

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION:
EFFECTS UPON THE BAPTIST COMMUNITY IN BARNOLDSWICK
AND THE RESULTING "SPLIT" IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH

As we pass through a period of economic depression, churches are facing the task of helping the unemployed. At different periods in the story of this nation Baptist churches have played their part in action to relieve the stress of unemployment. In recent days this has often worked to the advantage of the church in such schemes as "job creation". However, a primitive form of "job creation" placed one Baptist minister in bankruptcy, resulted in a battle through the courts of the land, divided a church in two and created enmity between the members for nearly 100 years. The story of the Rev. Thomas Bennett and the Baptists of Barnoldswick is a salutary one, fortunately with a happy ending, albeit 100 years after the beginning.

R. H. Tawney¹ describes the changes that occurred in the teaching of the church in regard to money and the change that took place in trade and society in the 16th and 17th centuries which began to pave the way for the development of large scale industrial capital, which, combined with the encouragement to invention and science of the Reformation led to the industrial revolution. "The triumph of puritanism", said Cunningham, "swept away all traces of any restriction or guidance in the employment of money".² The old regime, once broken, was capable of a reformation of its own and a system which had started out with authoritarian regimentation ended up as utilitarian individualism and economic licence. Medieval suspicion of trade gave way to a new thesis that there was no necessary conflict between religion and business. So Richard Steele, a minister deprived of his living under the Act of Uniformity wrote: "Prudence and Piety were always good friends... you may gain enough of both worlds if you would mind each in its place... How is it that ye stand all day idle? Your trade is your proper province. Next to saving his soul, the tradesman's care and business is to serve God in his calling, and to drive it as far as it will go".³

Gradually, through the restoration and on into the Industrial Revolution economics and trade were removed from the realm of ethics and theology. Having legitimised industrial capitalism, the church let go of economic theory. In this changing climate the struggle of the Baptist church in Barnoldswick reflects the new perspectives emerging. At the heart of the industrial revolution was the growth of cotton manufacturing in the north-west of England. The mill became a symbol of new social energies and the new men of industrial wealth figures to be reckoned with as the towns around their mills began to grow. The equation between the cotton mill and the new industrial society, and the correspondence between new forms of productive and social relationship, was a commonplace among observers in the years between 1790-1850. Karl Marx expressed the point thus - "The hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the

steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist".⁴

Barnoldswick was on the edge of this "new" society, but reflected in many ways the patterns observed in more dramatic instances in towns like Oldham.⁵ The mills in Barnoldswick were relatively late to be constructed. Like other cotton towns, they were erected by men of capital and standing in the area, but where the small scale entrepreneur made his mark was in the renting of heat and power from a shed owner and building up his business by owning a certain number of looms in a spinning shed. The effect of this development was dramatic on a small town like Barnoldswick which altered out of all recognition between 1841 and 1871 as the mills were erected.

A Baptist church had existed in the area for a long time. In 1661 a message barn, croft and garden, held in trust by three members of the dissenting community, was conveyed in trust to a John Taylor. This was the first meeting house of the Barnoldswick Baptists. In 1687⁶ William Mitchel and his cousin, David Crosley (who was brought up by an aunt, Mrs Mitchel of Barnoldswick) began preaching around a circuit of meeting places based on the Rossendale valley and including Barnoldswick. In 1694, the barn, cottage and garden were transferred to Crosley who was described as "minister" of the Church. From then on the Baptist cause begins to emerge clearly in the town. This little church, formed mainly of illiterate crofters and handloom weavers, grew in what was a quiet back-water. In 1705 one of their own number acted as minister (James Howarth) and about 70 people from Colne, Sutton, Malham, Bolland, Gisburn and Earby constituted the communicant members of the assembly. In 1797, the then Pastor, Nathan Smith (described in records as a hand-loom weaver, malt merchant, teacher and pastor) encouraged the church to build a chapel next to the barn and cottage. This they did. Following the opening of the Leeds and Liverpool canal in 1796, the character of the hamlet began to change. The weavers associated together in two water powered mills at "Gillians" and by 1810 there was a small steam engine in Mitchel's mill opposite the chapel. From then on, the town underwent expansion.

