that so living and walking in love and peace, the God of love and peace may be with us. Amen. Signed by John Wilson, John Foster, etc.

Until this time the meeting place of the Church is spoken of as a "barn," but in May 1692 the first chapel was built. It stood farther back from Tilehouse Street than the present chapel, and cost £250. The names of the contributors, with amounts contributed are recorded in the Church book. Part of the money was raised in London—£74, and the remainder in the country. For the ground Thomas Hollis of London gave £15. John Foster gave £3; Agnes Beaumont, whose tablet may be seen in the grave-yard,* gave 10/-, &c. &c. Account has been kept of the money paid for various parts of the work. For instance—"paid Mr. Bradley for building house £77 1 0; for building the wall and the well £32 11 1; for the baptizing place"—proof that it was a Baptist Church, £10 13 7½. There are various other items, e.g. "timber," "iron," "glass,"

* The Tablet bears the inscription :—

"Agnes Beaumont, of Edworth, Bedfordshire (afterwards Mrs. Story), became a member of the Church at Bedford, under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Bunyan. Died at Highgate, Nov. 28th, 1720, aged 68 years. And being brought to Hitchin by her own desire was interred in the adjoining burial-ground.

"This stone was erected by subscription in 1812 in respectful remembrance of a person so justly celebrated for her eminent piety and remarkable suffering."

“ windows,” “ doors,” “ sawing,” “ carriage of bricks” &c. The present iron gate in Tilehouse Street is the original.

By reason of weakness and inability, through age and infirmity, it became necessary to find some assistance for Mr. Wilson in his ministerial work, and on Sept. 29th, 1697, an invitation was sent to Ebenezer Wilson, son of the pastor, to become his assistant. Evidently this was declined, for, in June, 1702, a second invitation was sent, but again the reply was in the negative. In 1704 an invitation was given to a Mr. Wills to come and assist, the Church promising to “ raise for his maintenance what they could,” but this also was declined.

Two brethren named James Gregory and Edward Hurst were appointed “ ruling elders ” in 1698. The latter owing to his great piety was known as “ holy Hurst of Hitchin.” Going through the market-place when mountebanks were being exhibited he would not turn to look at them. On being asked to stop and watch he answered—“ Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.”

Edward Foster in his *Brief Outline* states that John Wilson laboured under many infirmities, and for the last twenty years of his life was often incapacitated. For several years, through a paralytic stroke, he had to be conveyed to the chapel in a chair. He died about the year 1717 at Bull Corner (corner of Queen Street and Bridge Street), and was buried near the pulpit, beneath the table pew, in the Old Meeting House.

From his settlement as pastor to the Glorious Revolution, 1688, the Church was much harassed by persecution, and the members suffered much for conscience' sake. His ministry covered a period of about 40 years.

In association with John Chandler, Mr. Wilson edited the first folio edition of Bunyan's Writings. He wrote the preface and a character sketch of Bunyan.

JOHN NEEDHAM 1709-1743.

Still seeking an assistant for Mr. Wilson, in Sept., 1705 the Church sent an invitation to John Needham

then a student attending an Academy at Attercliffe, Sheffield. The pastor of the Church at Sheffield testified that "he gave good satisfaction of the grace of Christ in him, and walked becoming the Gospel in sobriety, gravity and sweetness of temper, with soundness in the faith and orderliness of behaviour."

The invitation was accepted, and the young student came "to assist." After four years, in 1709, he became co-pastor, having been unanimously requested by the Church. In order to meet the wishes of those who differed from the practice of the Church in the ordinance of Baptism it was agreed—"that those who differ from us if they accept Mr. Needham as joint pastor should upon all occasions practice their judgment and conscience without any opposition or reflection; that Mr. Needham should exchange with any pastor of another Church whom they should desire to come and baptize their children, as if they had a pastor of their own; that the charges of the exchange should be borne by the Church; and that in case the Church become so numerous there should be occasion for another pastor Mr. Needham be willing that they should have one of their own judgment."

Under his faithful and devoted ministry the Church increased much. In 1715 the Chapel was enlarged—a gallery being built, the cost of which was met by Mr. Hollis. Mr. Needham was born at Ware 1685. He was a man of extraordinary gravity. "I have heard," writes Isaac James, "my mother (who was his daughter) say she never saw him laugh above twice in her life." He was affable, however, proficient in astronomy, and something of a poet.

After a ministry extending over 37 years he entered into "the rest that remaineth," February 10th, 1743, in the 58th year of his age. He died at Bull Corner in the same house as John Wilson and was buried near to him in the Old Meeting House. The grave is marked by brick work on which there is a large flat stone with the following inscription:—

"Here lies the remains of the Revd. and learned

Mr. John Needham, the late worthy and useful pastor of this Church.....

“ He was favoured with a descent from religious parents who very early instilled into him the principles of true piety, which under a Divine blessing on younger years, produced in the following parts, those constant and peaceable fruits of righteousness, which even his childhood seemed more than obscurely to presage.

“ Soon after he had passed his 20th year, he received an invitation from this Church to assist the Revd. Mr. Wilson, and about 4 years after was chosen co-pastor. His sentiments of the sacred and solemn obligations of the ministerial function were always such that no proposals of temporal advantages, appeared in the least to shake his noble and laudable resolution of not deserting his beloved flock.

“ His eminent example as minister, husband, parent and friend, his natural and acquired abilities, his large share of spiritual gifts and graces, which never discovered themselves but under a veil of humility and especially his patience, under a lingering indisposition, are not for this stone to tell, nor need they be mentioned here, when they are written in the hearts of his affectionate people and mournful relatives.”

During John Wilson's ministry the number of members connected with the Church seems to have been just over 200, and during Mr. Needham's ministry from the time of his becoming co-pastor, about 135 were added.

The following Hymns, composed by
John Needham, have been kindly supplied
by Reginald L. Hine, Esq.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

PSALM XC., 1, 2.

GREAT GOD ! with awe and with delight,
Our souls attempt an arduous flight ;
Thee Great Eternal ! we adore,
Who art that see that know no shore.

Before the azure sky was spread,
Or the huge mountain rear'd its head,
Or golden sun was plac'd on high,
Thy throne was Thine eternity.

Days, weeks, months, years and ages too,
Are but a moment in Thy view ;
To Thee, whose eyes all time survey,
Thousands of years are as one day.

Thy days did ne'er beginning know,
Thy years no changes undergo ;
To Thee the first, to Thee the last,
Alike the present and the past.

Nature and time shall both expire,
And earth and seas be lost in fire ;
Sun, moon and stars, shall lose their light,
And all be one continuous night.

But Thou in light hast Thine abode,
And art to everlasting God :
Let earth and seas and skies be gone,
Thy endless ages must run on.

THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE INSCRUTABLE.

PSALM XCVIII.

LORD ! 'tis beyond the powers of sense
To sound the depths of Providence ;
Born but of yesterday shall man
Presume the ways of heaven to scan ?

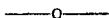
Not to Thy angels round Thy Throne,
Thy secret will is fully known ;
Thy ways, well pleas'd they still explore,
And wish and strive to know them more.

Can then our feeble reason sound
Those depths where angels' thoughts are drown'd ?
Shall our presuming pride define
The things beyond an angel's line ?

Shall man of providence complain,
Or teach his Maker how to reign ?
Shall he usurp th' imperial rod ?
And at his bar arraign his God ?

My God, my King, I will adore
Those depths I cannot now explore ;
Let clouds obstruct my feeble sight,
I know that all Thy ways are right.

Patient I'll wait for that blest day
When I shall drop this house of clay ;
And see, and sing as angels do
Thy ways all holy, just and true.



HUMAN LIFE SURVEY'D.

WELL—'tis a dull and tedious round
Which we poor mortals tread ;
To eat and drink, to toil and sleep,
To rise and go to bed.

To be still vex'd by joys delayed
Or by fruition cloy'd ;
To be deceiv'd and find the cheat
And still to be decoy'd.

To sweat and pant quite out of breath,
Spent in the fruitless chase ;
And still from day to day run on
And ever love the race.

To taste the meaner joys we sought,
And find no true content ;
And when these transient joys depart,
Their absence to lament.

Can this be life, which to enjoy
We wish for longer breath ?
Shall we such life a blessing call,
And dread the name of death ?

Life, sure in wisdom's sacred style,
Is a diviner thing ;
Its source is not from earth, but flows
From a celestial spring.

To love and fear Thy Name, my God,
And do Thy holy will,
This life of angels and of saints
Shall my best hopes fulfil.

CHAPTER IV.

SILVER STREAKS.

SAMUEL JAMES. M.A., 1743-1773.

ABOUT a year before the death of Mr. Needham it became necessary for the Church to consider the appointment of an assistant. A suitable one was found in Mr. Samuel James, a member of the Church at Hemel Hempstead, whose father was the minister there. In the Church book he is spoken of as "a very deserving and hopeful young minister."

