

Gower Street Chapel.

A BOOKWORM on his way down Shaftesbury Avenue to Charing Cross Road, may have his topographical sense bewildered as he passes a building labelled Gower Street Memorial; for Gower Street still runs its straight and unblemished course. The name, however, refers to a building near the north of Gower Street, which has housed three churches, whose vicissitudes exemplify some of the difficulties besetting churches of a highly Calvinistic type.

William Huntingdon, S.S., died in 1813, and some of his followers gathered for worship in Conway street. In 1819 they were attracted by a pedobaptist, Henry Fowler of Birmingham, and next year they built this chapel, which was opened by Gadsby of Manchester. They had only a ninety-nine-year lease of the ground, had not paid for the chapel, so borrowed on mortgage. Fowler settled as their pastor in 1821, the bond being not believers' baptism, but hyper-Calvinism. The church lost its pastor in 1838, and approached Edward Blackstock.

He belonged originally to the Strict Baptist church at Wolverhampton, but at Lakenheath had persuaded the church to Open Communion, though it has since reverted to the Strict position. So when in 1818 Blackstock desired to become pastor of one of Burnham's group of churches, he was rejected. As a hyper-Calvinist, indifferent on the question of baptism, he was exactly of the Gower street type, and he settled. But William Gadsby of Manchester, then at the height of his influence, disapproved, and in 1842 the Baptists were invited to quit the church. The weakened community could not pay the interest, the mortgagee foreclosed, and the church was ejected. This did not improve its cohesion, but part of it under Arthur Triggs from Zion in Waterloo road bought the remainder of the lease from the mortgagee and re-entered. In 1854, however, he sold the lease, and his section seems to have disbanded.

The section that held with Blackstock made a new start in 1843, and found a home in Little Portland street. A further disruption sent one party to Hertford street, another round Castle street, George street, Great Portland street, Lawson's Rooms on Gower street, till John Wigmore found room at Rehoboth on Ridinghouse lane and united the fragments in 1854 as a Strict Baptist church. A sketch of its later career appeared in II., 169.

In October 1842 seven Baptists from the original 1813

church met in an upper room in Gadsby's Yard off Tottenham Court Road. They decided to aim at forming a Strict Baptist church, and obtained the countenance of John Kershaw of Rochdale. They bought the lease of a chapel in Eden street, off the Hampstead road, hitherto used by the New Connexion; and it was opened under these new auspices by John Warburton of Trowbridge. They then felt strong enough to form a church, and five men on 25th May, 1843, gave one another the right hand of fellowship. Gadsby came next month to recognize the church, which had grown to number twenty. For eleven years there was steady progress, with supplies, and in 1854 the church bought from Arthur Triggs the diminished lease of the Gower street premises, and Kershaw re-opened it for them next year. Within five years they enlarged it, and the building then bore the two dates 1820, 1860. Some of the members had belonged to the original non-Baptist church of 1813, and by degrees this 1843 Baptist church came to consider itself a Baptist church of 1820. The lease was due to expire on 24th March, 1919, and so the provident church looked ahead and bought from another Strict Baptist church the freehold chapel on Shaftesbury Avenue, which it re-named Gower Street Memorial, and occupied in April 1917.

The Gower street premises, still bearing the outward semblance of a chapel, are now used as a furniture-warehouse. In this they are rather like the chapel at Nottingham, where Carey preached his famous sermon; but that is now doomed to be taken down to improve the lane on which it stands.

The General Baptist Academy of the Old Connexion.

THE first organized attempt to train men for the Baptist ministry in London was made by the General Baptist Assembly. The impetus was given by the church of Saffron Walden and Melbourn in 1790, and within two years Stephen Freeman agreed to take pupils at his house in Ponder's End, under the auspices of the "General Baptist Society for the Education of Young Men for the Ministry." His only student was Benjamin Austen, who ministered at Smarden, and died 1859. *Obituary, G.B.C. &c., 1861*