

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Dr. Rippon's Prayer and its Answer.

One of the best things that a church can do is to catch a minister young, and train him for themselves. Some of the happiest and longest pastorates in our denomination commenced with the invitation of a young man from the country to a post for which he was barely qualified. His mistakes were borne with, his efforts were encouraged, and he grew, and the church grew with him. His pastorate continued for many a year, since he was under no temptation to leave for another position, because he felt at home, and could say, like one of old, "I dwell among mine own people."

I am told that my venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, used often, in his pulpit, to pray for somebody, of whom he knew nothing, who would follow him in the ministry of the church, and greatly increase it. He seemed to have in his mind's eye some young man, who, in after years, would greatly enlarge the number of the flock, and he often prayed for him. He died, and passed away to Heaven, a year or two after I was born. Older members of the church have told me that they have read the answer to Dr. Rippon's prayers in the blessing that has been given to us these many years.—C. H. S.



THE Christians commonly called Baptists are, according to my belief, the purest part of that sect which, of old, was "everywhere spoken against," and I am convinced that they have, beyond their brethren, preserved the ordinances of the Lord Jesus as they were delivered unto the saints. I care very little for the "historical church" argument; but if there be anything at all in it, the plea ought not to be filched by the clients of Rome, but should be left to that community which all along has held by "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." This body of believers has not been exalted into temporal power, or decorated with worldly rank, but it has dwelt for the most part in dens and caves of the earth,—“destitute, afflicted, tormented,”—and so has proved itself of the house and lineage of the Crucified. The church which most loudly claims the apostolical succession wears upon her brow more of the marks of Antichrist than of Christ; but the afflicted Anabaptists, in their past history, have had such fellowship with their suffering Lord, and have borne so pure a testimony, both to truth and freedom, that they need in nothing to be ashamed. Their very existence under the calumnies and persecutions which they have endured is a standing marvel, while their unflinching fidelity to the Scriptures as their sole rule of faith, and their adherence to the simplicity of gospel ordinances, is a sure index of their Lord's presence among them. It would not be impossible to show that the first Christians who dwelt in this land were of the same faith and order as the believers now called Baptists. The errors of the churches are all more or less modern, and those which have clustered around the ordinance of baptism are by no

means so venerable for age as some would have us suppose. The evidence supplied by ancient monuments and baptisteries, which still remain, would be conclusive in our favour were it not that upon this point the minds of men are not very open to argument. Foregone conclusions and established ecclesiastical arrangements are not easily shaken. Few men care to follow truth when she leads them without the camp, and calls them to take up their cross, and endure to be thought singular even by their fellow-Christians.

The church now worshipping in the Metropolitan Tabernacle* took its rise from one of the many assemblies of immersed believers who met in the borough of Southwark. Crosby, in his *History of the Baptists*, says:—"This people had formerly belonged to one of the most ancient congregations of the Baptists in London, but separated from them in the year 1652, for some practices which they judged disorderly, and kept together from that time as a distinct body." They appear to have met in private houses, or in such other buildings as were open to them. Their first Pastor was WILLIAM RIDER, whom Crosby mentions as a sufferer for conscience sake, but he is altogether unable to give any further particulars of his life, except that he published a small tract in vindication of the practice of laying on of hands on the baptized believers. The people were few in number, but they had the reputation of being men of solid judgment, deep knowledge, and religious stability, and many of them were also in easy circumstances as to worldly goods. Oliver Cromwell was just at that time in the ascendant, and Blake's cannon were sweeping the Dutch from the seas, but the Presbyterian establishment ruled with a heavy hand, and Baptists were under a cloud. In the following year, Cromwell was made Protector, the old parliament was sent about its business, and England enjoyed a large measure of liberty of conscience. This seems to have been a period of much religious heart-searching, in which the ordinances of churches were tried by the Word of God, and men were determined to retain nothing which was not sanctioned by Divine authority; hence, there were many public disputes upon baptism, and, in consequence, many became adherents of believers' immersion, and Baptist churches sprang up on all sides. Truth suffers nothing from free discussion; it is, indeed, the element in which it most freely exerts its power. I have personally known several instances in which sermons in defence of infant baptism have driven numbers to more Scriptural views, and I have felt that, if Pædo-Baptists will only preach upon the subject, Baptists will have little to do but to remain quiet and reap the sure results. It is a dangerous subject for any ministers to handle who wish their people to abide by the popular opinion on this matter.

* Readers who desire more detailed information concerning the Tabernacle Church, can find it in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle: its History and Work*. By C. H. SPURGEON. Passmore and Alabaster. 1s. and 2s.

