

## South Parade, Leeds, 1836-45 (1)

AT the end of September 1835, South Parade learned that its minister, Rev. J. Acworth, had accepted an invitation to succeed Dr. Steadman as President of Horton College. As his resignation would become effective at the end of the year, the deacons began to look round for another minister, and eventually summoned a church meeting on January 20, 1836, at which it was resolved that henceforth all "important" business, including the selection of a pastor, should be decided by ballot. Then letters from Rev. 'B' [T.S.] Crisp, of Bristol College, and Rev. John Dyer, of London, were read in support of the candidature of Rev. J. E. Giles, of Salters' Hall, London. When it became clear that a local candidate, John Yeadon, of Horsforth, did not wish to be considered, the church decided on February 11 to invite Giles at a salary of £230 a year which was, incidentally, more than it had paid Acworth. At first Giles made a hesitant reply, referring to obligations he had at Liverpool, but on February 12 he gave a definite acceptance, not forgetting to ask about the church's constitution and to claim five free Sabbaths. He and his wife were admitted members and received by the church on May 22.<sup>1</sup>

John Eustace Giles was born at Dartmouth in 1805 and had been a student at Bristol with Joshua Gray, John Leechman, Robinson, and others. After preaching for a short time at Haverfordwest, he was appointed pastor of Salters' Hall in 1830. By 1836 he had given evidence of his superior talents: his funeral sermon on the death of Robert Hall in 1831 had been printed, and he had written many hymns, now forgotten, though one, however, still survives in the *Revised B.C.H.*, No. 472.<sup>2</sup> He was a man of many gifts: a scholar, a lofty advocate of Christian, and especially Baptist, principles, above all a preacher of such eloquence that the memory of it survived down the century.<sup>3</sup> Some evidence of his rhetorical and argumentative powers remains in various newspaper reports and printed pamphlets under his name, but these were products called forth by special occasions, addresses touched up for printing by request. He does not seem to have been the man to settle down and write a sustained treatise.<sup>4</sup> His place was the pulpit or the platform rather than the press. It was not long before he made a considerable mark in Leeds: he was the man for the times at South Parade.

His tenure of office coincided with a great flowering of pulpit eloquence among the dissenters in the town, and the beginnings

of a well-known Anglican revival under Leeds's famous vicar, Dr. W. F. Hook. Among his contemporaries were Winter Hamilton, J. Ely and Thomas Scales of the Independent chapels, and C. Wicksteed of Mill Hill, mighty father of a mightier son, great preachers who were renowned for their powers of persuasion on the public platform likewise. The fame of Dr. Hook has overshadowed that of other Anglican clergymen like William Sinclair, incumbent of St. George's, who possessed great oratorical talent. Giles was not inferior to any of them.

The Baptist church at Leeds had begun in 1779 with sixteen members. Under the ministry of the saintly and impecunious Thomas Langdon it made unspectacular progress in numbers, but had felt secure enough to put up a new building in 1826, by which time seventy members were on the roll.<sup>5</sup> Langdon did not live to enter the promised land at South Parade;<sup>6</sup> it was reserved for his young colleague and successor, J. Acworth, to begin a new era in an elegant new chapel. Acworth took his part in civic life, without leaving the mark Giles was to do, but it was as a beloved pastor that he left a most fragrant memory. When Giles took over from him, the membership stood at two hundred and fifty six: the figures speak for themselves.

Within the first year of Giles's pastorate the church had been enlarged to accommodate fourteen hundred worshippers, his salary had been increased to £300 a year, and fifty-nine baptisms had been recorded. Thereafter steady progress was maintained until in 1844 a record membership of five hundred and thirty three had been attained. In 1840-1 there was a record number of seventy-five baptisms, but the average for the decade 1836-45 was about forty. Membership had doubled in less than ten years, and the figures meant what they said, for the deacons did not hesitate to exclude recalcitrant members and made a close examination of the roll in 1841.<sup>7</sup> Total gains for the period 1836-7 to 1843-4 were four hundred and eighty-eight, of which baptisms accounted for three hundred and eighty-two, and total losses were two hundred and eleven, including sixty-one exclusions. In 1842-3 the deacons were gratified to note twelve baptisms of persons belonging to congregations of other denominations. But a swift change came in 1844-5 when only six baptisms took place.