At a Church meeting held on Feb. 20th, 1743, a few days after Mr. Needham's death, a day of humiliation and prayer was set apart for "the members of the Church—especially the brethren—to humble ourselves before God for our sins, and especially the Church's sins, and to fervently pray God to give us His Holy Spirit to direct and guide us from time to time in our consultations until in due time He makes a clear way to the choice of another pastor, whom He would have settled among us."

Following this on March 6th, 1743, the Church unanimously agreed to request Mr. James to continue with them for a time; also that the Church should be continued on the same principles—viz. to receive members "saints as saints notwithstanding some small differences in circumstances, so that they were all under the profession of Baptism one way or the other—for that is essential." Again a day of humiliation was appointed for confession of sins, and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order that they might soon be settled with a pastor.

As the Church at Hemel Hempstead had been so kind in granting Mr. James "the younger" to supply at Hitchin in the time of necessity, they were further asked to permit him to supply "three Lord's days in a month for three months to come"; and it was hoped by that time God in His providence would direct them how to act that would be most for His glory, and the peace and prosperity of the Church.

On June 9th, 1743, the Church came together for prayer and "thanksgiving that God had inclined Mr. James readily to accept the call to the arduous work of pastor, and to pray that He would be pleased to double the portion of His Spirit upon him to fit and capacitate him therefor." The Church had had trial of Mr. James for several months, he had kept the members together, his preaching had been blessed to the edification of believers and the awakening of others, and in due course his dismissal was sought for from his father's Church. The transfer was granted in the most cordial and affectionate terms, and with earnest prayer that his ministry might be greatly blessed.

The following month, July 13th, he was ordained, and thus began a long and fruitful ministry. At that time the Church numbered 108 members—of whom 9 dated back to Mr. Wilson's time, and had remained all through Mr. Needham's ministry.

In 1744, Mr. James married Mary Needham, the daughter of his predecessor, by whom he had eleven children.

In connection with his pastorate there were several items of interest which are here given:—

He gave the right hand of fellowship to 195 members—29 of whom were received in the year 1771—a fruitful year. In the Church book the note of praise is sounded thus, "Blessed be God for such a harvest of souls."

The new Burying Ground in Tilehouse Street was purchased in 1752, at a cost of £142. The list of subscribers towards the purchase with the amounts given has been preserved in the Church records.

Mr. Urwick states that in the year 1751, the Dissenters of Hitchin were denied the privilege of sending their children to the Free School unless they conformed. The matter was taken to the Attorney General, who gave his opinion in their favour, with the result that the privilege was restored.

The following minute was passed in 1752, entitled "An Act concerning Pews and Places"—

"That any person having or claiming any right or property in any Pew or Place in the said Meeting-House shall not have any power hereafter to sell, give, or dispose of such after their death, or after their removing from or forsaking the said Meeting-House or public worship therein (except only to those of their family as shall continue to attend the public worship of God there). But when all the family are deceased or removed or have forsaken the public worship of God in the aforesaid Meeting-House it shall then be in the power of the Church to dispose of such Pew or Sitting to whom they shall think fit."

In 1756 Mr. James had a controversy with the Rev. Roe, a clergyman at Stratford, Beds., upon Dissent.

In 1760 he published a *Life of Mrs. Churchman*.

In 1762 the Chapel was enlarged at a cost of £160.

From Rhode Island College, U.S.A. he received the Hon. degree of M.A. in 1770.

During Mr. James' ministry both Church and congregation increased much. "He enjoyed for many years an uncommon share of health, but towards the end of 1764 he was seized with a threatening disorder which chiefly affected his spirits. From this he recovered and came forth with fresh vigour, though not without symptoms of natural decline. In the summer of 1772 he was quite low, but revived in some measure by means of a journey. A relapse, however, came again, and after a few months his soul joined the celestial choir on Lord's day morning Aug. 22nd, 1773.

In his latest moments the spirit of adoption was upon him. He frequently called on God under that

endearing character 'My Father.' The last words he uttered, and with no small emphasis were *Victory! Victory!*—(Quoted from the Church Book.)

Mr. James died at Bull Corner in the same house as both his predecessors, aged 57, and was buried in a vault adjoining the Old Meeting House. The Church and congregation erected a handsome tomb to his memory.

“ This monument, sacred to the memory of the

Rev. SAMUEL JAMES, M.A.,

is erected to transmit to posterity what cannot be erased from the memory of those who knew him—that he was an affectionate husband, tender father, faithful friend, exemplary Christian, and able minister of the Gospel.

For thirty years he humbly, cheerfully, disinterestedly, and successfully served this Church as their pastor, and, amidst the tears of a sorrowful family and afflicted people, he sweetly fell asleep in Jesus, Aug. 22nd, 1773, aged 57 years. Also here lies interred Mary, his wife, daughter of the Rev. John Needham, formerly pastor of this Church. In every relation she shone with peculiar lustre, and after a long illness, borne with exemplary patience, died in London, Nov. 12th, 1779, aged 65 years.”

THE PURPLE ON THE HILLS.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN GEARD, M.A., 1775-1831.

AFTER the death of Mr. James, the Church "set apart one hour every Lord's day for prayer," and appointed "some other days for fasting and prayer, that they might seek unto God for that wisdom which is from above to direct them to that which may be for His own glory and for the Church's prosperity."

Certainly a wise proceeding. If Churches were to adopt the same plan there would be fewer mistakes in selecting pastors.

John Geard, a student attending the Bristol Academy, was invited to supply the pulpit for seven Lord's days from Jan. 16th, 1774. At the end, and before returning to Bristol the Church gave him a unanimous invitation to take the oversight thereof for six months. He accepted the invitation, and in doing so spoke of his desire to be made "the instrument of promoting the Redeemer's Kingdom, of quickening, comforting and edifying your souls, and of converting multitudes unto God."

In June of that year he commenced his six months ministry, which proved to be much to the Church's satisfaction, and so blessed that the members asked him "to take up the pastoral office." The letter was signed by 46 of the male members. In accepting the invitation he wrote—"I esteem it a great honour to succeed such worthy and eminent men as have presided as pastors over you, and to be connected with a Society so respectable as you are." He agreed that the Church should be continued on the same plan of open communion and of

receiving Paedobaptists into membership. The Church agreed that he should have "four Sundays in the year to spend where he pleased," and also "if any difference shall arise betwixt any of us as individuals or families, we will not require Mr. Geard to interfere in such differences or be concerned in the making them up."

Mr. Geard was born at Montacute, near Yeovil, and was a member of the Church there. In due course a letter was sent asking for his dismission to Hitchin. When it came he was welcomed into the Church as a member on Lord's day, April 9th, 1775. His father, a member of the Yeovil Church, being at Hitchin, read the letter. On the 13th he was solemnly set apart to the pastoral office; Mr. Hugh Evans of Bristol Academy gave "the charge" from 1 Tim. iv. 15, and Mr. R. Robinson of Cambridge offered the ordination prayer. Other ministers who took part were Mr. Ryland of Northampton, Mr. Symonds of Bedford, Mr. Jones of Hempstead, and Mr. Gill of St. Albans.

Days of fasting and prayer were occasionally held to seek Divine help in various matters. Indeed such were a special feature in the Church's life throughout Mr. Geard's long ministry. A summary of the occasions may be interesting.

(1). When the time came to elect new deacons a day of solemn fasting and prayer was appointed.

(2). When arranging for messengers to converse with candidates seeking membership, and with members "walking disorderly."

(3). Again and again during the years Britain was at war with America, National fast days as they were called, were held. Sometimes the Church arranged them on its own initiative, but generally they were appointed by order of the King, George III.

(4). The meeting of Parliament in 1781 was the occasion of one.

(5). A day of fasting and prayer was observed "on account of our beloved Sovereign, whose circumstances at that time were extremely melancholy."

On these special occasions it was customary for the Tilehouse Street Church and the Queen Street Church to unite. The meetings were held alternately in each Chapel; the minister of the visiting Church preached the sermon; four brethren—two from each Church, engaging in prayer.

(6). In July 1789 both congregations came together for prayer on account of the approaching harvest. It rained with little intermission for above five weeks, the hay harvest being much injured, and the circumstances of the corn being extremely critical. Later in the year a meeting was held "To return thanks to God for having appeared in a remarkable manner to have answered prayer, extremely favourable weather having set in, and the corn was a great crop."

Year after year there are notices in the Church Book of meetings for prayer and thanksgiving with reference to the harvest.

(7). United meetings, called "extraordinary" were held from time to time to seek God in the use of means for the revival of religion.