How long William Rider exercised the ministerial office, I am unable to tell, but the church's next record, bearing date 1668, says :—" The Pastor having been dead for some time, they unanimously chose MR. BENJAMIN KEACH to be their elder or pastor." Accordingly, he was solemnly ordained, with prayer and the laying on of hands, being then in the twenty-eighth year of his age. Previous to his coming to London, Keach was continually engaged in preaching in the towns of Buckinghamshire, making Winslow his headquarters ; and so well did the good cause flourish under his zealous labours, and those of others, that the government quartered



MR. BENJAMIN KEACH.

dragoons in the district in order to put down unlawful meetings, and stamp out Dissent. The amount of suffering which this involved, the readers of the story of the Covenanting times in Scotland can readily imagine. For publishing a little book, *The Child's Instructor*, Keach was fined, imprisoned, and put in the pillory at Aylesbury and Winslow ; but he continued to labour in the country until 1668, when he came to London, and very speedily was chosen Pastor of the late Mr. Rider's congregation.

Benjamin Keach was one of the most useful preachers of his time, and for thirty-six years built up the Church of God with sound doctrine. Having been in his very earliest days an Arminian, and having soon advanced to Calvinistic views, he preserved the balance in his preaching, and was never a member of that exclusive school which deems it to be unsound to persuade men to repent and believe. He was by no means so highly Calvinistic as his great successor, Dr. Gill ; but evidently held much the same views as are now advocated from the pulpit of the Tabernacle. Nor must it be supposed that he was incessantly preaching upon believers' baptism, and other points of denominational peculiarity ; his teaching was sweetly spiritual, intensely Scriptural, and full of Christ. Whoever else kept back the fundamental truths of our holy gospel, Benjamin Keach did not so. During the time of an indulgence issued by Charles II., the congregation erected a large meeting-house, capable of holding "near a thousand hearers," in Goat's Yard Passage, Fair Street, Horse-lie-down, Southwark, and this is the first house of prayer actually set apart for Divine worship which I find that our church possessed. The joy of being able to meet in quiet to worship God, the delight of all assembling as one church, must have been great indeed. I have tried to imagine the cheerful salutations with which the brethren greeted each other when they all gathered in their meeting-house of timber, and worshipped without fear of molestation. The architecture was not gorgeous, nor were the fittings luxurious ; but the Lord was there, and this made amends for all. In all probability, there were no seats, for at that time most congregations stood, and pews are mentioned, in after days, as extras which persons erected for themselves, and looked upon as their own property. Mr. Keach trained his church to labour in the service of the Lord. Several were by his means called into the Christian ministry, his own son, Elias Keach, among them. He was mighty at home and useful abroad. By his means, other churches were founded, and meeting-houses erected ; he was, in fact, as a pillar and a brazen wall among the Baptist churches of his day, and was in consequence deservedly had in honour. He "fell on sleep," July 16, 1704, in the sixty-fourth year of his age, and was buried at the Baptists' burying-ground *in the Park, Southwark*. It was not a little singular that, in after years, the church over which he so ably presided should pitch its tent so near the place where his bones were laid, and that New Park Street should appear in her annals as a well-beloved name.

When Mr. Keach was upon his death-bed, he sent for his son-in-law, BENJAMIN STINTON, and solemnly charged him to care for the church which he was about to leave, and especially urged him to accept the pastoral office should it be offered to him by the brethren. Mr. Stinton had already for some years helped his father-in-law in many ways, and therefore he was no new and untried man. It is no small blessing when a church can find her pastors in her own midst ; the rule is to look

abroad ; but, perhaps, if our home gifts were more encouraged, the Holy Spirit would cause our teachers to come forth more frequently from among our own brethren. Still, we cannot forget the proverb about a prophet in his own country. When the church gave Mr. Stinton a pressing invitation, he delayed a while, and gave himself space for serious consideration ; but, at length, remembering the dying words of his father-in-law, and feeling himself directed by the Spirit of God, he gave himself up to the ministry, which he faithfully discharged for fourteen years,—namely, from 1704 to 1718. He had great natural gifts, but felt in need of more education, and set himself to work to obtain it as soon as he was settled over the church. To be thoroughly furnished for the great work before him, was his first endeavour. Crosby says of him :—“ He was a very painful and laborious minister of the gospel, and though he had not the advantage of an academical education, yet, by his own industry, under the assistance of the famous Mr. Ainsworth (author of the Latin dictionary), after he had taken upon him the ministerial office, he acquired a good degree of knowledge in the languages, and other useful parts of literature, which added lustre to those natural endowments which were very conspicuous in him.” In his later days, as the lease of the meeting-house in Goat’s Yard had nearly run out, preparation was made for erecting a new place of worship in Unicorn Yard. Spending himself in various works of usefulness, Mr. Stinton worked on till the 11th of February, 1718, when a close was put to his labours and his life. He was taken suddenly ill, and saying to his wife, “ *I am going,*” he laid himself down upon the bed, and expired in the forty-third year of his life. He smiled on death, for the Lord smiled on him. He was buried near his predecessor, in the Park, Southwark.