In 1844 a young man by the name of Thomas Bennett settled as Pastor. He was from Sabden and had been employed with a print works until he entered the dissenting academy at Accrington. On leaving Accrington he settled in Barnoldswick. The population was now over 1,000 though hand-loom weaving was still the principal industry. Some weavers still carried work on their backs to Colne (5 miles away). Being isolated life revolved around either the parish church (2 miles from the town), a small Wesleyan chapel or the Baptist chapel. The community appears to have functioned in the task-orientated pattern commented on by E. P. Thompson,⁷ which marks the pre-industrialised community and its approach to work activity. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution the viability of hand-loom weaving became precarious and in 1847 the first large scale mill was opened adjacent to the Baptist chapel. An exodus began from Bacup and Rossendale to Barnoldswick for the new work opportunities. At that time the standard form of

house in the town was a single-entrance cottage. The cottage had flagged floors, no cellars, bare woodwork and joists. Some of the houses were three storied, hand loom weaving being carried out on the top storey (examples of this form of house are to be found next to the old Baptist chapel in Walmsgate to this day) and had the distinction of being the only blue-slated houses in the township at this time.

Bennett, 22 years old, came to this growing community as a gifted preacher. Across the road from the chapel the Mitchel family began to erect Clough Shed which held 300 looms with space for winding, warping and cut-looking. The Mitchels let the space to three Bracewell brothers noted in local folklore as men who did not work their employees too hard. In this atmosphere the Baptist church outgrew the 1797 building and in 1852 erected a fine new chapel seating 900 - "Bethesda". As the Baptists advanced, so the Bracewells declined. The competition became harder and the brothers relinquished their tenancy in 1860 and left the district. This immediately created a situation of serious unemployment in the township. The Butts shed was now in operation with over 400 looms (soon to be expanded to 634) but families were continuing to move into the town. In this situation the Baptist Church met to see what could be done. The outcome of that meeting was to ask Mr Bennett to take over tenancy of part of the Clough shed, and with financial backing from some of his friends, to commence cotton manufacturing. The aim seems to have been quite simply to relieve unemployment amongst the members of the church and generally to lift that sense of depression which had come to the town following the departure of the Bracewell brothers.

The time was not propitious for success. The American war was soon to lead to great difficulty in the cotton industry throughout the northern counties and Bennett, recently started in the trade and without any great reserves of finance, succumbed to severe losses. At that point trouble emerged in the church. E. R. Lewis, his successor as minister, says:

In consequence of this he became very unsettled in the church, differences arose, which in 1868 led to the formation of the Church which now worships in the new chapel near the Clough. During all the disquietude the Church at Bethesda devotedly clung to Mr Bennett and gave many evident proofs of affectionate attachment to him.⁸

Contrast this with a statement some years later by the minister of North Street (the "New chapel near the Clough"):

Mr Bennett like many others had to pass through the painful experience of bankruptcy. This might have proved but a temporary setback to his popularity and progress, but later on, grave and well-founded charges were brought against him by members of his church and congregation. Differences arose in the church causing long and painful protestations but the dominant will of Mr Bennett proved a barrier to speedy settlement.⁹

These statements present a stark contrast. This contrast becomes all the more interesting when we discover that Bennett was forced into bankruptcy by a member of his own congregation,

Clayton Slater, who later brought these "very serious charges" against Bennett; that Slater and other families who later rose to be wealthy mill owners formed the "New Chapel" leaving Bethesda the chapel of the employees; that there was a High Court action which was finally settled by the Vice-Chancellor and that the two chapels remained divided from 1868 until 1971 and into the 1950s the social difference, the employers church and the employees church, could still be seen in them.

Thereafter the scandal of division was often commented upon. One story frequently told in Baptist circles was of "two Baptist Churches within stones throwing distance of each other, and they knew because they had tried".¹⁰

Now, the two causes have re-united in new premises and the boxes of letters, the copies of minutes, the newspaper cuttings begin to tell the story of the effect of the industrial revolution upon the church.

Bennett shared the tenancy at Clough Mill with John Slater and Sons. This family was connected with the Baptist Church. John Slater had started in business as a hand loom weaver and the experience of weaving in difficult days ensured that the firm survived the 1860s. John Slater trained his sons in the arts of manufacturing - Joseph Henry, Thomas, Clayton and James were all actively involved in the business before their father died in 1867 at the age of 69. John Slater had been of help and support to Bennett in his attempts to increase employment for the townsfolk; and Bennett, at his collapse, had significant debts to John Slater and Sons. Bennett seems to have failed in 1867, about the time of John Slater's death. Unlike their father, the sons had always been employers and manufacturers and it was Clayton Slater who then took a central role in suggesting to Bennett's creditors that they foreclose. It is perhaps no coincidence that John Slater and Sons then took over the space occupied by Bennett in Clough Mill and later added to the building, gained control of the Shed Company and began letting room and power to others. Clayton Slater wanted to isolate Bennett and several Special Church meetings were called at which prominent business men within the Church proposed Bennett's dismissal. In time the following was submitted to a Church meeting:

We have a painful duty to perform, but as the honour and rights of the Church require it at our hands, we beg to submit the following facts and resolutions to the Church:-

The opinions and decision of the Church have been systematically deferred. At the first Church meeting after the event of Mr Bennett's failure a proposition was made that he be suspended for one month. This was lost by a majority of the members then present - the parties who made this proposition have no reason to complain of the numbers or abilities of those present since the opportunity was entirely of their own choosing - yet they persisted in active opposition. At a second Church meeting, our pastor, having made his statements, left himself entirely in the hands of the Church to do with him as they thought proper,

which was equivalent to submitting to suspension, expulsion or resignation or whatever the Church might decide. The following motion was made - That the Church had confidence in the character of their minister and requested him to resume his labours as soon as business matters would permit or give in whatever other decision he might arrive at. This was carried by 6/7ths - 54 - and in the face of this, opposition to the Church and members was perseveringly carried on. At a third Church meeting in defiance of the expressed wishes of the previous meeting the subject was introduced again and by the forbearance of the Church the chairman invited the disturbers to bring forward a proposition. None being forthcoming, the following, to secure peace, was submitted: That the questions affecting our minister be deferred until after his businesses are brought to a close and that this meeting confirms its decision at the previous meeting, but notwithstanding the repeated efforts of the Church to secure peace and justice its elected servants attempted by persuasions and offers of liberal treatment to induce our minister to leave us. Prayerfully asking what is our duty in the light of the foregoing facts and realizing something of the awful power vested in us as the final court of appeal as embodied in the words of our saviour if they hear not the Church let them be unto ages an heathen man and a publican - we therefore resolve that this meeting express its disapprobation at those deacons or others who have dared to set the authority of Christ and the power of the Church at defiance and that we again request our minister not to resign and that the resolutions of the previous meetings be confirmed - Carried by 33 showing hands in favour of the foregoing resolutions out of the 41 members present at a Church meeting duly noticed on the previous sabbath.¹¹

A picture of two deacons pressured by members of the congregation encouraging the church to suggest that Bennett should resign the pastorate and leave the town begins to emerge. The church members, by and large weavers, still wanted to stand by Bennett because he had put himself at risk for them. The deacons then refused to serve at the Lord's table or make the announcements and the church meeting provisionally appointed others to undertake these tasks. The church met again on 2nd December but this took the matter little further other than resolving that - "females have a right to speak".¹² A more important meeting was held on 13th December. At that meeting non-members were present and they had, during the course of the meeting, to be excluded. Bennett was confirmed as minister (43 votes to 27)¹³ and the Deacons were censured. The lines of battle were being drawn. Slater and his friends on the diaconate had no intention of letting Bennett and the weavers off so lightly.

Here, it might be worthwhile referring to testimony under oath at the West Riding sessions in Bradford, on Saturday 12th December 1868. On that occasion Clayton and Henry Slater, John Smith, Robert Edmondson and Frederic Wilcock were charged with being guilty of a misdemeanour on 27th September 1868, and

impeding and assaulting in the performances of his duties as a minister of religion, the Rev. Thomas Bennett at the old chapel in Barnoldswick. They shed some light on the initial bankruptcy of autumn 1867:

Mr Shaw, appearing for the prosecution, said:

It appeared that a gentleman of the name of Bennett had been since 1844 the Baptist minister at a chapel in Barnoldswick. Some time after his coming to the place another chapel (Bethesda) was established. It appeared that Barnoldswick was a place where hand loom weaving was largely followed, but that it was not a profitable occupation and Bennett induced a friend to start power-loom weaving in the cotton business. This gentleman later withdrew and Bennett himself adopted the business. During the unfortunate rupture in America the cotton business declined and ultimately Bennett became a bankrupt. About October 1867, the defendant, Clayton Slater, who possibly - he did not say certainly - was a creditor of Bennett's, raised objections against that gentleman's officiating any longer as minister. Slater had a personal following, but there was no doubt that a large majority of the congregation was in favour of Bennett, who continued to officiate at one of the chapels, though not the old one, where in July of the present year (1868) he was dragged violently from the pulpit.¹⁴

Why he was dragged from the pulpit we shall see later, but the record of this court case for assault highlights the facts and begins to throw into perspective the issue of control. Slater wanted rid of Bennett, and under cross-examination the following additional details come to light -

