

Nailsworth Tabernacle Church.

IT is not generally known that there were at one time two Baptist churches in Nailsworth. The popular appreciation of the Rev. Dr. C. Brown by the Rev. H. Cook gives no indication that there was another church there during his pastorate. But it was possible for the other church to, and they did so, claim to be the first Baptist church in Nailsworth.

The Shortwood church was formed in 1715-16 (there is a little uncertainty as to the exact date) and continued to serve a large area of the surrounding neighbourhood for many years. Chapels for preaching were built in several districts and in the 1800's separate churches were formed at a number of these; Minchinhampton, Avening, etc. A room was also opened at Nailsworth itself for evening services, the Sunday services at Shortwood being held in the morning and afternoon. In 1864 the Rev. Thos. Fox Newman resigned after a long and notable ministry, the membership of the church reaching its height. For a while the church continued without a pastor and then a disagreement arose over the calling of the Rev. W. Jackson of Bilston.¹ He was a brother-in-law of C. H. Spurgeon, having married his eldest sister, Eliza Rebecca. He removed in 1867 to Cambray, Cheltenham and died in 1892 at Waltham Abbey (vide Baptist Handbook 1893). In consequence of the disagreement about eighty of the members withdrew early in 1867 to form a separate church. During the year Mr. C. L. Gordon of the Metropolitan Tabernacle College laboured among them apparently while still at college. The pastor of the Tetbury church, who had presided at the church meetings prior to the split, now offered himself as pastor of the new church, but this was declined, as they did not yet feel able to support a minister. There were signs of growth however, a number of baptising services were held and work for a chapel was put in hand with the assistance of Mr. Spurgeon. Mr. Gordon was called to the

¹ The exact nature of the dispute is not clear to me for I have not had access to the relevant Shortwood minutes, but so far as I can tell from the Tabernacle Minute book now in the safe in the vestry of Shortwood Baptist Church, it would seem that the more influential and richer members of the church were not willing that Mr. Jackson should take up the work in their midst. Eventually Shortwood called the Rev. W. T. Price to the pastorate (vide *Chronicles of Shortwood*, by the Rev. F. T. Smyth, a former pastor, 1906-34).

pastorate in June or July of 1867, the church continued to grow, and the chapel was built and opened in 1868. (A Mr. Clissold was the architect. This is a name well known in connection with Baptist churches of the neighbourhood, especially Shortwood, and it is a pity that an initial does not give some means of identification).

The other churches mentioned above had always been connected with the Bristol Association, but the Tabernacle applied for affiliation to the Glos. and Hereford Association. In 1869 appeared the first reference to trouble in the infant community. The pastor was compelled to reprove them for evil speaking and backbiting, and though there were evidences of repentance, a leading figure in the disruption and a prominent member of the church, Gideon Teakle, withdrew from membership accompanied by a few others. A suggestion by the pastor that he should elect his own deacons was acceded to. In April, 1874, Mr. Gordon accepted a call to another sphere and some six months later the church unanimously called the Rev. R. Kerr, of Avening, to the pastorate. In June 1875 Mr. Teakle and the others returned to the fellowship, and the church applied to the Pastor's Augmentation Fund to assist in the minister's salary. Things were not happy, however, and in 1878 Mr. Kerr resigned. Mr. Spurgeon stated that he would not further help in the maintenance of a pastor, but a little later Mr. P. Hutton of the Pastor's College accepted the pastorate, being himself responsible for part of the salary. He resigned in December, 1880, and a church meeting at the end of the year engendered such heat that it broke up in confusion.