The loss of its Pastor is always a serious matter to a Baptist church, not only because it is deprived of the services of a well-tried and faithful guide, but because, in the process of selecting a successor, some of the worst points of human nature are apt to come to the front. All may unite in the former Pastor, but where will they find another rallying point? So many men, so many minds. All are not prepared to forego their own predilections, some are ready to be litigious, and a few seize the opportunity to thrust themselves into undue prominence. If they would all wait upon the Lord for His guidance, and consent to follow it when they have obtained it, the matter would move smoothly ; but, alas ! it is not always so. In the present instance, there came before the church an excellent young man, whose after life proved that he was well qualified for the pastorate, but either he was too young, being only twenty or one-and-twenty years of age, or there were certain points in his manner which were not pleasing to the older friends, and therefore he was earnestly opposed. The deacons, with the exception of Mr. Thomas Crosby, schoolmaster, and son-in-law of Keach, were resolved that this young man, who was

no other than JOHN GILL, from Kettering, should not become the Pastor. He found, however, warm and numerous supporters, and when the question came to a vote, his admirers claimed the majority, and in all probability their claim was correct, for the other party declined a scrutiny of the votes, and also raised the question of the women's voting, declaring, what was no doubt true, that apart from the female vote John Gill was in the minority. The end of the difference was that about half the church withdrew from the chapel in Goat Yard, and met in Mr. Crosby's school-room, claiming to be the old church, while another portion remained in the chapel, and also maintained that they were the original church. The question is now of small consequence, if it ever had any importance, for the company who rejected Gill, after selecting an excellent preacher, and prospering for many years, met with a chequered experience, and at length ceased to exist. In all probability, the division promoted the growth of the cause of Christ, and whatever unhappy circumstances marred it for a while, both parties acted conscientiously, and in a very short time were perfectly reconciled to each other. Mr. Gill's people did not long worship in Crosby's school-room, but, as the other friends were moving out and erecting another meeting-house in Unicorn Yard, they came back to the old building in Goat Yard, and found themselves very much at home.

Dr. Gill's pastorate extended over no less a period than fifty-one years, reaching from 1720 to 1771, and he proved himself to be a true master in Israel. His entire ministry was crowned with more than ordinary success, and he was by far the greatest scholar the church had yet chosen ; but he cannot be regarded as so great a soul-winner as Keach had been, neither was the church at any time so numerous under his ministry as under that of Keach. His method of address to sinners, in which for many years a large class of preachers followed him, was not likely to be largely useful. He cramped himself, and was therefore straitened where there was no Scriptural reason for being so. He does not appear to have had the public spirit of Stinton, though he had a far larger share of influence in the churches, and was indeed a sort of archbishop over a certain section. The ordination discourses and funeral sermons which he preached must have amounted to a very large number ; it seemed as if no Particular Baptist minister could be properly inducted or interred without Dr. Gill's officiating. In the beginning of the year 1719, the church at Horsleydown invited him to preach with a view to the pastorate, and he was ordained March 22, 1720. Little did the friends dream what sort of a man they had thus chosen to be their teacher ; but had they known it, they would have rejoiced that a man of such vast erudition, such indefatigable industry, such sound judgment, and such sterling honesty, had come among them. He was to be more mighty with his pen than Keach, and to make a deeper impression upon his age, though perhaps with the tongue he was less powerful than his eminent predecessor. Early in his

ministry, he had to take up the cudgels for Baptist views against a Pædo-Baptist preacher of Rowel, near Kettering, and he did so in a manner worthy of that eulogium which Toplady passed upon him in reference to other controversies, when he compared him to Marlborough, and declared that he never fought a battle without winning it. As a Pastor, he presided over the flock with dignity and affection. In the course of his ministry, he had some weak, some unworthy, and some very wicked



DR. GILL.

persons to deal with. To the feeble of the flock, he was an affectionate friend and father. He readily bore with their weaknesses, failings, and infirmities, and particularly when he saw they were sincerely on the Lord's side. In 1757, the church under his care erected a new meeting-house for him in Carter Lane, St Olave's Street, Southwark, near London Bridge ; which he opened on October 9, preaching two sermons from Exodus xx. 24.