Mr Campbell Foster proceeded to cross-examine Bennett at great length. He admitted that, in April 1867, he made a statement of his affairs to the Yorkshire Building Company, showing a balance of £841 in his favour. He denied that in his examination in bankruptcy in September of the same year, he stated that the year before his deficiency was between three and four thousand pounds... He (Bennett) had been thirteen months in court before he obtained a certificate, but it was through the proceedings of the present defendant (Slater) that he became bankrupt for over £8,000. He did not know what his assets produced, it should have been about £4,000 but the property was squandered.¹⁵

These details were not disputed. What becomes evident is that Slater, the manufacturer, Sunday school teacher and member of Bennett's congregation, was the key figure in undermining Bennett in his attempts to provide work within the town and that as a result of the crisis Clayton Slater and his brothers were able to take control at a reduced price of Clough Mill and the machinery within it and went on to become, by the late 1870s, the largest employers in the town. The tension between manufacturer, dissenting minister and weavers was to go on for many years. It was noticeable that after the estab-

lishment (by Slater) of the "New Chapel" in 1869, the manufacturers in Barnoldswick who were attracted to the Baptist denomination always attended the "New Chapel" (later called North Street), and the weavers, by and large, the Bethesda chapel, and that these same manufacturers never became members of the Church. As late as the early 1960s, an industrialist moving into the town from Baptist stock, began to attend North Street. The following week one of his workpeople stopped him and said, "Ah, I see you have gone to the Bosses' Chapel".¹⁶

Battle having been joined, Clayton Slater and his two deacon friends continued the campaign. If the church meeting supported Bennett, Slater would tackle the Trustees. The Minister was paid largely from rent of the original barn, cottage, messuage and sundry other premises inherited by the church in the preceding two hundred years. Slater convinced a majority of the Trustees that Bennett was in dispute with the church and for ten years the Trustees withheld rental payments due to the minister as stipend.¹⁷ In addition Slater encouraged the Trustees to give him access to the 1797 Chapel to conduct worship as the "authentic" Baptist community. The Trustees were divided on this including both supporters of Bennett and Slater. The latter had two things in their favour. Firstly, they had the keys of the old chapel, and secondly, they collected the rents from the property and went half-yearly to pay them to the minister. The rent issue was settled in the High Court by the Vice-Chancellor in 1875 in favour of Bennett. In the meantime attention focused on attempts to use the old chapel for worship. Since the opening of Bethesda in 1852, the old chapel had been mainly used for the Sunday School and various Bible class meetings. Slater was keenly involved in the Sunday School.

On 27th September 1868 Bennett tried to gain access to, and conduct worship in, the old chapel. At nine in the morning he was refused entry by Slater and others, a scuffle took place and as the prosecutor at the subsequent trial described it - "Bennett was seized, they took him by the neck, pulled him by the hair and by the coat, knocked him down, and treated him in a shameful way; and others were also assaulted. The consequence to Mr Bennett was that he was confined for some time to his bed, and that the injuries he received produced erysipelas, from which there arose danger of the loss of his eyesight".¹⁸ Events had now gone beyond easy words and motions. Bennett, writing to his solicitors, said - "Alarm reports were spread, the Police were gathered and hundreds of people were collected around the chapel when a meeting of the Church (members) was held... The truth is that the Church is fighting for its independence and for the right of the majority to rule (against the wishes of the manufacturers)".¹⁹

In the court hearing already referred to, the Chairman of the Bench tried to bring the parties together, but it proved difficult. Bennett had gone into manufacturing to help the many unemployed in the town, he could have weathered the storm, but Slater, one of his own congregation, had objected to the methods of Bennett, which, like the Bracewells before him, had

been more humane than those of the industrial capitalists. Eventually it was agreed on a suggestion from the jury that -

the keys of both chapels ought to be given up. Each party to occupy one chapel, the minister to have the choice; that the minister have the same control over any funds that he had previous to the disputes and that the keys of the two chapels be placed in the keeping of the local superintendent of county police with the understanding that he open the chapels at all reasonable hours, and act as keeper of the chapels in that respect. These conditions to remain in force until Mr Bennett be legally discharged from office.²⁰

This was no solution. Bennett was never legally discharged from office. He died as Pastor at the age of 67 in October 1886.²¹ Clayton Slater and his friends did not use the old chapel for long, soon moving out, and Thomas Bennett did not receive the income as required by the agreement until the ruling of the Vice-Chancellor in 1875. As for Slater, he rode out the difficulties of the cotton trade and by astute management and the suppression of wages²² was well placed for further advance in the next boom.

The majority still held to Bennett and the original church. They had dismissed the two deacons who went with Clayton Slater and appointed new ones. The Trustees were divided and not inclined to pay Bennett the rental income until they had a firm court ruling. The Slater family were also pressuring the Trustees to withhold payment.