In July 1844 Giles was ill at Brighton and did not return to Leeds until the following April. In little more than three months' time he had resigned. What lay behind his departure? Was it that he felt his work in Leeds was done, and a change would be natural and desirable? Was there a brooding sense of unrest in the church, hard to define perhaps, which subsequent events may help to elucidate? South Parade had rebuked the B.M.S. in December 1841 for wishing to entice Giles away; in 1843 he was still "our beloved

pastor;" and when he fell ill in the autumn of 1844 the church sent him an affectionate letter. Then, after he had resigned and gone to Broadmead, there is utter confusion for a considerable time.

The invitation from Broadmead, dated July 10, 1845 and signed by T. S. Crisp, four deacons and two hundred and eleven members, was read at South Parade on August 3, at the same time as Giles's letter of resignation. The resignation was accepted on August 6 and on the 14th Giles made a final communication. On the surface the parting was affectionate: a farewell meeting was held on September 10 at which the celebrated Dr. Samuel Smiles took the chair and Giles spoke, typically, on Religious Freedom,<sup>8</sup> followed by a farewell sermon<sup>9</sup> on September 21. The church presented him with a silver inkstand as a token of regard<sup>10</sup> in October.

Meanwhile, on September 1, the deacons advised unity, charity and zeal to the church; in view of "the heavy work" involved, they proffered the suggestion, which they dared not have made without Apostolic warrant (it is duly provided) that two pastors should be appointed; and three prayer meetings a week were advised until the next church meeting. When, on September 29, Brother Town moved that only one pastor be appointed, the meeting was adjourned until October 1: there was then a ballot on a new proposal that there should be one minister and an evangelist. Town's proposal was carried by 116 votes to 54 but his further proposal that a salary of £300 a year be offered was rejected in favour of the appointment of a committee to select a minister, with power to "arrange" the salary. Protracted negotiations followed, and confusion reigned. A multitude of candidates were seen and heard from all parts of the country; there were church meetings; there were disagreements; to crown the misfortunes, a note was received from Samuel Giles in September 1846 saying that John Eustace was in an unfortunate position at Broadmead.<sup>11</sup> The only apparent result of this appeal was that the church struck Giles and his wife off the roll on September 7.

At long last, R. Brewer was appointed, but once again, the calm did not last, for he had not been pastor for more than a short period when there occurred the famous split which resulted in the establishment of what came to be known as the Blenheim church. To be minister at South Parade was evidently no sinecure. In the midst of these troubles the Baptist Union held its annual meetings at Leeds, for the first time out of London, in May 1845: perhaps this was some indication of the importance of Leeds as a Baptist centre.

While the Baptists were by no means negligible in strength, it could not really be said that they were the predominant force among the dissenters of Leeds early in the nineteenth century. In

their one church at Mill Hill the Unitarians concentrated an immense stock of power and influence; the Congregationalists had at least three major chapels with ministers of outstanding ability by 1836; and the Methodists had long ago made of Leeds that vast stronghold of enthusiasm which Dr. Hook found on his arrival. Had the Baptists kept pace with the rapid growth of this congenial abode of nonconformity? It was true that in one of its out-townships, Bramley,<sup>12</sup> a Baptist church had existed since 1774 and was therefore older than that in "Leeds" itself, but Baptist principles seemed to have taken firmer root in the neighbouring town of Bradford and surrounding villages like Rawdon and Gildersome. Under the ministry of Giles, South Parade undertook local missionary work without delay. Some of it was new, some revived; partly it was Sunday School work, partly the setting up of preaching stations; and it met with a mixture of success and failure. Various brethren were recommended to exercise their talents (August 1836), and to one, who bore a name long honoured for its services to the church, it was delicately hinted that he might improve his accent.

In September 1836 the "Sabbath Evening Stations" were specially considered. By November it had been decided to "recommence" those at Bowman Lane and Wortley Lane. Bowman Lane did not last long, nor did another attempt to start a meeting at Duke Street (not far away, and close to the old Stone Chapel) succeed any better, and little is heard of efforts to secure a room there in both 1837 and 1840. At Holbeck, work had begun in 1834 and was renewed in 1836; but, assuming that Zion School, Wortley, and Zion, Wortley Lane (in Holbeck) are one and the same, this effort was abandoned in 1844.<sup>13</sup> At Halton, some distance out of town, a Sunday School began in 1837 and ended in 1838.