In the Doctor's later years, the congregations were sparse, and the membership

seriously declined. He was himself only able to preach once on the Sabbath, and living in a rural retreat in Camberwell, he could do but little in the way of overseeing the church. It was thought desirable that some younger minister should be found to act as co-pastor. To this, the Doctor gave a very decided answer in the negative, asserting "that Christ gives *pastors*, is certain; but that he gives *co-pastors*, is not so certain." He even went the length of comparing a church with a co-pastor to a woman who should marry another man while her first husband lived, and call him co-husband. Great men are not always wise. However, by his stern repudiation of any division of his authority, the old gentleman held the reins of power till the age of seventy-four, although the young people gradually dropped off, and the church barely numbered 150 members. Soon, the venerable divine became too feeble for pulpit service, and confined himself to his study and the writing-desk, and by-and-by he found that he must lie down to rest, for his day's work was done. He died as he had lived, in a calm, quiet manner, resting on that rich sovereign grace which it had been his joy to preach. The last words he was heard to speak were, "O my Father, my Father!" He died at Camberwell, October 14, 1771, and was buried in Bunhill Fields. His eyesight had been preserved to him so that he could read small print by candle-light even to the last, and he never used glasses. His was a mind and frame of singular vigour, and he died before failing sight, either mental or physical, had rendered him unfit for service: in this as highly favoured as he had been in most other respects. He was one of the most learned men that the Baptist denomination has ever produced. His great work, *The Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, is still held in the highest esteem even by those whose sentiments widely differ from the author's. His *Body of Divinity* is also a masterly condensation of doctrinal and practical theology, and his *Cause of God and Truth* is highly esteemed by many. The system of theology with which many identify his name has chilled many churches to their very soul, for it has led them to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus: but for this, Dr. Gill must not be altogether held responsible, for a candid reader of his Commentary will soon perceive in it expressions altogether out of accord with such a narrow system; and it is well known that, when he was dealing with practical godliness, he was so bold in his utterances that the devotees of Hyper-Calvinism could not endure him. "Well, sir," said one of these, "if I had not been told that it was the great Dr. Gill who preached, I should have said I had heard an Arminian."

The mighty commentator having been followed to his grave by his attached church and a numerous company of ministers and Christian people, among whom he had been regarded as a great man and a prince in Israel, his church began to look around for a successor. This time, as in the case of Dr. Gill, there was trouble in

store, for there was division of opinion. Some, no doubt, as true Gillites, looked only for a solid divine, sound in doctrine, who would supply the older saints with spiritual food, while another party had an eye to the growth of the church, and to the securing to the flock the younger members of their families. They were agreed that they would write to Bristol for a probationer, and MR. JOHN RIPPON was sent to them. He was a youth of some twenty summers, of a vivacious temperament, quick and bold. The older members judged him to be too young, and too flighty; they even accused him of having gone up the pulpit stairs two steps at a time on some occasion when he was hurried,—a grave offence for which the condemnation could hardly be too severe. He was only a young man, and came from an academy, and this alone was enough to make the sounder and older members afraid of him. He preached for a lengthened time on probation, and finally some forty persons withdrew because they could not agree with the enthusiastic vote by which the majority of the people elected him. John Rippon modestly expressed his wonder that even more had not been dissatisfied, and his surprise that so large a number were agreed to call him to the pastorate. In the spirit of forbearance and brotherly love, he proposed that, as these friends were seceding for conscience sake, and intended to form themselves into another church, they should be lovingly dismissed with prayer and God-speed, and that, as a token of fraternal affection, they should be assisted to build a meeting-house for their own convenience, and the sum of £300 should be voted to them when their church was formed and their meeting-house erected. The promise was redeemed, and Mr. Rippon took part in the ordination service of the first minister. This was well done. Such a course was sure to secure the blessing of God. The church in Dean Street thus became another offshoot from the parent stem, and with varying conditions it remains to this day as the church in Trinity Street, Borough. It is somewhat remarkable, as illustrating the perversity of human judgment, that the seceding friends, who objected to Rippon's youth, elected for their pastor Mr. William Button, who was younger still, being only nineteen years of age. His father, however, was a deacon under Dr. Gill, and therefore no doubt the worthy youth was regarded with all the more tenderness; nor did he disappoint the hopes of his friends, for he laboured on for more than forty years with the utmost acceptance. The friends who remained with young John Rippon had no reason to regret their choice: the tide of prosperity set in, and continued for half a century, and the church again came to the front in denominational affairs. The chapel in Carter Lane was enlarged, and various agencies and societies set in motion; there was, in fact, a real revival of religion in the church, though it was of that quiet style which became a Baptist church of the straiter sort. Rippon was rather clever than profound; his talents were far inferior to those of Gill, but he had more tact, and so turned his gifts to the greatest possible account. He said

many smart and witty things, and his preaching was always lively, affectionate, and impressive. He was popular in the best sense of the term,—beloved at home, respected abroad, and useful everywhere. Many souls were won to Jesus by his teaching, and out of these a remarkable number became themselves ministers of the gospel. The church-book abounds with records of brethren preaching before the church, as the custom was in those days.



MR. RIPPON IN HIS YOUNGER DAYS.