Those members and congregation who had sided with Clayton Slater began at this stage to organise themselves into a church, worshipping first in a laithe (barn) in the Long Ing area of the town. In the same year they called the Rev. James Wilkinson to be their minister. He was a young man from the Bury (now Northern) Baptist College. This was to lead to a meeting of the Yorkshire Association at Halifax:

That the Christian friends at Barnoldswick under the pastoral care of the Revd J. Wilkinson be recognized as the Baptist Church in Barnoldswick and that Mr Wilkinson be received by the Association as the Pastor of the said Church.²³

During the interview with the Association Committee it had become clear that it would be possible to recognise only one of the two churches because of the strong feelings between them, and in the course of what we must imagine to be heated exchanges Bennett and the other Bethesda representatives withdrew from the meeting. The Bethesda church rejoined the Association in 1891 under the guidance of Bennett's successor, the Rev. E. R. Lewis.

Richardson and Turner, the solicitors engaged by Bethesda and Bennett, approached counsel for advice concerning the fees and Mr Wickens Q.C. wrote to them in August 1869 giving high hopes of early success in the courts -

The defendant should produce and make exhibits of the Church books in his possession containing the minutes of the Church meetings in October and November 1867.²⁴

It was necessary to have a formal notice for re-possession of the old chapel read out at a service there and Bennett's solicitors advised him to send "one of the most peaceable and least objectionable of your friends so that there may not be any risk of the unseemly proceedings of last Sunday which we think might have been avoided had you sent a civil request that the notice might be read".²⁵

Attitudes had hardened on both sides and every meeting and event became a cause for further aggravation. In February 1870 judgement on the issue of Bennett's right to receive the rents from the Trustees was made in his favour in chancery, but immediately there was a decision to appeal. Apparently no one was in any doubt as to why this was done - the attempt was being made to force Bennett to give up his claims through lack of finance. His stipend had now been withheld by the Trustees since 1867! The Trustees made various partial offers to Bennett, but he and the Bethesda membership were adamant that a point of principle was at stake. He was the duly appointed minister and the attempts made by a minority to remove him were the work of people inspired by motives of self-interest and greed and directed not only against the minister, but against the weavers who were members of the church. Finally, on 22nd December 1870 the Lord Chancellor decreed that Bennett had not been dismissed, that Bethesda was the legitimate continuing cause and that Bennett and the membership should have possession of both the old chapel and Bethesda and that Bennett should have the appropriate back-payment of stipend. His opponents tried to call a meeting of the Bethesda membership in January 1871 to dismiss Bennett, but in no way did this meeting represent those who had been in membership in 1867 or those who had been properly admitted to the original cause between 1867 and 1871. However, the payment of the stipend was not finally settled until 1876 when the Trustees paid up. In the meantime events in Barnoldswick continued to show bitter feeling between the rapidly prospering Clayton Slater and his friends, and the old weaver members who supported Bennett. Just two incidents may suffice to illustrate the attitudes. The main details come from newspaper reports, but in the archives of the church exchanges of letters and records of conversations support the basic details. In May 1874 Clayton Slater gave notice to the Bethesda Church of his intention to return and bring with him a class of boys. By this time the new church had been in existence some six years and the Rev. James Wilkinson was coming to the close of his pastorate. Slater's motives at this time are unclear, but in May he presented himself at the church. The leaders of the Bethesda Sunday School had resolved that they would not take him back (he had been Superintendent prior to 1867). Slater was not content with a refusal of this kind and tried to force his way in. He was resisted by Levi Widdup, the chapel keeper and another teacher. Slater brought a charge of assault against Widdup and his friend, but the charge was dismissed by the Magistrates on 23rd May. The Magistrates "advised the parties to try and live more peaceably together and to heal up unfortunate divisions existing among them. That advice, however; was not taken".²⁶

A month later, the Magistrates were engaged with another case in which Clayton Slater and his brother James Slater were charged with having done grievous bodily harm to Levi Widdup. As always the same two firms of solicitors, Richardson and Turner of Leeds and Robinson of Skipton, represented the opposing parties. There is more than a little hint of humour to the incident and even the magistrates (drawn from the landed gentry of the Dales) contributed to, and appreciated the humour, though not the continuing squabbles between the Christians in the town. From the newspaper report:²⁷

Mr J. R. Tennant (Chairman of the Bench) - The parties should take our advice and settle out of court. The parties were here only the other day and there ought to be some Christian charity shown to put an end to these disturbances.

Mr Turner (for Widdup) - We say the Christian charity is all on our side.