The Church kept in touch with events happening in the nation's life. In 1788 the centenary of the "Glorious Revolution" was observed, and a collection (£1 15 0) taken in aid of building a memorial pillar at Runnymede. The memorial scheme, however, fell through, and the Church applied the collection to another and more useful purpose. To a Society formed to oppose the Slave Traffic on the West coast of Africa the Church gave support by means of a collection on the ground "that this nation which boasts so much of liberty may not expose itself to the reproach of the inconsistency as well as the cruelty of enslaving others."

There was a resolution passed in 1781, that "no one who is not a subscriber to the Burying ground, and who does not belong to the Church nor the congregation should be permitted to be buried in the ground without 5/- being paid if the person be poor; 10/6 if in middling circumstances; and £1 1 0 at least if rich." Such as

belonged to the Church were to have full liberty to be buried without anything being paid except for digging the grave.

The following is interesting—"Some misunderstanding having taken place relative to singing it was agreed that no more new tunes should be introduced in public worship without the consent of the Church; also that there should be liberty to sing the tunes which had been introduced within some few years past, to which the Church had not before objected." Later in 1795 "permission was given for some particular metres or other new tunes to be introduced and continued to be sung occasionally unless the Church should object to them, in which case they should be discontinued."

The Church has always taken a deep interest in Missionary work in Foreign lands. In 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed. There is a record in the Church book stating that Mr. John Thomas and Mr. Wm. Carey sailed for India to preach the Gospel to the heathen in the year 1793, and that in the following year on Nov. 30th and Dec. 7th, collections were taken for the Society which amounted to £11 14 10. A monthly missionary prayer meeting was arranged, and also a special meeting once a quarter. There have been few (if any) years since that the Society has not been remembered by the Church.

In consequence of the wars, the serious state of things in the country in 1800, is indicated by a record on March 12th, viz.—"the excessive dearness of the necessaries of life, rendering the circumstances of the poor very trying." Wheat was sold in Hitchin market at £4 per load of five bushels, and the quarter loaf at 15½d. Later the price of wheat went up to £5; £5 9 0, and £5 15 0, and the loaf to 1/6 and 1/8; while in London the loaf was 1/10½. It was feared there would not be bread enough to last till the harvest.

On June 2nd, 1805 the victory of Nelson at Trafalgar was celebrated by a public thanksgiving, and the collection taken for the wounded sailors amounted to

over £13. In the same year the 20th Anniversary of the united meetings with Back Street was also celebrated, thus showing the cordial relations existing between the two Churches.

It was during Mr. Geard's ministry that the Tilehouse Street Sunday School was started. His sister-in-law, Miss Bradly, who was the moving spirit, tells the story in her diary. A prayer meeting was held on March 27th, 1812 to seek divine guidance in the matter. Difficulties were in the way, but they were surmounted. Teachers were forthcoming, and on May 24th the school commenced with 18 girls and 4 boys in attendance. The following year when the first anniversary was held, the numbers had increased to 66 girls and 44 boys. The collection realised £10. "It was a day long to be remembered."

When Mr. Geard commenced his ministry the membership numbered 156. The names are all recorded in the Church Book. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. Samuel Bradly, of Maidencroft, Gosmore, July 13th, 1778, and had several children. He continued his ministry till the end of 1829, when he agreed to have an assistant. Mr. Joshua Gray, a student at Bristol, came on probation for six months, at the end of which he left. When eventually Mr. Geard resigned, the Church unanimously granted him an allowance of £70 per annum for the remainder of his life. He was remarkable for the strength of his constitution, and throughout the whole of his long ministry was never prevented by illness from attending to the duties of his office on the Sabbath day.

He published three volumes entitled "The Beauties of Henry": a selection of the most striking passages in the Exposition of that celebrated Commentator.

"As a preacher," says Edward Foster, "his talents were not superior, but as a Christian Minister he was a living epistle, known and read of all men. He was a most affectionate pastor, living in the love of both old

and young, and held in high esteem by all whether Churchmen or Dissenters. It was said of him 'there is not a person living with fewer imperfections than Mr. Geard.' He manifested that humble childlike simplicity, that gives lustre to the Christian character. He was a man of peace, and his end was peace."

On Nov. 20th, 1838, in the 89th year of his age he breathed his last, having been pastor of the Church 56 years. He was laid to rest in the Burial ground behind the Chapel, where he himself buried more than 800 persons, men, women, and children. His funeral sermon was preached by Rev. Thos. Morell, of the Academy, Little Wymondley, to an immense crowd, who came to show their respect to so venerable and noble a character.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BROADENING LIGHT.

THOMAS GRIFFIN, 1831-1840.

MR. GEARD having become unable, through age and infirmities, to discharge his pastoral duties, the Church decided to invite the Rev. Thomas Griffin, of Prescott Street Church, London, who was desirous of removing from the Metropolis, to preach for a few Sabbaths. He came, and the result of his visit was a unanimous invitation to undertake the pastoral oversight of the Church.

The letter of invitation was written by John Crawley, one of the deacons, and bears the date July 12th, 1831. He states that at the Church meeting "complete unanimity prevailed—not a dissentient voice." Further "that in the event of your return Mr. Geard has fully made up his mind to resign." The salary offered was £100 a year during Mr. Geard's life, with something like £30 more at his decease.

After a reply from Mr. Griffin "a more formal invitation" was sent on July 17th, in which he was informed that "our venerable and highly esteemed minister, Mr. Geard, for more than 56 years pastor of the Church.....having concluded totally to resign the pastoral office among us, we request you (having for some weeks laboured among us with general acceptance and some apparent success) to take the sole pastoral care over us." The letter was signed by John Crawley and Edward Foster, deacons.

On July 19th, Mr. Griffin wrote accepting the invitation. "I have never been a wanderer," he states, "but may want a fortnight, *once in a year* to visit my

friends, unto which you will probably have no objection. The interests of a Church and a Pastor are the same, and I resolve to do all I can to serve your best interests—to preach and pray and act so that with the Divine Blessing I may be very useful. Mr. Geard has acted well, and I esteem him much, and will treat him well as he deserves to be treated.”

The letter of dismissal from Prescott Street Church bears testimony to their “regard for their late pastor—to his faithful and zealous exertions in the discharge of his ministerial duties for a long course of years, and for the uprightness of his demeanour; and also to acknowledge the high degree of respect we bear to Mrs. Griffin for her christian and prudent conduct.”

One of the first things Mr. Griffin arranged was to have a lecture on Thursday evenings, alternately, with the friends at Back Street, he undertaking to preach once a fortnight at his own place. That evidently was the beginning of the present Thursday prayer service. Next he pointed out the necessity “to clean, repair, and improve this place of worship,” and that suitable persons be employed to do the work.

How was the work to be paid for? The pastor and deacons were to obtain donations, and “the friends generally were requested to use influence, each one as it may be possessed, to gain pecuniary aid for the object proposed.” The painting and the improvements were carried out in Feb. 1834, under the supervision of the deacons.

At a meeting held in June, 1840, a statement was read to the Church by Mr. Griffin having reference to his financial arrangements with his people. He did not actually resign, but he hinted as much unless there was some improvement in his circumstances. The matter was fully considered by the Church, with the result that Mr. Griffin sent in his resignation forthwith. Previous to this some difference had arisen between him and some of the deacons, which, however, was amicably settled.

During his pastorate, which extended just over nine years, the Church continued to increase, some 80 members having been added, most of them by the public confession in Baptism of Jesus as their Saviour.

JOHN BROAD. 1841-1857.

The interval between the resignation of Mr. Griffin and the coming of his successor was only a few months. Several ministers who had been recommended were invited to preach "with a view," but none of them met with unanimous acceptance.

Just then, however, the attention of the Church was directed to the Rev. John Broad, who had resigned the pastorate of the Kensington Baptist Church, which he had held for ten years. In many ways he was an extraordinary man. At what he believed to be the intimation of Divine providence he gave up a business that was yielding him more than £700 a year, to become pastor of the Church at a stipend of £80 per annum. "But," says the writer of a small Memoir, "this disinterestedness merits reward, the only reward he sought—he was rich in usefulness, and in the prosperity of the little community amongst which he laboured. The annals of the Church present an uninterrupted series of conversions. Twice the building had to be enlarged, and it was with no ordinary regret on his part or on theirs that in 1841 he parted with his friends at Silver Street, Kensington, to become pastor of the Church at Hitchin."

Without delay he was invited to supply the Tile-house Street pulpit for five Sabbaths. This he did, and met with such acceptance that at the expiration of the period he was "unanimously, respectfully" and "affectionately solicited to accept the pastorate of the Church." In the letter accompanying the resolution it was stated that "as the all wise and gracious providence of God has been so strikingly manifest in connection with your first visit to this place, and since it has pleased Him in a remarkable manner to favour us with His presence and blessing in our public assemblies, so that astonishing

results have been already produced, we have solid reason to conclude that if you should be called to labour stately among us, the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us."