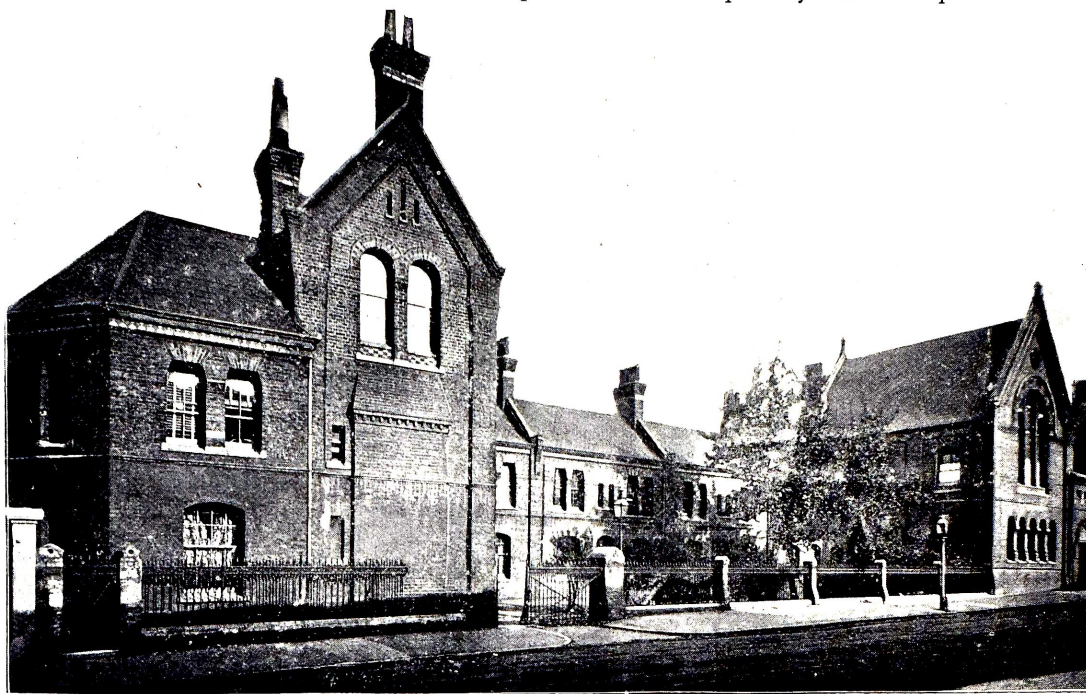
In his later years, Dr. Rippon was evidently in very comfortable circumstances, for we have often heard mention of his carriage and pair, or rather, “glass coach and two horses.” His congregation was one of the wealthiest within the pale of Nonconformity, and always ready to aid the various societies which sprang up, especially the Baptist Foreign Mission, and a certain Baptist Itinerant Society, which I suppose to have represented the Baptist Home Mission. The Pastor occupied no mean position in the church, but ruled with dignity and discretion,—perhaps, ruled a little too much. “How is it, Doctor, that your church is always so peaceful?” said a much-tried brother minister. “Well, friend,” said Rippon, “you see, we don’t call a church-meeting to consult about buying a new broom every time we want one, and we don’t entreat every noisy member to make a speech about the

price of the soap the floors are scrubbed with." In many of our smaller churches, a want of common sense is very manifest in the management, and trouble is invited by the foolish methods of procedure. Dr. Rippon once said that he had some of the best people in His Majesty's dominions in his church, and he used to add with a nod,—"*and some of the worst.*" Some of the latter class seem to have got into office at one time, for they were evidently a hindrance rather than a help to the good man, though from his independent mode of doing things the hindrance did not much affect him. As well as I can remember it, the story of his founding the Almshouses and Schools, in 1803, runs as follows. The Doctor urges upon the deacons the necessity of such institutions; they do not see the urgency thereof; he pleads again, but, like the deaf adder, they are not to be charmed, charm he never so wisely. "The expense will be enormous, and the money cannot be raised;" this was the unceasing croak of the prudent officers. At length the Pastor says, "The money can be raised, and shall be. Why, if I don't go out next Monday, and collect £500 before the evening meeting, I'll drop the proposal; but while I am sure the people will take up the matter heartily, I will not be held back by you." Disputes in this case were urged in very plain language, but with no degree of bitterness, for the parties knew each other, and had too much mutual respect to make their relationships in the church depend upon a point of difference. All were agreed to put the Doctor to the test, and challenged him to produce the £500 next Monday, or cease to importune them about Almshouses. The worthy slow coaches were up to time on the appointed evening, and the Doctor soon arrived. "Well, brethren," said he, "I have succeeded in collecting £300;—that is most encouraging, is it not?" "But," said two or three of them at once in a hurry, "you said you would get £500, or drop the matter, and we mean to keep you to your word." "By all means," said he, "and I mean to keep my word, too, for there is £800 which the friends gave me almost without asking, and the rest is nearly all promised." The prudent officials were taken aback, but recovering themselves, they expressed their great pleasure, and would be ready to meet the Pastor at any time, to arrange for the expending of the funds. "No, no, my brethren," said the Doctor, "I shall not need your services. You have opposed me all along, and now I have done the work without you, you want to have your say in it to hinder me still; but neither you nor any other deacons shall plague a minister about this business. So, brethren, you can attend to something else." Accordingly, the old trust deed of the Almshouses had a clause to the effect that the Pastor should elect the pensioners, "*no deacon interfering.*"

When the time came for removing the Almshouses and Schools to the fine block of buildings erected by our friends in the Station Road, Walworth, near the Elephant and Castle Railway Station, I had great pleasure in inducing the

Charity Commissioners to expunge this objectionable clause, and to give the Pastor and deacons unitedly the power to select the objects of the charity.