Mr Coulthurst (magistrate) - That is a Christian sentiment (laughter in court).

The incident referred to was rather bizarre. A few days previously, Levi Widdup, the chapel keeper, had placed his donkey to graze in the graveyard area at the front of Bethesda. Clayton Slater had to pass the chapel on his way down from his new house to Clough Mill. It so happened that the donkey was eating the grass on the grave of Mr Slater's father and his child. Clayton Slater demanded that Widdup remove the donkey. Widdup refused. The following morning Clayton and James Slater entered the grounds and set about Widdup with a cane. Mr Turner (prosecuting) described Slater thus:

The head and front of all the rows and disturbances (connected with the Baptist cause in Barnoldswick), the moneyed ringleader and backer of all the crimes and misdemeanours in that quarter; and no pecuniary penalty would touch him. It had been insinuated that the donkey had been put to graze on the grave of his (Slater's) father and child, but that was mere idle pretext for it would be shown that the donkey was at large in the yard and could go where it liked; and the desecration was only a very bad excuse for the aggravated assault which had been committed.²⁸

Levi Widdup was a coal dealer and had permission from the church meeting to graze his donkey in the graveyard. Slater and his brother had crept up behind Widdup and set about him with a walking stick so that he had to be put to bed and the day after transported to Leeds where he was examined by Mr M'Gill, House surgeon and demonstrator in anatomy at Leeds Infirmary who described the injuries as grievous.²⁹ The defendants were fined £5 each with costs and the paper commented, "Barnoldswick promises to become notorious for its ecclesiastical squabbles".³⁰

Finally, the money was handed over, the two chapels settled down with their differing social structure to co-exist. Ill-feeling continued until the 1950s when changing social struc-

tures, the ending of links with several of the most involved families and the efforts of the Association and J. O. Barrett, the then Area Superintendent, began to bring the two causes closer together. Re-union was achieved in 1971 and new combined premises opened in 1977 on a site gifted by Clayton Slater many years earlier to the North Street cause.

What analysis fits the events described? During the period in question the town underwent a massive growth in population and saw the opening and development of the cotton trade. The pattern of occupation changed from the independent hand-loom weaver to regulated factory work. The census returns³¹ show the growth of overlooking, engineering, and the like as occupations. With the change from home-based occupation combined with small-scale crofting, there was also a significant growth in the service trades and shopkeepers. For example, between 1841 and 1871 the number of tailors and dressmakers in the census returns increased from 6 to 42!³² In that period the requirement of the expanding cotton mills was for a disciplined work-force to meet the employers' needs. Clayton Slater's father had worked alongside the handful of people he employed and worshipped alongside them in the Baptist chapel, the strongest religious cause in the town. However, with the coming of the powered mills and the development of a new social ethic this pattern was broken. E. P. Thompson suggests that "Old Dissent" had in many instances ceased to be the religion of the working man and that Methodism filled that role. Dissenters in Manchester, Quakers in Birmingham and Leicester included some of the largest employers by the beginnings of the 1800s and the traditions of religious life which had been developed in the time of Bunyan amongst common men had now become a preserve of the aspiring middle class:

Their attachment to civil and religious liberty went hand in hand with their attachment to the dogmas of free trade... in those great areas of the provinces where Methodism triumphed in the default of Dissent, it nearly destroyed the democratic and anti-authoritarian elements in the older tradition, interposing between the people and their revolutionary heritage a callow emotionalism which served as auxiliary to the established church.³³

For Thompson, two national trends are discernible - Old Dissent becoming the preserve of the middle class and Methodism interposing itself for the working class and taking away from them the democratic tradition which was part and parcel of the theology of the Church and State in the "gathered churches". This may be a legitimate general picture, but there were certainly exceptions. John Foster in his detailed look at Oldham points to a working-class identity being found in places like "Dob Lane Chapel", a free-thought, Unitarian type of assembly which still reflected links with the earlier Anabaptist-Socinian tradition. Barnoldswick was an exception, too. Methodism was barely established in the town. The small congregation was served by the circuit minister in Colne and no minister settled to serve the Methodist cause until after the events described in this article.