In his reply dated Feb. 25th, 1841, Mr. Broad noted the "affectionate confidence which the resolution discovered," "the cordiality of my reception by the brethren," and "the manifestation of the Divine presence enjoyed at Hitchin," all indicating "the hand of a Gracious Father distinctly marking out the bounds of my future habitation and sphere of ministration." In yielding to the wish of the Church he disclaimed all mercenary motives. Had "filthy lucre" weighed with him he would have declined the suggestion of the pastorate forthwith.

From the outset, the seal of the Lord was set upon Mr. Broad's ministry. In every way he proved himself a worthy successor of the gifted and godly pastors who had preceded him. Under his devoted leadership and inspiring preaching the congregations increased, and month by month there were numerous additions to the membership of the Church. Throughout the years of his pastorate one searches in vain the Church's records for a discordant note. He was happy in the confidence and love of his people, and peace and prosperity were enjoyed. "There was perhaps no part of the Lord's vineyard in England," says the writer of the Memoir, "more abundantly favoured than this flourishing and happy community."

It was not long before the question of a new and larger Chapel had to be considered. The matter was first mentioned at a Church meeting in March, 1843, and so earnestly did the friends set to work that "the new meeting house"—the present Chapel—was opened for the worship of God on Friday, June 28th, 1844. There was a prayer meeting at 7 o'clock in the morning, which was numerously attended, and the opening sermon was preached at 11 o'clock by Rev. William Brock of Norwich. In round figures the total cost of the building was £2,308, and towards this sum, including the collections at the opening services, there had been raised

£1,446. The burden of the debt was not allowed to remain. On Wednesday, June 27th, 1849, a thanksgiving service "to the God of all grace for His favour in permitting us to witness the entire liquidation of our building debt" was held. In this connection the following note was made by Mr. Broad:—

"In making this entry which may possibly be read by generations yet unborn, the present pastor cannot avoid supplementing the account with the statement that in first exciting the people to attempt the erection of a new Chapel he acted under a very powerful conviction of duty, and that while in the course of the undertaking many great unanticipated difficulties were encountered, the hearty co-operation and goodwill of the committee and congregation availed by the divine blessing to surmount them all. It is also especially deserving of notice that since the completion of the work several of the most wealthy and liberal of the contributors have been removed by death, without whose countenance and assistance it is not at all likely that the Church would have entertained the idea of erecting so commodious and substantial an edifice. How then can this record more appropriately close than in the language referred to (see i Chron: xxix. 10-17; the text of the sermon preached on the occasion by Rev. J. Jukes, of Bedford)? or with the prayer of Moses—'Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea the work of our hands establish Thou it'."

In the year 1847 instrumental music in worship was introduced. A Harmonium was purchased at a cost of £47, and in 1852 the deacons were authorized to dispose of it, because its use had been superseded by the introduction of an organ.

Notice was taken of the great Cholera epidemic in 1849 by a meeting for humiliation, and prayer for its removal, and also for the revival of God's work "in our hearts." On many occasions meetings of the Church were called to consider how to promote "revival." It

may be of interest to record that the request of the Baptist Missionary Society for the first Sacramental offering in the year to be devoted to the relief of widows and orphans of Missionaries was granted, and the first collection taken in Jan. 1857. The first Sacramental collection of the year is still devoted to the same worthy object.

At the beginning of 1857 there were serious indications of a breakdown in the pastor's health, and, after seeking recuperation in vain, he resolved that in accordance with medical advice he should try the effect of a prolonged sea voyage. The Church at first refused to accept his resignation, and proposed obtaining an assistant. Negotiations were opened with a student at Bristol College, but before these were completed he found it necessary to resign. Under the circumstances his devoted and affectionate people could do no other than sorrowfully accept it. On both sides the severing of a bond that had strengthened with the years was a real grief. A presentation of a tea and coffee service and of a purse of money was made to him and Mrs. Broad, and he went for a time to Hastings.

As several of his children had gone to make homes for themselves in Australia he decided on paying them a visit. When he reached Melbourne his health had so far improved that he was able to do a considerable amount of preaching. The Church at Geelong implored him to stay with them as pastor, but he could not see his way to that. His heart was set on returning to England. In September of 1858 he arrived home. His last sermon was preached at Hastings on Sunday, Oct. 3rd, and he finished it with an emphatic recital of the lines:—

“ Happy, if with my latest breath,
I may but gasp His name ;
Preach Him to all, and cry in death—
Behold, behold the Lamb ! ”

At daybreak on the following Saturday morning his spirit entered into the presence of the Lord. His remains were brought to the quiet God's Acre surrounding

the Meeting House he was instrumental in erecting, there to rest "till the day break and the shadows flee away." A tablet in the Chapel expresses the affection of his people.

"In affectionate remembrance of the Rev. John Broad, seventeen years the faithful and devoted pastor of this Christian Church, who was suddenly called to his rest at Hastings, October 9th, 1858, in the fifty first year of his age. This sanctuary stands as a memorial of his zeal for the glory of God, in which his unwearied labours were abundantly blessed to the conversion of souls, his joy here and crown of rejoicing now in the presence of his Lord.

Rev. xiv. 13."

CHAPTER VII.

BRIGHTNESS UNDIMMED.

GEORGE SHORT, B.A.. 1858-1868.

SEVERAL months passed before a successor to Mr. Broad was found. At a Church Meeting held on October 5th, 1858, the following resolution was adopted:—"That the Rev. George Short, B.A., be invited to supply the pulpit for four successive sabbaths with a view to the pastorate." Not being able to come for four, he came for two, and on the strength of his ministrations on those two he was invited to the pastorate. The invitation was by no means unanimous.

In his letter of acceptance, Mr. Short wrote—"It would have given me pleasure had the invitation been unanimous, and the fact that it was not has been duly weighed by me. Still I should not have felt justified (notwithstanding my appreciation of the friends dissenting) to have declined on that account. And now with the conviction that the finger of God points the way I cheerfully though tremblingly follow where He leads." He commenced his ministry February, 1859. His membership together with Mrs. Short's was transferred from the Church at Plymouth.

To follow such a minister as Mr. Broad, and maintain the activities and prestige of the Church at the same high standard was no easy matter, but during the years of his pastorate he proved himself equal to the task and a worthy successor. Year by year under his able and faithful preaching large additions were made to the membership. Altogether during Mr. Short's ministry the number of members added was 210, giving an average of 21 per year.

The question of Sunday School accommodation became urgent, and towards the end of 1860 the Church decided that the Schoolroom and vestry should be enlarged, and a committee was appointed to deal with the matter. Ultimately the enlargement was completed at a cost of £735.

At various times such matters as "increased accommodation for the Sunday School children in the gallery, warming of the Chapel," and arrangements "to prevent the draught and mitigate the cold" were considered; also the appointment of an Evangelist or Missionary to assist in the village work. The membership roll was regularly revised, and any slackness on the part of members attending the Communion Service was noted and steps taken accordingly. Every effort was made to keep the Church statistics as accurate as possible. The unification of the Trust Deeds of the Church property—bringing them under the control of one body of Trustees was effected by Mr. Short.

"After mature consideration" the New Baptist Hymn Book was introduced, and in 1866 "an excellent organ, costing over £200, was placed in the chapel, the expense of which was nearly, if not completely, defrayed on the evening of opening—about £100 being given or promised on that occasion."

In 1867 a difficulty arose about the minister's house. "So frequent has been his changes since residing in the town," is the note in the Church Book, "that he feared he should be obliged to resign the Church in consequence." A committee was appointed to consider the matter; and as no suitable house could be obtained, it was decided to procure the ground on which the Manse now stands and build. The scheme was carried through at a cost of £960.

On May 13th, 1867, Rev. C. H. Spurgeon visited Hitchin and preached in the Chapel. "The services were productive of great pleasure, and (it is hoped) profit."

The same year the question of a "Mission Hall" at Walsworth Road was raised by a member, Mr.

Richard Johnson. The Church, however, decided not to proceed in the matter. Subsequently a "Mission Hall" was erected, and out of the work then commenced has sprung the present commodious Chapel and School buildings on Walsworth Road.

After more than nine years strenuous and devoted labours, Mr. Short resigned the pastorate on April 23rd, 1868. The health of Mrs. Short and his own overtaxed powers were the final considerations inducing the resolve. The resignation came as a great surprise and sorrow to the Church. He was earnestly asked to re-consider, but his mind was fully made up. As pastor and as man he was greatly beloved and esteemed. Later he removed to Salisbury and for many years was pastor of the Church there. In the year 1894 The Baptist Union honoured him by electing him to the presidential chair.

JOHN ALDIS. 1868-1877.