Dr. Rippon continued in the pastorate from 1773 to 1836, a period of sixty-three years. He outlived his usefulness, and it was a wonderful instance of Divine care over the church that the old gentleman did not do it serious injury. He retained the will to govern after the capacity was gone, and he held his power over the pulpit though unable to occupy it to profit. Supplies who came to preach for him were not always allowed to officiate; and when they did, the old minister's remarks from his pew were frequently more quaint than



METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE ALMSHOUSES AND SCHOOLS.

agreeable. It is not an unqualified blessing to live to be eighty-five. During the last few months, MR. CHARLES ROOM, with the Doctor's full approbation, acted as his assistant, but he resigned upon the decease of Dr. Rippon. He left with the esteem and good wishes of the church, and afterwards exercised a useful ministry at Portsea. In 1830, six years before Dr. Rippon's death, the old sanctuary in Carter Lane was closed, to be pulled down for making the approaches to the present London Bridge. Due compensation was given, but a chapel could not be built in a day, and, therefore, for three years, the church was without a home, and had to be indebted to the hospitality of other congregations. After so long a

time for choice, the good deacons ought to have pitched upon a better site for the new edifice ; but it is not judging them hardly when I say that they could not have discovered a worse position. If they had taken thirty years to look about them with the design of burying the church alive, they could not have succeeded better. New Park Street is a low-lying sort of lane close to the bank of the River Thames, near the enormous breweries of Messrs. Barclay and Perkins, the vinegar factories of Mr. Potts, and several large boiler works. The nearest way to it from the City was over Southwark Bridge, *with a toll to pay*. No cabs could be had within about half-a-mile of the place, and the region was dim, dirty, and destitute, and frequently flooded by the river at high tides. Here, however, the new chapel must be built because the ground was a cheap freehold, and the authorities were destitute of enterprise, and would not spend a penny more than the amount in hand. That God, in infinite mercy, forbade the extinction of the church, is no mitigation of the shortsightedness which thrust a respectable community of Christians into an out-of-the-way position, far more suitable for a tallow-melter's business than for a meeting-house. The chapel, however, was a neat, handsome, commodious, well-built edifice, and was regarded as one of the best Baptist chapels in London. Dr. Rippon was present at the opening of the new house in 1833, but it was very evident that, having now found a place to meet in, the next step must be to find a minister to preside over the congregation. This was no easy task, for the old gentleman, though still revered and loved, was difficult to manage in such matters. Happily, however, the deacons were supremely judicious, and having kept the church out of all rash expenditure, they also preserved it from all hasty action, and tided over affairs till the worn-out Pastor passed away to his rest, and with due funereal honours was laid in that Campo Santo of Nonconformists,—the cemetery of Bunhill Fields, of which it had been his ambition to become the historian and chronicler. There are thousands in Heaven who were led first to love the Saviour by his earnest exhortations. He quarried fresh stones, and built up the church. He moulded its thought, and directed its energies. Without being great, he was exceedingly useful, and the period in which he was one of the judges of our Israel was one of great prosperity in spiritual things. It was a good sixty-three years, and with the previous pastorate of Dr. Gill, enabled the church to say that, during one hundred and seventeen years, they had been presided over by two ministers only.

The next Pastor was Mr., now Doctor, JOSEPH ANGUS, a gentleman whose career since he left us to become secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and afterwards the tutor of Stepney Academy, now Regent's Park College, has rendered his name most honourable among living Baptists. During Mr. Angus's pastorate, the privilege of communing at the Lord's table was extended to members of other churches, whether baptized or not, and this was done quietly and without division,

though a considerable minority did not agree with it. The church remains a community of baptized believers, and its constitution will not admit any persons into its membership but those immersed upon personal profession of faith in the Lord Jesus ; but it does not attempt to judge the order and discipline of other churches, and has fellowship in the breaking of bread with all churches which form parts of the mystical body of Christ : thus it endeavours to fulfil at the same time the duties of purity and love. In December, 1839, the Baptist Missionary Society invited Mr. Angus to become its Home Secretary. A sense of the importance of the Missionary Society, and the fact that, after much deliberation, the Committee could not discover anyone else about whom they could be at all unanimous, were the motives which led him to leave the church, to the deep regret of all the members.