In the Baptist Church Slater employed his daughters as weavers and whilst he later kept servants, his family married within the Baptist community. This is in contrast to Oldham where the rising mill owners appear to have forsaken their dissenting backgrounds in favour of Anglicanism.³⁴

However, Slater never became a member of the chapel and this trend continued to be followed by other manufacturers who "joined" the seceding North Street Church in later years. Slater provided the land for their building and a further parcel of land for future development and was a member of the Finance Committee, so creating the unusual position at North Street of having a Finance Committee of which 50% were non members. However, Clayton Slater took no part in forming the Trust Deed of the Church which incorporated the standard clauses of the period. Secondly, it is significant in the light of the work of both Thompson and Foster, that Clayton Slater, his brothers and daughters were involved in the Bethesda Sunday School and it was the Sunday School minute books and records which were removed from the Bethesda cause and formed the first records of the new North Street cause. If Clayton Slater, his family and associates had stood at a distance from full commitment to the church, they had not taken the same attitude with regard to the Sunday School. Indeed Slater was certainly the teacher of a class of boys in the school and at one time Superintendent. When the North Street cause became a duly recognised church, Clayton and his brother Henry still remained in the work of the school and did not become members. The Sunday School rule book included the typical points and fines system for punctuality. The family appear to reflect the comments of Thompson³⁵ on the role of manufacturers within the Sunday School movement and their desire to use Sunday Schools as a means of teaching discipline and time-keeping, factors which John Foster also notes and recognises in the tradesmen and manufacturers of Oldham.³⁶ The attitude of the manufacturer to "Raikes' schools" was to teach children to be "their own interior model time piece" as Richard Baxter put it, the better to accept the discipline and use of time required within a factory economy.

Slater clearly wished to establish his control over the workforce within his mill and in this the chapel was a useful tool. Bennett represented a threat to that with his insistence upon the right of the majority to rule, and his record of benevolence as a provider of work. In this stand of the weavers and Bennett against Slater and his friends and overlookers, Slater must have felt his position as an employer being undermined. His initial reaction was to assert his dominance by trying to secure his will in the church meeting, but failing that, he set up another Baptist Church, largely financed from his own pocket and in which he could exercise control. In the battle for authority within the chapels, the isolated community of Barnoldswick perhaps experienced the re-assertion of the democratic tradition which in the more populous towns of the main cotton area with the high incidence of Methodist churchmanship only developed in the rise of radical political groups. Indeed, one prominent industrialist, William Bracewell, moved to Barnoldswick from the Bolton area later in the century and

built himself a mill and Wesleyan chapel because the workers of the town had not been part of the political unrest which he had experienced in Bolton.³⁷ Undoubtedly in the light of all this and the strong sense of the desire to accumulate wealth and pass this on to the next generation, Thomas Bennett was a threat to Slater and his fellow mill-owners. The whole episode was inclined to be destabilising and the appropriate action in Clayton Slater's eyes was to have Bennett removed and discredited as Pastor. Whilst the attitude of Mortimer Grimshaw, leader of the power workers in Lancashire, is crude, it is not without some foundation:

You may see them winding their way to some chapel so demurely that you might imagine that the big saints had never done anything wrong, and no doubt their very thoughts at that instant are how another penny might be screwed from the hard-won earnings of their workpeople.³⁸

In Barnoldswick, the split between the two chapels became pronounced, not on theology, but on social position. The overlookers, tradesmen, engine tenters and the like figure prominently on the North Street roll, with mill owners and manufacturers in the congregation, whereas at Bethesda, the membership into the 1900s was essentially weavers.³⁹ For some reason Bennett identified with the weavers and was maintained by them because he had been prepared to provide work in a period of depression. He remained minister of Bethesda for 42 years. This in itself suggests a man of constancy and devotion to a cause. He built the church up, for, as we have noted, in the first few years of his ministry, the 1797 chapel became too small for the numbers attending and the Bethesda buildings, seating 900, were erected at the same time as the first cotton mill in the town and before any of the employers had more than 12 workpeople. He appears to have been in essence a solitary figure. In 1869 he married one of the Bethesda members, Elizabeth Horsfield, though unfortunately after only ten months of marriage she died and correspondence with his nephew and the Reverend J. G. Hall of Swavesy, Cambridge, reflect the grief that he experienced. On the other side, Slater was a man of quick temper and on each occasion of confrontation it is Clayton Slater who resorts to violence.

Thus, in one experience, a church which still had descendants of the original families connected with David Crosley and William Mitchell who had settled in the hamlet in the 1600s, was broken apart in the advent of industrial capital and the growth of the cotton empire.

To end on a positive note, E. P. Thompson sees the developing consciousness of the workers as a positive gain of the industrial revolution. If Barnoldswick has been used in the past by denominational leaders as an example of the worst features of the gathered church, there is the point that for the weavers, the conflict and the necessity of working through it, contributed to their own personal growth.

The effects of the interchange lasted well into this century in the life of the two subsequent churches and are

reflected in the town to this day as the last vestige of the cotton industry disappears in the latest bout of economic depression and once again the pressures emerge, not only on the shopfloor, but in the homes, the public houses and the churches of the town.