Before the end of 1868 the Church had once more found a pastor. Rev. John Aldis, Junr., of Haworth, Yorkshire, was invited to supply the pulpit for the month of August. So satisfactory did his ministrations prove that he was invited to accept the pastorate. This he did entering with "some trepidation" upon so "important a post, and so arduous a work" the last Sunday in November of that year.

Early in the new year the public recognition of the pastor was held when amongst others taking part were Revs. John Aldis, of Reading (the pastor's father), J.P. Chown, of Bradford, and J. T. Wigner, of London. The attendances were very good, and the proceedings much enjoyed.

With great zeal and devotion Mr. Aldis began his labours, and from the first the work of the Church prospered in his hands. From year to year the records of the Church tell of the earnestness with which he prosecuted his ministry, and the success which attended it. Thoroughness was a prominent characteristic of his ministry.

He gave much attention to the work in the villages,

and that care might be exercised concerning those who went to preach, it was arranged they should be authorized by the Church after their preaching abilities had been tested and reported upon.

Every year he prepared a careful review of the year's work for presentation to the Herts and Beds Association of Baptist Churches. These reviews are tersely phrased and give a good general idea of the work done by the Church. The figures of increase and decrease in membership, the number of members resident and non-resident, number of village stations, preachers, Sunday School teachers and scholars, are all carefully recorded.

At the end of his ministry he prepared a summary of the members received and removed during his eight and a half years pastorate:—on profession of faith 136, by transfer from other Churches 46, restoration 7, total 189; removals, by death 33, dismissal 107, withdrawals 8, exclusion 4, erasure 38, total 190. There was thus a decrease of 1. But the Church was really stronger when he left than when he came. The non-resident list was reduced from 57 to 31, while the resident list was increased from 225 to 250. The increase in members residing in the neighbourhood was 25.

It was in 1869 that Walsworth Road Church was formed. The resolution passed at the Church meeting June 24th, is as follows:—“That considering the distance between Salem Chapel (Tilehouse Street Church was long known as “Salem”) and the Mission Hall; considering the large and rapidly increasing population near the latter place whose spiritual wants are very inadequately provided for; considering the encouraging prospects of the formation of a flourishing Church there; considering the practical difficulties in the way of organic union between the two congregations—it is expedient that a separate Church be formed at the Mission Hall.

“We therefore cordially dismiss our brethren and sisters (six in all) to form the nucleus of a new Church and prayerfully commend them and the new enterprise

to the love and care of God.

“ We cordially desire the prosperity of the new Church. Though their beginning is small may their latter end greatly increase. We trust they may be speedily guided to a pastor who shall be eminently useful in the conversion of sinners and the building up of the saints. We would desire to foster between the two Churches a most cordial understanding and the sincerest sympathy, believing that the interests of both are compatible; and that they may harmoniously though separately promote the glory of God, the kingdom of His dear Son, and the welfare of souls.”

From this it will be seen that the Walsworth Road Church is the legitimate offspring of Tilehouse Street.

It was during the ministry of Mr. Aldis that the suggestion of building the “ Bunyan Chapel ” at Preston was made. The matter was considered on August 3rd, 1876, and resolved, “ That this Church adopt the scheme for building ‘ Bunyan Chapel ’ at Preston, to be held in trust, and to be worked as a preaching station in connection with the parent Church.” A few weeks later a committee was appointed to make the arrangements for carrying out the resolution.

Not long after this Mr. Aldis resigned the pastorate. Having the impression that “ the time had come for another workman to take his place,” and having received an invitation from the Canterbury Baptist Church he decided to accept it. Thus after eight and a half years of earnest and faithful labour for Christ in Hitchin he left. The Church “ much regretted ” his action, and “ very reluctantly ” accepted his resignation. He was greatly beloved and esteemed, and at the farewell meeting held on May 9th, 1877, he was “ presented with a purse containing sixty sovereigns.”

Mr. Aldis was one of several distinguished brothers. One was Senior Wrangler and Smiths prizeman at Cambridge in 1861; another was sixth Wrangler with classical honours in 1863; and a third was second Wrangler and Smiths prizeman with classical honours in 1866.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRILLIANCE WITH A PASSING SHADOW.

F. G. MARCHANT. 1877-1889.

THERE was but a brief interval between the departure of Mr. Aldis and the settlement of Rev. F. G. Marchant. The letter of invitation bears the date of July 3rd, 1877, and states that the resolution "that the Rev. F. G. Marchant be invited to become pastor" was carried unanimously. A week later he wrote intimating his acceptance, and stating, "I shall come to you with much faith in your kindness, your godliness, and your Christian zeal. May we be strong above all things in the love of Christ; that being so, we shall, I am sure, possess a large-hearted tolerance of each other in all differences, and know a warm co-operation in our work together for Christ."

At the time Mr. Marchant was pastor of a Church at Wandsworth. He closed his ministry there in August, and commenced at Tilehouse Street the first Sunday in September—200 years from the commencement of John Wilson's ministry. He was a preacher of remarkable eloquence and power, and large congregations gathered to his ministry. For several years, however, owing to the large number of removals of members from the town there was a considerable decrease in the Church membership.

In 1879, Mr. Marchant received and accepted an invitation from the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon to become Classical Tutor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle College. Communicating the matter to the Church he stated that such an appointment need not separate him from his ministry in Hitchin. It would mean his being in London four days each week, but he hoped to take the week-night

services regularly. The Church consented to the arrangement, feeling that his usefulness would be increased, but expressing "regret that they would be deprived of a measure of his pastoral oversight."

In this connection it should be stated that Mrs. Marchant entered most heartily into the work of pastoral visitation, particularly in looking after the sick of the congregation.

For the remarkably large number of additions to the membership, the year 1882 stands out as the most memorable in the long history of the Church. No less than 49 converts were received by Baptism, and 12 by profession without Baptism. It is not surprising that at the annual meeting New Year's day, 1883, "special cause was found for thanksgiving." Notwithstanding an unusual number of losses the net gain was 46, bringing the total of members on the Roll up to 311—the first time the membership had passed 300.

Early in 1883, the Evangelists, Messrs. Fullerton and Smith, held a united mission in the town—the Baptist, Congregational and Wesleyan Churches combining—which resulted in "large and manifold blessing." This year, 43 were added by Baptism, and the net increase was 37, making the total membership 348.

When he had completed six years in Hitchin he was presented with a cheque for £100. The subscriptions toward the Testimonial were confined to members of the Church and congregation. It was their wish to give him a "substantial proof of their esteem and appreciation of his faithful and efficient ministrations amongst them. Gratitude was also expressed to Mrs. Marchant for the great good she had done in so constantly visiting the sick, and speaking words of comfort to the afflicted."

Towards the end of 1884, the hitherto happy and harmonious life of the Church was seriously broken in a matter which concerned the election of deacons. A spirit of bitterness somehow crept in, and "in consequence of the disagreement the usual annual meeting

was not held." Early in 1885 there were several resignations of deacons and village preachers, and finally on March 26th, an application was made by the minister of Walsworth Road Church (Rev. F. J. Bird) for the transfer of 59 members. The application was granted of all the persons named in the letter. In the main it may be said the shadow passed, though perhaps the memory of it remained long after. Matters, however, in the Church settled down again, and the work went on quietly.

In the year 1888, the Church expressed sympathy with the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon in his action with regard to what was known as "The Downgrade Controversy," and regretted "the ill-considered vote of censure" which was passed on him by the Baptist Union. All through this year the membership was increasing and at the close it numbered 250.

Owing to the serious state of the health of his daughter, and the necessity for removing for her sake to the South Coast, Mr. Marchant felt that it was his duty to resign the pastorate which he had held for more than 12 years. In the letter of resignation he gave the impression that his work at the College, which caused him to be "absent in London for half the week for 10 years, laid him open to being misunderstood," and prevented him doing his pastoral work as it ought to have been done. Referring to the "trials" through which he had passed it was to say—"If at any time I have ever wronged any of you, please forgive me." The almost sudden death of Mrs. Marchant was also a factor inducing his resignation.

Needless to add it was received with "deep regret" and a resolution was unanimously passed expressing the Church's appreciation of his earnest, able, and faithful ministry, and affectionately commending him to God. The farewell meeting was held October 9th, 1889, when he was presented with a parting gift of £66.

Taking up residence at Brighton he continued his tutorial work up to about a year before his death, which took place on April 9th, 1899. He had reached the age

of 61. His remains were brought for interment in the burying ground adjoining the Chapel. A tablet "in affectionate remembrance" was placed in the Chapel, and reminds the worshippers of today that "He being dead yet speaketh."

THOMAS WILLIAMS, B.A., 1890-1893.

Mr. Marchant was succeeded by Rev. Thomas Williams, B.A., then pastor of the Church at Coleford, Gloucestershire. He was requested to preach for two Sundays in March, 1890, which resulted in a unanimous invitation to the pastorate. This he accepted and commenced his ministry the first Sunday in May.