After the removal of Dr. Angus, the church was happily directed to hear MR. JAMES SMITH, whose ministry in Cheltenham was an abundant guarantee that he was likely to prove the right man to collect a congregation in New Park Street. He was Pastor for about eight years and a half, from 1841 to 1850, and then returned to Cheltenham, from which many of his best friends are of opinion that he ought never to have removed. He was a man of slender education, but of great natural ability, sound in the faith, intensely earnest, and a ready speaker. Few men have ever been more useful than he. In July, 1851, the church invited the REV. WILLIAM WALTERS, of Preston, to become the Pastor, but as he understood the deacons to intimate to him that his ministry was not acceptable, he tendered his resignation, and although requested to remain, he judged it more advisable to remove to Halifax in June, 1853, thus closing a ministry of two years. These changes sadly diminished the church, and marred its union. The clouds gathered heavily, and no sunlight appeared ; but the Lord had not forgotten His people, and in due time He poured them out such a blessing that there was not room to receive it. Let me tell once more the pleasing story.

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On the last Sabbath morning in November, 1853, I walked, according to my wont, from Cambridge to the village of Waterbeach, in order to occupy the pulpit of the little Baptist Chapel. It was a country road, and there were five or six honest miles of it, which I usually measured, each Sunday, foot by foot, unless I happened to be met by a certain little pony and cart which came half-way, but could not by any possibility venture further because of the enormous expense which would have been incurred by driving through the toll-gate at Milton ! That winter's morning, I was all aglow with my walk, and ready for my pulpit exercises. Sitting down in the table-pew, a letter, bearing the postmark of London, was passed to me. It was an unusual missive, and was opened with curiosity. It contained an invitation to preach at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, the pulpit of which had formerly been

occupied by Dr. Rippon,—the very Dr. Rippon whose hymn-book was then before me upon the table,—the great Dr. Rippon, out of whose Selection I was about to choose the hymns for our worship. The late Dr. Rippon seemed to hover over me as an immeasurably great man, the glory of whose name covered New Park Street Chapel and its pulpit with awe unspeakable. I quietly passed the letter across the table to the deacon who gave out the hymns, observing that there was some mistake, and that the letter must have been intended for a Mr. Spurgeon who preached somewhere down in Norfolk. He shook his head, and remarked that he was afraid there was no mistake, as he always knew that his minister would be run away with by some large church or other, but that he was a little surprised that the Londoners should have heard of me quite so soon. “Had it been Cottenham, or St. Ives, or Huntingdon,” said he, “I should not have wondered at all; but going to London is rather a great step from this little place.” He shook his head very gravely; but the time had come for me to look out the hymns, therefore the letter was put away, and, as far as I can remember, was for the day quite forgotten.

The next day, this answer was sent to the letter from the London deacon:—

“No. 60, Park Street,

“Cambridge,

“November 28th, 1853.

“My Dear Sir,

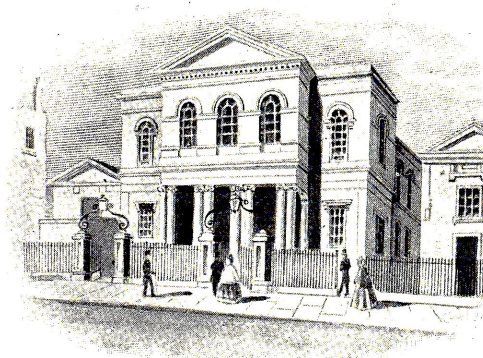
“I do not reside at Waterbeach, and therefore your letter did not reach me till yesterday, although the friends ought to have forwarded it at once. My people at Waterbeach are hardly to be persuaded to let me come, but I am prepared to serve you on the 11th [December]. On the 4th, I could not leave them; and the impossibility of finding a supply at all agreeable to them, prevents me from leaving home two following Sabbaths. I have been wondering very much how you could have heard of me, and I think I ought to give some account of myself, lest I should come and be out of my right place. Although I have been more than two years minister of a church, which has in that time doubled, yet my last birthday was only my nineteenth. I have hardly ever known what the fear of man means, and have all but uniformly had large congregations, and frequently crowded ones; but if you think my years would unqualify me for your pulpit, then, by all means, I entreat you, do not let me come. The Great God, my Helper, will not leave me to myself. Almost every night, for two years, I have been aided to proclaim His truth. I am therefore able to promise you for the 11th, and should you accept the offer, I will come on Saturday afternoon, and return on Monday. As I shall have to procure a supply, an early answer will oblige—

“Yours most truly,

“C. H. SPURGEON.”