NOTES

- 1 R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London 1926.
- 2 W. Cunningham, *The Moral witness of the Church in the Investment of Money and the use of wealth*, London, 1909, p.25.
- 3 R. Steele, *The Tradesmans calling*, London, 1684.
- 4 Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English working class*, London, 1963, p.208.
- 5 John Foster, *Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1974.
- 6 The exact date is a matter of some historical debate. For the purpose of this article, reliance is placed upon the work of the late Principal W. E. Blomfield and his essay in *The Baptists of Yorkshire*, London, 1912, pp.73-90.
- 7 E. P. Thompson, "Time, work, discipline and Industrial capitalism" in *Essays in Social History*, Eds. Flinn and Smart, Oxford, 1974.
- 8 E. R. Lewis, *History of the Baptists in Barnoldswick*, Barnoldswick, 1892,p.82.
- 9 E. Winnard, *The History of the Baptist Church, Barnoldswick 1500-1916*, Burnley, 1916, p.69.
- 10 Comment attributed to various denominational leaders, repeated in my presence by Rev. Dr D. S. Russell.
- 11 From records of the meetings held by the Bethesda Church and now deposited in the West Yorkshire archives at Wakefield.
- 12 Meeting of the Bethesda Church, *ibid*.
- 13 *Ibid*.
- 14 Report in the *Bradford Observer*, 14th December 1868, on a court case at West Riding sessions for assault, preventing a minister from the performance of his duties etc.
- 15 *Ibid*.
- 16 From an interview by the author with the late Mr Harold Lovesey, former Production Director of APV Carlson and former Deacon of the Baptist Church Centre, Barnoldswick.
- 17 For full detail see K. G. Jones, "The Industrial Revolution: Effects upon a dissenting religious community in North West England". Unpublished thesis. University of Bradford Library.
- 18 Report in the *Bradford Observer*, 14th December 1868.
- 19 Letter from Thomas Bennett to Richardson and Turner (Solicitors), 7th October 1868, in West Yorkshire archives.
- 20 *Op.cit*. *Bradford Observer*, 14th December 1868.
- 21 Rev. E. R. Lewis, Thomas Bennett's successor as minister of Bethesda records this note in his history, *op.cit.*: "He laboured in his only pastorate for 42 years. His remains were interred at S. Mary-le-Gill (the ancient Parish Church some distance from the town). The funeral,

which was an exceedingly large one, was a very affecting sight. The Revs. J. G. Hall, Swavesy, Cambridge, J. Jefferson, Rawtenstall and B. Bowker, Bury, officiating. The sermon was from Rev.xiv, 13 - "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!"

- 22 An example of the methods of the Slaters is recorded in the *Colne and Nelson Times* of 8th August 1878 when, following the annual Barnoldswick Lane Feast, the weavers employed at Clough Mills received their first pay since the reduction (in wages). On Monday after breakfast the male portion of Weavers refused to return to work alleging the reduction had been made unequally, in some cases an excessive 7½%. Engines immediately stopped and there was no work until Tuesday, when the masters promised to equalize the reductions.
- 23 Minutes of the Yorkshire Association transmitted in a letter to the Rev. James Wilkinson in June 1870. Now in West Yorkshire Archives.
- 24 Letter: an opinion of Wicksons Q.C. to Richardson and Turner. In West Yorkshire Archives.
- 25 Letter from the Clerk of the Peace's Office, 27 East Parade, Leeds, to Thomas Bennett. Now in West Yorkshire Archives.
- 26 *Bradford Observer*, 22nd June 1874.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 For the complete tables and analysis see Jones, op.cit.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Thompson, op.cit., p.57f.
- 34 Foster, op.cit., p.31f and Chapter 6.
- 35 Thompson, "Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial capitalism".
- 36 Foster, op.cit., pp.178,191,215ff.
- 37 Details on the life and work of William Bracewell are recorded in several publications about Barnoldswick, but see in particular the diary of Richard Ryley, a weaver who kept a note of events and commented on them in 1862. Recently illustrated and edited by Kenneth Wilson, *My Days are Swifter than a Weavers shuttle*, Barnoldswick, 1980.
- 38 "Mortimer Grimshaw, leader of the power-weavers" in the *Royton Vindicator*, 20th November 1852.
- 39 See tables of voting patterns in Jones, op.cit. Also in the Memorandum of Choice and appointment of the Trustees of the respective chapels the difference is marked. The Bethesda trustees tend to be millworkers and shop assistants into the 1940s, North Street comprise overlookers, shop owners and manufacturers.