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Burnham's Group of Churches.

THE planting of new churches is to-day quite rare, a phenomenon which should claim serious study. But 150 years ago England was awakened by the great Evangelical Revival, so that groups of believers gathered, multiplied, sent out evangelists to plant fresh churches. Around the metropolis this was the more marked, owing to the constant inflow of people to what was already well populated. A picture of a group of churches may illustrate what was possible for one man of great, if singular, abilities.

Richard Burnham came from High Wycombe, where Calvinistic Baptists had settled into premises built by the General Baptists a century earlier. At Reading he came under the influence of Thomas Davis, son of a Welshman and a Huguenot, converted at Woolwich by Robert McGregor. Burnham was one of seven of the disciples of Davis who were called to the ministry, and he illustrates well three characteristics of that age's piety—the most extreme Calvinism in doctrine, the modicum of respect for the moral law, the utmost fluency in preaching and in the writing of hymns. He is considered here only as a founder of churches.

On 21st April, 1778, fifteen members of Reading were organised by Davis into a new church at Staines, in the presence of ten other Baptist pastors; and Burnham was ordained their minister. The cause flourished, so that his reputation soon reached London, and he quitted this church. It had a check in 1823, but was revived by Pritchard of Keppel street. Under the care of Gregory Hawson from Portsea, it grew, entered new premises, and evangelized at Chertsey and Addlestone; within living memory it opened also at Egham.

Burnham, however, went on to an eventful career in London. An American evangelist had hired a small Calvinistic Methodist chapel, and gathered a congregation, but had departed to succour the Seventh-day congregation at Cripplegate. The deserted flock appealed to Burnham, and they found a home just across Blackfriars Bridge, where they organised in 1780. In his life-time, this church divided into three; his death gave rise to a fourth church and a fifth.

The first change was in 1782, when Burnham and one party hired a tennis court in Gate street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, whence they passed to Edward street in Soho, and after the departure of

yet another party, they apparently found peace, as they named the cause Salem. When John Martin's church was presented in 1795 with new premises on Keppel street, Burnham's people took a lease of the old premises on Grafton street in Westminster. Here he finished his course in October 1810; one epitaph was placed on his tomb at Whitefield's Tabernacle; a very different estimate was published by Walter Wilson within four years. The church divided afresh, and the principal group, under the care of John Stevens from Boston, rented quarters in the highly aristocratic neighbourhood of York street off Jermyn street. But in 1823 there was some internal revolution, which for a wonder does not seem to have led to any secession. The church chose to re-date itself, as though to cut loose from its troubled history, and built itself new premises up Meard's Court, off Wårdour street in Soho. Stevens continued till 1847: J. E. Bloomfield followed after five years, and with the pastorate of J. T. Briscoe which began 1870 we reach comparatively modern times.

The second section of this church did not move on to Edward street, but continued to worship at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1790, and at Chapel street in 1794. Meantime a church had been formed by William Garnish, which had had trouble in 1793. Five years later he had apparently gathered in this section, and they were worshipping in Great Castle street. But by 1811 they were in the Edward street premises, vacated by their sister-church, with T. Simmonds as their pastor. Seven years later they set the example of discarding their complex past, and calling themselves a new church of 1818, as they entered Soho Chapel at 406, Oxford street. Only after the pastorate of Herbert, Comb, Wyard, and Pells, did J. Wilkins persuade them to take the date 1791. Under J. Box they moved to Shaftesbury Avenue, and the fine new premises became the headquarters of the Metropolitan Strict Association. But in 1916 the church sold these premises to "Gower Street," of which much is to be said. It erected in 1918 and 1925 new premises on the High Road in Finchley, and named them Soho Memorial.

The third section of Burnham's church was reinforced by a group from Mitchell street, St. Luke's, which itself had had a most variegated story. James Upton from Waltham Abbey organized them in 1785, at the old premises in Green Walk; when rebuilt in 1801 the cause was termed Church street. To tell of the work done by his sons would open up vistas down which we must not travel. When the London, Chatham and Dover Railway wanted the space, his name was commemorated in the Upton chapel of 1864 in Barkham terrace, Lambeth road. Meantime the church had given rise to others, in Kingston and Lambeth.

Kingston had seen Josiah Thompson, senior, in his retirement, but it does not seem that he did any work there. Thomas Mabbott, of Lincoln, Spalding, Birmingham, Dudley, and Red Cross street, was the first Baptist evangelist here, and in 1790 organized in the Lambeth meeting-house the church of Kingston, confiding them next year to the care of Isaac Phillimore, who in 1794 became their first pastor.

A building on the Waterloo road being vacated by adherents of the New Jerusalem church, was opened in 1836 by members of Upton's church, and a daughter church was formed; but it did not live to come of age.

The fissiparous church of Burnham gave rise in 1805 to a group which occupied the old premises at Edward street, first under J. P. Bateman, then under W. Willmott. Andrew Smith took them to Brewer street, and soon after he went to Rye in 1821 the church ceased independent existence. It is conceivable that in 1823 it re-united with the parent church, and thus gave an excuse for the assumption of that date.

At the death of Burnham, there was no agreement as to a successor. Forty-five people left and established themselves in 1811 on Coventry street. Their fortunes are obscure, but eight years later William Williams was admitted to the Board as pastor of a church at Grafton street. This may imply that he took this group back to their old home when Stevens vacated it. It does not seem to have survived 1847.

Even in Burnham's life, several had seceded and gathered at Lewisham street near Westminster Abbey. They were joined by seceders from Stevens at York street, and in 1814 they called from Liverpool Henry Paice. But he had not the Burnham tradition, and wanted to sing from Watts as well; this led to his speedy retirement. His friends, however, bought out the others and recalled him next year. When he went to Wycombe, Christopher Woollacott came, and in 1828 opened the present home on Romney street. The Burnham influence ended in 1865, but Spurgeon re-opened the premises in the same year. This church is practically the only one in the whole City of Westminster.