In due time came another epistle, setting forth that the former letter had been written in perfect knowledge of the young preacher's age, and had been intended for him and him alone. The request of the former letter was repeated and pressed, a date mentioned for the journey to London, and the place appointed at which the preacher would find lodging. That invitation was accepted, and as the result thereof the boy-preacher of the Fens travelled to London. Though it is so long ago, yet it seems but yesterday that I lodged for the night at a boarding-house in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, to which the worthy deacon had directed me. As I wore a huge black satin stock, and used a blue handkerchief with white spots, the young gentlemen of that boarding-house marvelled greatly at the youth from the country who had come up to preach in London, but who was evidently in the condition known as "verdant green." They were mainly of the Evangelical Church persuasion, and seemed greatly tickled that the country lad should be a preacher. They did not propose to go and hear the youth, but they seemed to tacitly agree to *encourage* me after their own fashion, and I was encouraged accordingly! What tales were narrated of the great divines of the metropolis, and their congregations! One, I remember, had a thousand *city* men to hear him; another had his church filled with *thoughtful* people, such as could hardly be matched all over England; while a third had an immense audience almost entirely composed of the *young men* of London, who were spell-bound by his eloquence. The study which these men underwent in composing their sermons, their herculean toils in keeping up their congregations, and the matchless oratory which they exhibited on all occasions, were duly rehearsed in my hearing, and when I was shown to bed in a cupboard over the front door, I was not in an advantageous condition for pleasant dreams. New Park Street hospitality never sent the young minister to that far-away hired room again; but, assuredly, that Saturday evening in a London boarding-house was about the most depressing agency which could have been brought to bear upon my spirit. On the narrow bed I tossed in solitary misery, and found no pity. Pitiless was the grind of the cabs in the street, pitiless the recollection of the young city clerks, whose grim propriety had gazed upon my rusticity with such amusement, pitiless the spare room which scarcely afforded me space to kneel, pitiless even the gas-lamps which seemed to wink at me as they flickered amid the December darkness. I had no friend in all that city full of human beings, but felt myself to be among strangers and foreigners, and hoped to be helped through the scrape into which I had been brought, and to escape safely to the serene abodes of Cambridge and Waterbeach, which then seemed to be Eden itself. The Sabbath morning was clear and cold, and I wended my way along Holborn Hill towards Blackfriars and certain tortuous lanes and alleys at the foot of Southwark Bridge. Wondering, praying, fearing, hoping, believing,—I felt all alone, and yet not alone. Expectant of Divine help, and inwardly borne

down by my sense of the need of it, I traversed a dreary wilderness of brick to find the spot where my message was to be delivered. One text rose to my lips many times, I scarcely know why,—“He must needs go through Samaria.” The necessity of our Lord’s journeying in a certain direction, is no doubt repeated in His servants; and as my journey was not of my seeking, and had been by no means pleasing so far as it had gone,—the one thought of a “needs be” for it seemed to overtop every other. At sight of New Park Street Chapel, I felt for a moment amazed at my own temerity, for it seemed to my eyes to be a large, ornate, and



NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

imposing structure, suggesting an audience wealthy and critical, and far removed from the humble folk to whom my ministry had been sweetness and light. It was early, so there were no persons entering; and when the set time was fully come, there were no signs to support the suggestion raised by the exterior of the building, and I felt that, by God’s help, I was not yet out of my depth, and was not likely to be with so small an audience. The Lord helped me very graciously, I had a happy Sabbath in the pulpit, and spent the interval with warm-hearted friends; and when, at night, I trudged back to the Queen Square narrow lodging, I was not alone, and I no longer looked on Londoners as flinty-hearted barbarians. My tone was altered; I wanted no pity of anyone, I did not care a penny for the young gentlemen lodgers and their miraculous ministers, nor for the grind of the cabs, nor for anything else under the sun. The lion had been looked at all round, and his majesty did not appear to be a tenth as majestic as when I had only heard his roar miles away.

(The friend who walked back with Mr. Spurgeon to his lodging in Queen Square, at the close of the first Sabbath evening’s service at New Park Street Chapel, was Mr. Joseph Passmore. That walk was the prelude to a life-long friendship and happy association in church work and in the publication of the beloved Pastor’s

many works. The following is the first letter ever written by Mr. Spurgeon to his friend, and is included in the Autobiography through the kindness of his eldest son and namesake, Mr. Joseph Passmore :—)

“ May 17th, 1854.

“ My Dear Brother,

“ I am extremely obliged to you for your kind present. I find that all the kindness is not in the country, some at least grows in town ; and, if nowhere else, it is to be found in a house in Finsbury.

“ It is sweet to find oneself remembered. I trust the harmony between us may never receive the slightest jar, but continue even in Heaven. We have, I trust, just commenced a new era ; and, by God's blessing, we will strive to make it a glorious one to our Church. Oh, that our hopes may all be realized ! I feel assured that your constant prayers are going up fervently to Heaven ; let us continue wrestling, and the wished-for blessing must arrive.

“ With Christian regards to you and Mrs. Passmore,

“ I am,

“ Yours most truly,

C. II. SPURGEON.”