In connection with his "Recognition," Dr. Angus, Principal of Regents Park College, preached the sermon. At the evening meeting in the Chapel, Mr. M. H. Foster, senior deacon, presided and gave an interesting sketch of the history of the Church. Addresses were given by Revs. Dr. Angus, J. T. Wigner, Chas. Brown and others.

Soon after the settlement of Mr. Williams, the question of a new heating apparatus was considered, and also the re-pewing of the Chapel. The need for such work had long been felt. A committee was appointed and empowered to adopt such measures as were deemed necessary. Ultimately the scheme included a new pulpit and platform, an ornamental front to the gallery, and a ventilating appliance. This involved an expenditure of £636. Further it was decided to enlarge and remodel the organ at an estimated cost of about £500. Altogether it was calculated the total outlay would amount to £1,200. When the bill was finally presented it reached £1,757.

Re-opening services were held on Wednesday, July 22nd, 1891, the special preacher being Rev. William Brock, of Hampstead. Services of a special character were continued on the two following Sundays, when the two former pastors, Rev. Geo. Short, of Salisbury, and Rev. F. G. Marchant preached to large congregations.

Later, on Tuesday evening, Sept. 22nd, the organ was re-opened. The services of Dr. A. Rowland and Mr. Josiah Booth, the minister and organist of Park Chapel, Crouch End, were secured for the occasion. "A very delightful evening was spent. Dr. Rowland's address, the playing of Mr. Booth, and the singing of the choir were much appreciated by a large audience."

In 1892, a Bazaar was held to help reduce the debt on the Renovation Account. The net proceeds amounted to about £350.

For some reason or another Mr. Williams felt that he was not receiving the full sympathy and co-operation of some of the members, and this, along with the ill-health of his daughter, led to his resigning the pastorate October 16th, 1893. In accepting the resignation the Church thought "he had taken a somewhat extreme and exaggerated view of the situation."

He preached his farewell sermons on Sunday, Nov. 26th, and on the following evening was presented with a clock, and purse containing 40 guineas, "as an expression of high esteem for their (Mrs Williams was included) faithful and loving ministries in connection with the Tilehouse Street Chapel." They went to live at Aberystwyth.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVANCING DAY.

CHARLES S. HULL. 1894-1900.

REV. C. S. HULL was the pastor of the Church at Sussex Street, Brighton, when, on May 14th, 1894, an invitation was sent to him to undertake the pastorate. In accepting it, he referred to the splendid history of Tilehouse Street, that its ministers had been "no ordinary men." "One might well shrink," he wrote, "from the attempt to continue that history, and to act worthy of those traditions," but for the fact that "behind all visible instruments and agents, the Eternal, Invisible God will carry on and complete His own most glorious work."

"Believing in the mighty energy of God's truth, in the Divine efficacy of Christ's work, in the presence and power of the Eternal Spirit to apply both the truth and the work to the hearts and consciences of men," Mr. Hull came.

On June 8th of this year the Jubilee of the opening of the present Chapel was celebrated, the special preacher being the Rev. W. Brock, of Hampstead, and on the following Sunday the Rev. W. J. Styles, of London, conducted the services. The collections at these services realized £100.

In connection with the recognition of Mr. Hull as pastor, Mr. Marchant visited his old flock and preached on Sunday, October 7th. The following Wednesday, a public meeting was held over which Mr. John Marnham, of Boxmoor presided, and addresses were given by Dr. Usher, Mr. Marchant and the pastor.

The work of the Church went on year by year quietly and happily—nothing of special interest occurring. New members were added in considerable numbers—about 75 in all during Mr. Hull's ministry. The Church register had been carefully revised and the number 205 represented a fairly accurate membership.

Having received an invitation to the pastorate of the Church at Arthur Street, Camberwell, Mr. Hull decided to accept it. His resignation was received with much regret, "unfeigned sorrow," and heartfelt thanks were expressed for all his services during the six and a half years of his ministry at Tilehouse Street, Farewell services were held on Sunday, Nov. 26th, 1900, and a parting gift of £34 was presented to him.

HARRY JENNER. 1902-1906.

For more than a year the Church was without a pastor. Toward the end of 1901, Rev. Harry Jenner, of Waterbeach, was invited. The invitation, though not quite unanimous, was accepted. He commenced his ministry on the first Sunday of 1902, "relying on the generous and loyal co-operation of all, and trusting that under the Divine blessing he might be used of God to unite the Church in the bonds of peace and leading it into increased usefulness." The invitation was for a period of three years.

With the commencement of Mr. Jenner's ministry the Church decided to "re-introduce" unfermented wine for exclusive use at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

An interesting event in Mr. Jenner's life in Hitchin was his marriage. The home-coming of the pastor and his bride was made the occasion of a most cordial welcome. At tea the schoolroom was crowded. The Church Secretary, Mr. G. W. Russell, in the unavoidable absence of the Senior Deacon, Mr. M. H. Foster, presented Mr. and Mrs. Jenner, on behalf of the Church and Congregation, with a cheque for £38, and expressed the heartiest good wishes of all for their future welfare and happiness.

During Mr. Jenner's first year 39 members were added.

At the expiration of the three years the Church invited him to continue for a further term of three years; this he consented to do. Towards the end however of 1905 his health began to give way. The Church requested him "to seek entire rest and change for the remainder of the year" with the hope of his speedy restoration.

Ultimately on the 28th of February, 1906, he found it necessary to resign. He did not seek another pastorate. He went to live at Letchworth, where his death took place. His ministry in Hitchin extended a little over 4 years.

W. J. HARRIS. 1906-1917.

In seeking a successor to Mr. Jenner, the Church did not go far afield. Rev. W. J. Harris was fulfilling a successful ministry in the neighbouring town of Luton, and to him the members of Tilehouse Street turned. In September, 1906, an invitation was sent to him to become pastor. Because of exceptional circumstances, however, Mr. Harris proposed coming for a period of six months; if at the end of that time the Church confirmed the invitation, and he felt he could do good work, he would settle down with every confidence.

On these conditions he came, commencing his ministry on Nov. 4th of that year. A very hearty reception was given to Mr. and Mrs. Harris "who believed God had a great work for them to do in Hitchin." At that time the number of members on the roll was 210.

At the end of the six months the Church was so satisfied with Mr. Harris's ministry that he was earnestly and unanimously requested to accept the pastorate without any time limit, and promising "to assist him in every good work by sympathy and prayer." In accepting, Mr. Harris stated that he believed the Church was "acting under the inspiration and leading of the

Holy Spirit," and he could do no other than accede to their earnest request.

The "Recognition" services were held in July, 1907. Dr. W. J. Ewing preached in the afternoon. At the evening meeting over which Mr. M. H. Foster presided, prayer was offered by Rev. George Short, who nearly 50 years before had succeeded Rev. John Broad. At this meeting the electric light which had just been installed at a cost of £100 was used for the first time, and Mrs. Harris switched it on.

Year by year, through the faithful labours of Mr. Harris, and the Divine blessing, numerous additions were made to the membership of the Church. During the year 1907, no less than 37, many of them young people from the homes of the members were added. This same year a Sale of Work was held on the Manse lawn which realized £142.

In 1910, 19 members were added, most of them young people, and 21 in the year following. This year (1911) the Church sent the pastor as its delegate to the Baptist World Congress, at Philadelphia, U.S.A.,—a friend kindly defraying the expenses.

The Centenary of the Sunday School was celebrated in 1912. The Sunday preacher for the special occasion was the former pastor, Rev. C. S. Hull, who referred to the courage and faith of those who began the School, of the labours, through the years, of the workers whose names had been, for the most part, forgotten, and of the splendid service which had been rendered to the cause of Christ in the town. The celebration was continued on the Wednesday when the renowned Evangelist, Gipsy Smith, preached in the afternoon and lectured in the evening to audiences which filled the Chapel to its utmost capacity.

In connection with the Baptist Union effort to raise a Sustentation Fund of £250,000, Tilehouse Street took an honourable part. The amount contributed by the members reached £418.

Mr. Harris was elected President of the Herts. Baptist Association for the year 1916-17, and to show its

appreciation of the honour, the Church agreed to release him one Sunday in each month to enable him to exchange pulpits with other ministers in the county, and undertaking to meet all the expenses on both sides.

On his completion of 10 years as pastor, the members of the Church seized the occasion to show their appreciation and affection for him and Mrs. Harris by presenting them with a cheque for £45. This was done at the Annual Meeting, January 1st, 1917. Thirteen had been added during the year, and the membership stood at 239.