More enduring success was achieved at three other places, where churches still survive: Hunslet, Woodhouse Carr and York Road. Some Sunday School work had been undertaken at Hunslet in 1834, followed in April 1835 by a decision to build a place of worship; this was done, but it was only after suffering misadventure with the foundations that it was opened in January 1837. The Goodman family had played a generous part in its establishment and will be mentioned at a later stage. Action was then taken to secure both a pastor and an adequate salary for him, after complaints of "indifferent supplies;" the same John Yeadon, who has already been mentioned as a candidate for the ministry at South Parade, accepted a year's trial, and twenty-six members were dismissed on May 29, 1837, to form the new church.<sup>14</sup> Yeadon died in November 1841. Further success, on a smaller scale, was secured at Woodhouse Carr in 1838 when a preaching station was set up there along with a Sabbath School; it survives as the Meanwood Road church.<sup>15</sup> The

decision to close Zion, Wortley, was immediately followed by a proposal to build a room at Joy's Fold, late in 1844; urgent meetings were held in August the next year and a resolution passed that the vice and gross ignorance in the eastern parts of the town demanded the attention of the church and that a school should be built there. Complaints of delay in January 1846 were remedied without delay by drawing up a constitution and looking out for suitable land for a new branch, but the search was temporarily abandoned in September as title deeds for a site chosen were not forthcoming. By this time Giles had departed, but the church at York Road was successfully formed and still maintains its witness.<sup>16</sup>

It is curious that not one of South Parade's extensions was considered of sufficient importance to merit an entry in the Leeds directory for 1847. In the town there were also General Baptists, with whom South Parade maintained friendly relations; among them was the founder of the Band of Hope movement, Rev. Jabez Tunncliffe, who laboured here from 1842 to 1865.<sup>17</sup> He founded a short-lived Baptist church in which he abolished the distinction between Particular and General.

Blenheim was no part of South Parade's missionary effort, even if it was an offshoot.<sup>18</sup> How long had the fire that caused the separation been smouldering? Brewer may have been the immediate cause, or agent, of secession, but had Giles, who, as will be seen, had been accused of unsound principles (even if the accuser was a crank) had any kindling hand? It was clear by 1848 that there were some who did not like South Parade's rigid discipline. To become a member there it was first necessary to narrate an "experience" either orally or by letter, and, if approved by a church meeting, then to be baptized.<sup>19</sup> Baptism was obligatory, communion was close, and members only were admitted to church meetings.<sup>20</sup> There were a few, as reported in 1843, who, though baptized, retained their membership of other sects.

Discipline was strictly maintained. Many removals from the registers were made for straightforward reasons such as neglect of public worship, and a few, in 1840, came off "through depression of trade." But "a few have withdrawn from us" ran the report in 1840, "in consequence of having imbibed erroneous doctrines, and others have so far departed from the truth, through the lust of the flesh, the love of the world, or the formation of sinful connections with unbelievers," that it had been necessary to exclude them, though with sorrow, as "we have felt ourselves bound in fidelity to our exalted Lord to maintain the discipline of His church." Harder cases were not shirked, and no discrimination was exercised between sisters and brethren. "Contumacious conduct and acting inconsistently with Christian profession" are severely dealt with. Erring

sisters were excluded for showing an unforgiving spirit (March 27, 1843), for example, or going back into the world, and two of them were told not to appear at the Lord's Table before they had made up their quarrel (November 28, 1843). An unfavourable report on another lady secured her exclusion after much deliberation during September to November 1836. This was not a Calvinistic church for nothing. In December 1841, six unspecified members were not ejected but ordered, "having expressed contrition for their faults," to attend for public admonition, according to 1 Tim. v. 20; only two of them did so, on January 31, 1842, one other was expelled, and the other three were absent. The case of Brother Templeton in July 1839 will be considered separately.

Deacons were to be men "of honest report." Their number was increased to seven in 1839 and to eleven in 1842, and in 1839 it was resolved that their appointment should be marked by imposition of hands and prayer, according to Acts, vi, 6. When one of them offered to resign in 1844 because he was in reduced circumstances, he put the rest in a dilemma, for it was found that another deacon, similarly situated, had continued in office; the latter was advised to "renew" the resignation of his office, but both gentlemen were to understand that confidence in their character was undiminished. The welcome innovation of appointing deaconesses, felt to be "desirable in accordance with Scripture," was made in March 1842. The early deaconesses were long remembered for their gracious kindness.