In 1881, under a new secretary, an invitation was sent to the Rev. J. Robinson, of Great Sampford, Essex, and he accepted and settled in the early summer of that year. In this year the Shortwood church moved its chapel down the valley so that the Tabernacle was now to experience greater competition in the work in which they were already hampered by their internal disharmonies. The Baptist ministers of the district refused to come to the recognition meetings because of the bad treatment given to Mr. Hutton. Mr. Robinson was loath to believe these reports and reproached, in the minutes, the ministers for believing them, but in 1886 he resigned and he ends his minutes with an impassioned outburst, "Lord, Thou knowest I have done what I could". The rest of what he had to say has unfortunately been lost through the removal of certain pages by the next minister who was authorised to do so by the church meeting. This has meant unfortunately the loss of other pages later in the book. In February the Rev. J. Taylor, formerly of Chipping Campden, and studying at the Pastor's College, became pastor and the church

withdrew from the Association. The last reports of his ministry are missing due to the loose leaves being lost as mentioned above but he removed to Holbeach, in Lincolnshire, in 1889.

Various preachers and evangelists now visited the place and the Rev. W. Jackson who had taken considerable interest in the church since its inception, and had written to them approvingly, stayed in Nailsworth for a while with his wife and both conducted services and lectured in the week. A blind evangelist, the Rev. Thos. Moreman, of Bristol, conducted campaigns at various times, the Rev. W. E. Lynn, of London, supplied, and in May 1892 was unanimously invited to become pastor but the result of this is not recorded and until August 1902 there are no minutes.

The next records are in the handwriting of the Rev. W. G. Jackson, son of the original innocent cause of the secession. He visited Nailsworth in August 1902 and congregations increased so considerably that he was unanimously asked to become pastor, having too "a most unanimous vote of confidence from a large Sunday evening congregation". He gave it earnest consideration and began work in October. By February of the following year things had so improved that the newly appointed secretary could speak in glowing terms of the work. New organisations were formed, the Sunday school re-opened, and new members were added to the church, while lapsed memberships were renewed. The pastor's mother joined them and laboured diligently in the cause, and the church decided to join the Bristol Association, though for a while they were diffident about joining the Baptist Union. Gipsy Reuben Smith conducted Gospel Mission Services during August 1903. The Education Act, 1902, unfortunately removed the secretary from Nailsworth, and the brief prosperity was soon to end. The income was not sufficient to maintain the ministry for as early as October, 1884, the Secretary of the Union, the Rev. S. H. Booth, had informed the church that the Augmentation Fund could not continue the support of the ministry of a second church in Nailsworth. There was some talk of joining with Woodchester (about a mile further down the valley towards Stroud) for pastoral oversight, but in June, 1904, Mr. Jackson accepted the invitation of the church at Westmancote. He promised to assist all he could, even visiting them once a month, till they found a pastor. The Rev. Philip A. Pepperdene from London wrote in reference to the pastorate and though the church replied outlining their circumstances, he elected to come, and after a week accepted the invitation given him. The work did not prosper, however, and on a letter being sent to Mr. Pepperdene about the state of things he promptly sent in his resignation having only been with them six months.

It is nearly a year now before we have another entry. The

church secretary has apparently been accused of disorderly walking. The tenant of the manse becomes secretary and Mr. A. C. Blake of the Deverells, Nailsworth, received the documents pertaining to the church and the rent of the manse. In January, 1909, things seem to be fairly satisfactory, but only three more entries remain. The last two relate to the closing of the building, the deeds of the chapel were returned to the Met. Tab. Building Socy., and in March, 1910, the members and friends met for a farewell gathering.

The chapel was purchased by the Methodists who relinquished their work at Downend a little distance from Nailsworth proper, but the work has never prospered in spite of occasional flashes of success. In 1947 the building was again sold, this time to the Council to be used as the Town Hall. The Roman Catholics desired to buy the place but the trust deeds would not allow of this. One wonders if they would have made a success of it! What can we learn from this saddening story? Here is a church evangelical in utterance, instant in prayer (there are numerous references to regular meetings for prayer), strict in discipline, often served by able men (was any stigma left on them?) concerned that the gospel should have free course, taking the message of Christ into the open air, which yet failed to prosper, to withstand a changing world and continue in unity. If the fellowship be disrupted all else is vitiated! The *koinonia* is vital to all Christian witness.

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