But the time of his departure was not far off. On July 3rd, 1917, he sent in his resignation, having received and accepted a "call" to the Onslow Baptist Church, South Kensington. To the Church he wrote—"We have lived and worked together in unbroken peace and harmony....., nothing could have persuaded me to rend so dear a tie but the solemn conviction that God Himself was calling me away." Under the circumstances the Church could do no other than accept the resignation, though it thought "that a great and good work was still open to him at Tilehouse Street."

Farewell sermons were preached on Sunday, Sep. 23rd, 1917, and on the Monday evening a social gathering was held in the Schoolroom when a cheque for £30 was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Harris with best wishes for their future.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS THE GOLDEN NOON.

IN seeking to fill the vacant pastorate, no time was lost. With commendable promptitude and energy the deacons set to work. Before three months had passed Mr. Harris was succeeded by the present minister, Rev. James McCleery. In December, 1917, a unanimous invitation was sent to him at Teddington, where he was ministering happily and successfully. The character of the Church, the nature of the work, and the possibilities of exercising a useful ministry in the town and neighbourhood appealed to him, and after prayerful consideration he accepted it.

He commenced his ministry on March 3rd, 1918, the Church and congregation giving to him and Mrs. McCleery a most cordial welcome.

He is the fourteenth minister of the Church.

At the Annual Meeting in January of that year the membership numbered 232. During the year 20 were added, and now in this 250th year, by a singular coincidence the number stands at 250. What could these not do to extend the Kingdom of God in this town if they were fully consecrated to the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit?

The Church is thoroughly united, and well organised, and there is a fine spirit of eagerness animating the workers. Young people are coming in larger numbers to the services, and such augurs well for the future. Our young men, spared to us, have returned from "The Great War," and are taking their places amongst us. The outlook is hopeful; we "thank God, and take courage."

On the Diaconate are men of splendid Christian experience and devotion, who not only have the confi-

dence of the Church, but throughout the town and neighbourhood are highly esteemed.

Matthew Henry Foster is the senior deacon and Church treasurer. He was baptized by Mr. Broad, and received into the Church in January, 1857. In 1866 he was elected to the office of deacon, and in 1868 was appointed treasurer. By his sanctified wisdom and counsel he has helped to guide the Church through all these years. He has never faltered in his attachment, and has given generously to it both of substance and of service. Its ministers have ever found in him the truest of friends, the wisest of counsellors, and the most loyal and sympathetic of deacons. Beyond the Church he has taken a deep interest in the Baptist cause in the County. He has been President of the Herts. Baptist Association, and for many years a member of its committee. To show the position he holds in the public life of the County—he is an Alderman of the County Council, a Justice of the Peace, a member of the Hitchin Rural Council and of the Hitchin Board of Guardians.

“The Foster Family” has been associated with Tilehouse Street Church from its beginning. The Church Covenant which was drawn up in 1681 was signed, among others, by John Foster. He was the eldest of six brothers, who lived at Preston, three miles from Hitchin. Several of them were members of the Church, but all were connected with the congregation. When John Wilson was suffering imprisonment in Hertford gaol for Conscience sake, these worthy brothers nourished him there. “They had all been fined,” wrote John Geard, “£20 a month each for not going to Church, till all they had was confiscated. However, their fines had not been literally extracted till the Glorious Revolution, when William III gave them, as it were, a receipt in full of all demands.”

While they lived at Preston, their house was constantly used as “an asylum for persecuted ministers.” “There John Bunyan used to make his home in his preaching excursions in the neighbourhood, and not a few are the family traditions of the occasions when they

had the honour of entertaining such a guest."

All through the 250 years of the Church's existence their descendants have been in membership, and, with only a few intervals, some member of the family has been in the diaconate.

The Church Secretary is George W. Russell, who also is a Justice of the Peace, a County Councillor and a member of the Hitchin Urban District Council—a man of sterling worth, fine Christian character, and beloved by all. He has been connected with Tilehouse Street for more than 50 years, and has taken the deepest interest in its welfare. For years he was a member of the Herts. Baptist Association Committee, and was President in 1903. In 1911, he celebrated the jubilee of his connection with the Sunday School, and as a Thankoffering gave £250 to be used either for the alteration of the Schoolroom, or towards the cost of new School premises. He was elected Superintendent, and also Deacon in 1885. No Church has ever been better served by a treasurer and secretary. We are proud of them and thank God for them.

Arthur E. H. Theobalds has been for many years connected with the Church and holds the office of Sunday School Superintendent. He is devoted to the work, and takes a keen interest in everything that pertains to the prosperity of the School and the spiritual welfare of its young life. With him is a band of consecrated teachers numbering 40, while the number of scholars on the roll is 256. We look forward to much good work being done amongst the young people in coming days.

W. Bradley Gatward, who is related to the Foster Family, is the organist. He is a first-class musician, and studies how to make the service of praise as perfect as possible. And the Organ is worthy of the Organist.

Frederick George, who before coming to Hitchin was for several years pastor of the Baptist Church at Hoddesdon, has for his special department charge of the village Chapels. He regularly visits them, and arranges for the preachers month by month.

There are three Chapels connected with the parent Church, viz:— Wymondley, Stondon, and Preston. That at Wymondley is the oldest, built in 1859, and is under a joint trust of Baptists and Congregationalists. In it is the desk which belonged to the Wymondley Academy, from which the renowned Dr. Thomas Binney preached. The Chapel seats about 120. Stondon Chapel was built in 1865, and has accommodation for about 150. At Preston is "Bunyan Chapel." It was built mainly by the Foster Family, and on a stone are these words:—

" An Ebenezer of
The Foster Family
whose ancestors were
associated with
Bunyan and Preston."

They are all beautifully situated, and well attended by the people from the villages and the districts around. They have their Sunday Schools and week evening services. On Anniversaries and special occasions the minister visits them, and occasionally spends an afternoon visiting among the people. There are members of the parent Church living in each of the villages, and these render good assistance in carrying on the work.

From the beginning of the Baptist Missionary Society, the Tilehouse Street Church has been a constant and enthusiastic supporter of all its operations in "The Regions Beyond." To every appeal there has been a prayerful and sympathetic response, and year by year there has been an annual contribution sent up to Headquarters. This year, 1918-19, the amount gathered in from various societies and sources reached the total of £194.

Temperance work has not been neglected by the Church. There is a flourishing Band of Hope, and amongst the enthusiastic Temperance workers in the town are those connected with the Church as members. They are helping to keep the flag flying.

The Church is well organized, but other organizations, especially for the young people are in contemplation, and in such we confidently expect the help of our young men returned from the war.

The outlook is full of promise. There is much land to be possessed. We hear the command of our God and feel the urge of His Spirit to "go in and possess it." "Forward be our watchword." "Unto the perfect day."

CHAPTER XI.

REFLECTORS.

AS we have traced the past of the Tilehouse Street Church, we have grouped the story round the various ministers, but associated with them through the years was a splendid company of workers—deacons and members who aided and supported them, and without whose prayers and sympathies and loyal co-operation they could not have done what they did. When we look at St. Paul's Cathedral we are reminded in one sense it stands as a memorial to Sir Christopher Wren, but without a host of unknown toilers who quarried stones, and builders who placed them in the noble structure, the architect could not have done the work.

An examination of the Head Stones in the beautiful old graveyard in Tilehouse Street reveals the names of many of those who in the days long past did their "bit" for the Church and its Lord. Their feet trod all the roads leading to the old and the present Sanctuary, and in imagination we can see them gathering Sabbath by Sabbath for worship, and hear their voices mingling in psalm and prayer. What a love they had for the hallowed place! Who can ever tell the sacrifices many of them made and the work they did for their Lord and Saviour? In the Church books, for the most part, only the barest outlines of the services they rendered have been recorded.

In reading through the books some names are met with again and again—names of those in the diaconate. Others occur less frequently, but nevertheless they played their part in the varied activities of the Church. No history of the Church would be complete without

at least mention of such. Reference has previously been made to the name of the Fosters, and more need not, though much more could be said. In later years there was a Wm. Foster, of Hitchin, who belonged to another family, and whose descendants have still association with Tilehouse Street. But in dealing with a considerable number of those who have been conspicuous, more or less, in the history, space will not permit of more than giving their names in alphabetic order,

Richard Angell, John Bradly, Thos. Caporn, Thos. Crawley, John Crawley, Wm. Chapman, J. A. Comfort, John Godfrey Cooper, Thos. Dodwell, Jeremiah Gazley, Thos. Field, Daniel Field, Wm. Hainworth, Thos. Hardwick, Geo. Halsey, Hy. Jeeves, Wm. Jeeves, John Lawrence, Daniel Lane, John Lane, Richard Lane, Hy. Merritt, John Malden, Watson Perks, M.D., John Pryor, Jas. Smith, Reuben Shadwell, Arthur Throssell, Stephen Woodfield.