There were special occasions on which the whole church took part, and there were sectional activities to absorb the energies of the members. The annual Tea Meeting evoked the warmth of domestic fellowship, but red-letter days were the annual "Auxiliary" missionary meetings in September. It was not only at the usual Sunday services that noted preachers like J. H. Hinton, F. A. Cox, Eustace Carey, Pearce and other missionaries were to be heard, along with laymen such as George Thompson and R. Chamberlaine, of Jamaica; a public meeting later in the week, with distinguished men like George Goodman in the chair, formed an integral part of the proceedings, and there was a "Public Breakfast" on another day, admission by ticket (paid for), at the early hour of nine in the morning. William Knibb came during his campaign in 1840 and left a lasting impression.<sup>21</sup> Though these meetings were announced under the head of "Missions to the Heathen," the church did not confine its interests merely to its own denominational society, or to the religious welfare of non-Christian peoples. It had an eye for religious oppression everywhere and showed special concern at this period for the abolition of the iniquitous system of negro apprenticeship.

South Parade was allied to the Baptist Union at an early date, and was a prominent member of the West Riding Association of Baptist Churches, in whose activities also various members played their part. It collected for the Baptist colleges both at Bristol and Bradford. There were organisations in Leeds like the Town Mission, the Tradesmen's Benevolent Society, a branch of the R.T.S., the House of Recovery, the Lancasterian School, to which individual members could and did make their contributions.<sup>22</sup>

Among sectional activities, the Sunday School obviously held a high place.<sup>23</sup> It was well established by 1836, but it seems to have been an independent institution until that year, for a minute records that in July, a matter of weeks after Giles's arrival, it was "brought under the supervision of the church." It had been in association with the Leeds Sunday School Union since 1828, and some of its missionary activity in Leeds and district has been mentioned. There was play as well as work to be enjoyed. The Whit Monday gatherings at the nearby Coloured Cloth Hall Yard, scene of many famous meetings, were days long to be remembered; especially since the School had ceased to go there alone, and after 1830 joined with other Sunday Schools in a mighty throng. Names familiar to the church for more than a century figure as officers in the School's annals: the names of Wilkinson and Town among them. Statistics for 1837 are: 2 Superintendents, 33 teachers, 97 boys and 73 girls.<sup>24</sup>

In 1876 an old scholar, looking back over forty years, referred to his days at the Sunday School, but also mentioned a day school "supported by" the church at Sunny Bank.<sup>25</sup> In July 1839 "several friends connected with this church" applied to use one of the rooms beneath the chapel as a day school,<sup>26</sup> and permission was granted "provided the religious education of the children be under the superintendence of the Pastor of this church." In June there had been a move to establish a Leeds Baptist Commercial School, but nothing is known of its activities beyond the attempt to found it.<sup>27</sup>

Of the societies within the church and school, many seem not to have been long-lived; at that time and at later dates, the same activities were pursued in organisations bearing the same name, but there appears to have been a process of lapsing and reviving. The Loan Tract Society,<sup>28</sup> for example, was one: in Giles's day it presented its first report on August 28, 1837, showing that it had made a visitation of 300 houses by 46 distributors. It was one of several such societies: a more permanent one was begun in 1850, owing much to the zeal of Joseph Town junior.<sup>29</sup> There was a Library<sup>30</sup> at the church, which adopted rules on April 1, 1839, and there was a Christian Instruction Society, which rendered its first report in January 1839. Here it may be mentioned that there was at South

Parade a branch of the Leeds Young Men's Society, a rather intellectual body formed in 1837,<sup>31</sup> and that Giles was a member of the Committee of the Leeds Mechanics Institute,<sup>32</sup> like Acworth before him.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A portrait of him at this period, by R. Woodman, appeared as frontispiece to the *Baptist Magazine* for 1831.

<sup>2</sup> Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, revised edition 1907, has an account of Giles as hymnologist.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Jubilee of South Parade Baptist Chapel, Leeds*, ed. J. W. Ashworth (1877), 32, 38.

<sup>4</sup> But cf. *Baptist Quarterly*, XIX (6), April, 1962, 243-52, noting Giles's contributions to local Baptist magazines, *Northern Baptist* and *Church*.

<sup>5</sup> For the early history of the church in Leeds, see three articles by the present writer in *Baptist Quarterly*, VI (1932).

<sup>6</sup> One of the first things Giles was called upon to do was to write a commendatory preface to a belated *Memoir* of Langdon, who had died in 1824.

<sup>7</sup> The total for that year, 444, was achieved, after recording the 75 baptisms, by striking off 22 names; even so the clear gain for the year was 40. The figures for the whole period, though remarkable, never rivalled those for Bradford; on the other hand, dismissals to the new church at Hunslet made little difference to South Parade's progress.

<sup>8</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, September 13th, Supplement.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, September 27th, Supplement.

<sup>10</sup> After much wandering, the inkstand returned to South Parade a few years ago and was placed in the vestry. Giles's subsequent career hardly concerns us here: he died June 24th, 1875.

<sup>11</sup> Giles was soon at Sheffield, where he remained for ten years. But it is odd that he had taken part in the services to mark the opening of the new building at Bramley in June, 1846, *Memorials of the Baptist Church at Bramley* (1864), 7. How can he have avoided meeting some of the Leeds friends?

<sup>12</sup> Out of Bramley arose Stanningley (1827- ). Giles preached there at its re-opening on August 10th, 1838. He was back at Bramley in June, 1846, as stated.

<sup>13</sup> In the West Riding Baptist Association report for 1846 there is a mention of work at Armley, "hitherto" not very successful. But success came in the end; the present Armley, church began in Wortley Road. *Zion Baptist Church, Carr Crofts, Armley, 1848-1948, Souvenir Programme*.

<sup>14</sup> *Hunslet Baptist Tabernacle: Centenary History, 1837-1937*.

<sup>15</sup> See the centenary account (1838-1938) by the present writer in *Baptist Quarterly*, IX.

<sup>16</sup> Many links with Giles and his regime survived, of course. George Goodman opened the premises in 1847, for instance, and a young man of whom more will be heard, John Barran, became a trustee. Though the church survives, its old site had to be abandoned in a post-war clearance scheme.

<sup>17</sup> H. Marles, *The Life and Labours of the Rev. Jabez Tunnicliff* (1865).

<sup>18</sup> See R. Gawler, *History of Blenheim Baptist Church, 1848-1948*.

<sup>19</sup> The short autobiography of Joseph Town, junior, illustrates the process in 1848.



<sup>20</sup> Gawler, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *The Leeds Mercury*, September 23rd, 1837 had published a letter from Knibb to Sturge, read at South Parade's missionary meeting; it subsequently mentioned Knibb and his work on various occasions. Chamberlaine spoke of the Baptist missions in the West Indies in 1839, and the book on the West Indies (to be mentioned later) by Sturge and Harvey (1837), of special interest to Leeds people, also quoted them.

<sup>22</sup> These contributions will be mentioned when considering the laymen of the church.

<sup>23</sup> Some facts about the early Sunday School are given in the *Jubilee* volume of 1877, 62ff., but it also contains reminiscences of old scholars *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> This set of figures is taken from the church minute book. The reports of the West Riding Baptist Association gave figures for only a year here and there: for 1841, 2 schools, 48 teachers and 300 scholars; for 1842 (repeated exactly in 1843), 2 schools, 60 teachers and 330 scholars. Local directories give the following: 1834 (Baines and Newsome), 38 teachers, 242 scholars (130 boys, 112 girls); 1839 (Baines and Newsome), 47 teachers, 302 scholars (161 boys, 141 girls); the schools having both morning and afternoon sessions. The first of these latter sets of figures shows that the school was average for Leeds, the second that it was above the average, but possibly the figures include the mission stations already referred to.

<sup>25</sup> *Jubilee*, 32. In St. James's Street, joining Sunny Bank, was an academy kept by the widow and daughter of Rev. Thomas Langdon, former minister.

<sup>26</sup> The day school is mentioned in *The Leeds Mercury*, 14th September, 1839.

<sup>27</sup> Information from R. Ram, Esq., B.A.; a prospectus dated 4th June, 1839, quotes a capital sum of £1,200 to be in £5 shares. This move was quickly followed by one in the same month to form a Leeds Church of England Commercial School, which at any rate advertised extensively in *The Leeds Mercury* from 6th July, 1839.

<sup>28</sup> *Jubilee*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> See extracts from his ms. autobiography, *B.Q.* XX (1964), 206-13.

<sup>30</sup> The Library was still in existence in 1845, when it reduced its subscription from 4s. to 2s., and again in 1848, when Joseph Town junior waited there (ms. biography, *ut sup.*).

<sup>31</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790-1960* (1961), 194.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 176.

(To be continued)

F. BECKWITH