Of special interest is the name of John Hutchinson, B.A., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was one of the ejected ministers. Licensed to practise as a physician "per totam Angliam" he settled in Hitchin, and connected himself with "the Church in Tylers Street." He preached at Bendish, and occasionally at Hertford, Ware, and Bedford; but always *gratis*, and would not take charge of a congregation, although much urged to do so.

In the course of the years a number of those who were, from time to time, in membership, became pastors of Churches, and some went forth as missionaries to "The Regions Beyond."

The first was Henry Shepherd, who "by education and learning and gifts of the Holy Ghost" was fitted for ministering "the glorious Gospel where the providence of God should cast him." On October 13th, 1700, after some time spent in prayer, he was sent forth to preach, commissioned by the Church. He became pastor of the Church at Burton, near Bridgewater, and in the letter commending him John Wilson wrote,

“ We are very loathe to part with such an honourable member and brother, whose walk and conversation hath been all along an ornament to the Gospel.” A very beautiful testimony.

In the year 1847, Amos English was admitted a member of the Church. For many years he served the villages around Hitchin as a local preacher. At a Church meeting held in June, 1865, a letter was read from the deacons of the Church at Modbury, Devon, requesting the transfer of “Bro. English, the pastor elect of that Church.” The entry in the minute book states that “an honourable transfer was given, in which the usefulness of our brother’s labours in the villages surrounding Hitchin was recognised, and in which were expressed earnest desires for his success in his new sphere.”

The next was John Odell. His parents were members of the Church, and he attended the Sunday School, afterwards becoming a teacher. In 1850 he was baptized and received into fellowship by Mr. Broad. His strong desire was to become a minister of the Gospel, and with a view to preparing himself he entered Horton College, Bradford. His first pastorate was George Street Baptist Church, Hull. His ministry there was a great success. After five years he was invited by the Irish Baptist Society to take charge of a Church at Rathmines, Dublin. He remained there a number of years. His next move was to Preston, Lancashire, then to Kingsbridge, Devon, and finally he returned to the scene of his first labours in Hull. His ministry was again marked by much success, and was continued almost till his death in 1895. He was not only a model pastor, but an excellent man of business.

Alfred Thomas Osborne was baptized and became a member in 1859. He did useful work as a preacher in the villages. In 1869 he was invited to become pastor of, and was transferred to, the Church at Stoke Green, Ipswich.

In the same year as the above, James Neobard was baptized and received into the Church. After a time he

entered Regent's Park College as a student for the ministry, and in 1865 he became pastor of the Gosport Baptist Church. The letter of transfer expressed the Church's high esteem, and the earnest prayer that he might become, as he promised to be, a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Formerly in membership with the Queen Street Congregational Church, Mary Wheeler was transferred in April 1861, to Tilehouse Street. Subsequently she was baptized, and in the year 1862 went out as a missionary to India—the first member of the Church to go to the Foreign field. She married a Mr. Williamson, and in 1867 asked for her membership to be transferred to the Circular Road Baptist Church, Calcutta.

Daniel Wilshere joined the Church in 1867, and in 1873 undertook the pastoral oversight of the Baptist Church at Willingham, Cambridgeshire and subsequently at Fakenham, Norfolk. After some years he went out as a missionary to the Bahamas, under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Society. In the British and Foreign Bible Society Report for 1918, there is an interesting notice of Mr. Wilshere which is as follows: "Honour was fitly paid to the Rev. Daniel Wilshere, president of the Auxiliary, who has served it for over 40 years. He received from the committee of the Parent Society a specially bound and suitably inscribed copy of the Bible in recognition of his long and valued services at Nassau."

James Rennie, so well-known throughout Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire as the Hitchin Colporteur, is a member of the Church. He joined by transfer from Biggleswade in 1877. For nearly 50 years he has been engaged in colportage work, visiting the towns and villages, where, in addition to preaching the Gospel in Chapels and Mission Halls, and in the open air, he has sold and distributed many thousands of pounds worth of Bibles and all kinds of good literature. His bright and breezy manner has ever made him a favourite with the people, and his devoted labours for the Master have been crowned with abundant blessing.

At the present time amongst the younger ministers of the Baptist Denomination there are three, pastors of Churches, who have been closely connected with Tilehouse Street Church and Sunday School.

Frederick Arthur Baker was associated with the School from the infant class. He was baptized in June, 1905, and received into the Church by Mr. Jenner. He became a devoted Christian worker, and developed preaching gifts. He is now pastor of Old Buckenham Baptist Church, near Attleborough, Norfolk, and is carrying on a useful and successful ministry. His parents and sister are most regular members of Tilehouse Street.

Archibald Wm. Smith, now pastor of Westgate Baptist Church, Rotherham, and his brother Frank Thomas Bloice Smith, B.D., pastor of North Parade Baptist Church, Halifax, were both for some years connected with the Sunday School—Frank holding office as Secretary. Though they did not come into actual membership with the Church, yet they gave themselves whole-heartedly to various forms of Christian activity.

This list of those who have been, and are, reflectors of the Light in connection with Tilehouse Street Church would not be complete without reference to another, who though not a member, yet on many occasions rendered valuable service to the Church. In the burying ground is the grave of James Bisset, and on the tombstone is the following inscription:—

“James Bisset, minister of the Gospel, died at Hitchin, April 2nd, 1859, aged 88. The Father and Founder of the “Aged Pilgrims’ Friend Society in 1807, and for 51 years its gratuitous secretary.”

In his day he was well-known and esteemed as a minister of the Gospel. He laboured at Hertford, Walkern, and Stevenage, and in his closing years he was the regular afternoon preacher at Tilehouse Street.

CHAPTER XII.

NOW.

BRIEFLY, the long and glorious history of Tilehouse Street Church has been told. Would that it had been better done.

It only remains to record some of the reflections which the story of the Church's past suggests. These are given without any attempt at elaboration, though much might be written concerning each.

(1) Looking back over the 250 years, and stating it generally, the history of the Church as a whole may in truth be said to be worthy, and honourable, and beautiful. It has ever sought to maintain a high ideal of what a Christian Church should be. It cannot be said that its character is without stain, but the blemishes are indeed few. Only once or twice has its peace been broken by anything approaching strife. Through all the years it has stood high in the estimation of the people of the town, and its reputation and influence are of the highest to-day.

(2) It has never wavered in its attachment and loyalty to the whole of the Evangelic faith. Nourished and reared on the teaching of John Bunyan through John Wilson, it has never lost the impetus of that early association. It has gloried in the Cross, and has never been ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It stands by the Cross to-day.

(3) Speaking generally it has been greatly blessed of God in its pastors, of whom there have been 13. For the most part they were able ministers of Jesus Christ, and served it with fine devotion. On the other hand as the story shows, the Church treated its pastors well,

and supported them in every work of faith and labour of love. In this respect its record is good.

(4) What shall be said of the Diaconate? In this office the Church has been served by a splendid succession of godly men—men who gave much of time, and much of prayer to the work, who laboured in season and out of season for its peace, its purity, and its prosperity. It is an inspiration to read through the Church books and note the devotion and consecration of these men. One could not but be impressed with the high regard they had for their office, and the conscientiousness with which so many of them did the work.

(5) The Church's relationships with the other Churches in the town have ever been of the friendliest character. It has ever been ready to sympathize with and to help in every good work outside its own borders, and as occasion required to unite in common cause with other Christian denominations. It has not cultivated a selfish or bigoted isolation.

(6) Its great governing aim has ever been the establishment of the kingdom of Christ in the earth. To this end it has laboured, and prayed, and contributed. Through its agency and instrumentality many have found the peace of God, by faith in Jesus Christ, and have passed from death unto newness of life. It has not failed to sympathize with, and has taken a share in the sending of the Gospel to every creature.

(7) Like most other Churches, Tilehouse Street has had its ups and downs, its periods of spiritual drought, and its "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"; its seasons of adversity and anxiety, and its spells of advance and prosperity. It has experienced sunshine and shade, storm and calm, gladness and sadness. It has walked in the valley of humiliation, and has known much of the mountains of rapture and exaltation; but by the grace of God it has continued its witness for Him and His truth until this present. The stone we raise is Ebenezer—"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

In this, the 250th year of the existence of the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, it is not suffering from any of the weaknesses characteristic of old age. It is fresh, and vigorous, and full of hope. It faces the future with a strong, unshakeable confidence in God, that the golden age is coming, and that the kingdoms of this world *shall* become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. Peace reigns, and signs of prosperity are not wanting. It is the faith of the pastor, the deacons, the members and the many workers in the various organizations that "the best is yet to be," and they will make it their business, through the anointing of the Divine Spirit, to translate the faith into glorious fact.

“ Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus
Constant will remain:
Gates of hell can never
'Gainst that Church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise
And that cannot fail.”