

NONCONFORMIST AND OTHER PLACES OF WORSHIP.— THE BAPTIST CHAPEL — FRIENDS' MEETING — UNITARIAN CHAPEL — CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL — WESLEYAN CHAPEL — BIBLE CHRISTIAN CHAPEL — METHODIST FREE CHURCH — MARINERS' CHAPEL — CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH — PLYMOUTH BRETHREN — CATHOLIC CHURCH — SALVATION ARMY.

THE BAPTIST CHAPEL.

NEXT in point of antiquity after the Established Church come the Baptists, and although so widely severed in opinions today, the two sects were nevertheless closely allied in our borough in earlier times. The exact period when the Baptists settled in the town cannot be traced, but it may be regarded as certain that it was somewhere in the sixteenth century. In 1655 they were of sufficient importance to be considered worthy the honour of entertaining the brethren of the Western Association of Baptist Churches.

With the troublous times of the seventeenth century the Baptists were closely connected. Joseph Alleine, the noted Puritan preacher, frequently occupied their pulpit, his most intimate companion being Mr. John Norman, who we learn from a borough document, was paid £110 a year by the Town Council of Bridgwater to discharge the duties of *Corporation Lecturer*. Those duties would appear to have been connected with St. Mary's Church, but the Church books and documents contain no reference to him. Another of his companions was John Wesley, grandfather of the illustrious founder of Methodism, who had been ejected from his benefice at Whitchurch, in Dorset, and preached almost every day, dividing his time between Mr. Alleine's people at Taunton, and Mr. Norman's at Bridgwater; also occasionally ministering to congregations of Baptists and Independents at both places.

In 1663 Alleine was imprisoned at Ilchester gaol for breaking the Act of Uniformity, and there found Mr. Norman, who for a like cause had been committed a few days before him." He also found in the gaol 50 Quakers and 17 Baptists, and very soon 13 ministers were brought; all taken like himself for the high crimes of preaching and prayer." Alleine and Norman were sentenced by Sir Robert Poster to be kept in prison until a fine of one hundred marks had been paid, and to give security for future good behaviour. Amongst those whom Mr. Alleine found in gaol was Mr. Tobias Willes, who for nearly 40 years

(ending about 1690) was pastor of the Bridgwater Baptists, but who was thrown into prison for an offence against the Act of Uniformity.

The Church at that time consisted of about 50 baptised members. Their services were much disturbed, and it is recorded that as late as 1780 *the ungodly of Bridgwater came dressed in sheepskins, entered the Chapel, and attempted to pull the minister from his pulpit in the midst of the service*. It is not known where the Baptists worshipped previous to 1692, when they erected a meeting-house on the site of the present Chapel in St. Mary-street. There are persons now living who can remember the old-fashioned edifice, which was in existence until 1835, and was situated behind a row of equally old-fashioned houses, the approach being under an archway. When the leases of these houses fell in, they were pulled down, and the result is the present grassy plot and iron railings in front.

The most striking exterior feature of the Chapel is the front, which is considered very handsome, being of freestone in the Creek and Ionic styles. The interior is very - pleasing' in appearance; and accommodation is provided for about 600 worshippers.

THE FRIENDS' MEETING.

To trace back the history of the Society of Friends it is necessary to mention that until the time of King Charles I., Church and Dissent, as, at present known, had no existence. The prelates attempted to put down doctrinal preaching, which roused the Puritans, and ultimately resulted in their supremacy and the downfall of the Prelates. These clashing interests may account for the immense number of new sects which suddenly came into existence. In the Guildhall Library is a pamphlet entitled *A discovery of twenty-nine sects here in London, all of which, except the first, are most divellish and damnable* Dr. Beaumont, in his *Catalogue of Heresies*, fills twenty-nine lines after this style :— *Tertullianists, Arabics; Symmachists, Homousiasts, Elxites, Origenians,, Yalesians, Agrippinians, Catharists, Hydroparasastes, Patripassians, Apostolics, Angelics, Chiliasts, Somosatenians, Paulianists*. Among these sects was one founded by George Fox, which obtained such headway that in 1680 it had a numerical strength equal to about one person in every 130 of the general population. It is said that Justice Bennett, of Derby, gave the society the name of *Quakers* in a scornful sense, because the founder, George Fox, admonished him, and those present with

him, to tremble (or quake) at the name of the Lord. They were first known as the Children of Light. Bridgwater appears to have been one of the cradles of Quakerism, for there were Quakers in and around the town even in the days of Fox himself. Mr. John Anderdon, a Bridgwater Quaker, was thrown into Ilchester gaol on account of his faith, was fettered to a felon with iron chains, and with others dragged through the streets. He wrote several works while in gaol, where he remained several years, until he died. In a little side path at the back of Wembdon Church is a rude stone, bearing the following inscription, from which it would appear that the body was brought to Wembdon for burial:—

Here lyeth ye body of Susanna Anderdon, ye wife of Ferdinando Anderdon, of Bridgwater, who departed this lyfe December 20th, 1675, aged 77 yeares.

*Short was her life,
Long was her payne;
Great is our lose,
Much more her gaine.*

Here lyeth also ye body of John Anderdon, their son, who died also December 26th, 1675.

There were altogether 81 Quakers in Ilchester gaol.

The Quakers in Bridgwater gained strength year by year, and in 1722 they erected a meeting-house, and their present premises in Friar-street were rebuilt in 1801. Several prominent townsmen in the borough are Friends.

THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL.

Christ Church is the more common appellation by which this place of worship is known. The old English Presbyterian Church is a monument of the former Puritanism of Bridgwater and its neighbourhood, and took its part in the stirring times alluded to above. The first meeting-house, of any importance was erected by Mr. John Herman himself, and when its pastor was imprisoned, as we have seen, at Ilchester, the structure was made to suffer great indignity, judging from the following account given by Lord Stowel in the State papers:—

We found the Hows of Worship, which was sooner pluckt down than built, and so ought to have bin all the phanatick houses in Bridgewater if they had the least incouragement for they were all able workmen; the materialls of the conventicles were carried upon the Cornhill, which made a bonfire fourteen feet high, atopp of which was placed the pulpit and the cushing. Wee only wanted the Levit to have given us a farewell sermon. There were severall gentlemen of the

country that came into us. ... Wee stood round the bonfire, and healths were not wanting. The mittig hows was made rown like, a cockpit, and culd hold some 400 parsons."

Mr. Norman died as the result of his imprisonment, and was buried in the precincts of St. Mary's, as shown by the register: *February 9, 1668. Johannes Norman, Presbiter Doctus.*

Mr. John Moore, of Brasenose College, Oxford, was the next pastor chosen by the scattered flock, and after several years' successful ministration (though not free from persecution), a fresh place of worship was built, the original Christ Church in Dampiet-street, of which the stone in front of the present building, bearing the date of 1688, formed a part. The Chapel was rebuilt in 1788, and as lately as 1866 nearly £1,000 was spent in internal repairs and improvements. The external architecture is common-place, but internally the sacred edifice has a fine and classical appearance, due to its Ionic style.

WESLEYAN CHAPEL.

Externally the Wesleyan Chapel is a very spacious edifice, with its commanding frontage to King-street, and its depth along Dampiet-street, the minister's house also adjoining. The outer walls are of red brick, with a portico entrance, comprising three arches supported on slight shafts. The original was built in 1816, and it was raised and enlarged in 1860, rendered necessary by the growth of the cause in the town. Internally the Chapel has a very neat appearance, simplicity being its chief characteristic.

A century ago Bridgwater formed part of the Taunton circuit, and the sect commenced with cottage rooms in Eastover[^] shortly followed by a small Chapel; whilst in 1816 the congregation moved to the present Chapel in King-street. In consequence of the great growth of the cause in this part of the county, Bridgwater, in 1840, became the head of its own circuit, which at the present time includes fourteen of the neighbouring villages. There are some school-rooms next the Chapel.

THE BIBLE CHRISTIAN CHAPEL.

William O'Brien is a name honoured and revered by the people belonging to this sect. He was a sturdy Cornish yeoman, and early in life he retired from his business as a farmer, and gave himself up entirely to preaching the Gospel, as a Wesleyan. In consequence of his being away on a

preaching tour for three weeks upon one occasion, and being absent from his class meetings, the Wesleyan minister erased his name from the roll of members. O'Brien, however, did not become discouraged by the act of his pastor, but continued to work and preach, and on Monday, October 9th, 1814, he formed the first society of the *Brienites*, which led to what we now know as the *Bible Christians*. It was formed at Lake farm, in the parish of Shebbear, Devon, and the first roll numbered only twenty-two names. At a subsequent meeting, when the founder revisited his newly-formed flock, the curate of the parish, the Rev. Mr. Evans, came to the service, and during the class meeting said: *If you had come here to preach a few years ago, you would have been stoned ; I, like John the Baptist, have been preparing the way.* Mr. Evans paid dearly for this expression of sympathy with what were then known as *Brienites*, for he was removed by the Bishop, his licence being cancelled in 1817.

In or about the year 1865, James Puduer and others, who had been members of the Bible Christians elsewhere, felt that something should be done in the cause in Bridgwater; and services were commenced in Mr. Puduer's own house, and subsequently an iron Chapel was erected on the Bath-road, and the Rev. John Jeffrey became the first regularly-appointed pastor. He succeeded in laying the foundation of a congregation, and left in the year 1868, followed by the Rev. Daniel Sturgess, who remained until 1869. The Rev. Richard Orchard was next appointed, and during his time St. John's Cottage (now the minister's residence) was purchased, also the land upon which the Chapel now stands.

He retired in 1871, when the Rev. Henry W. Dillingham was appointed. He was very successful here, and raised a considerable amount towards the contemplated new Chapel. Mr. Lillington left Bridgwater in 1875, and was replaced by the Rev. Thomas Whale Garland, in whose time the new Chapel in Polden-street was erected, and the old iron one demolished. The opening ceremony took place November 9th, 1876. Mr. Garland remained until 1878, when the Rev. Henry Ellis succeeded him. He in turn was followed by the Rev. William Higman, during whose ministry hundreds were persuaded to sign the pledge, and scores were added to the Church. Mr. Higman was removed to Taunton in 1884, when the Rev. Edmond Turner was appointed, during

whose time the Church has been consolidated and the existing debt reduced.

UNITED METHODIST FREE CHURCH.

Between thirty and forty years ago one of those ruptures with which unhappily the Church of Christ has been but too familiar took place in the Wesleyan body, and resulted in the secession or expulsion of many of its members. Amongst the expelled were the Revs. James Everett, Dunn and Griffiths, who had many sympathisers. These expulsions created a sect known as the Wesleyan reformers. For some time they had no regular preachers or strict form of service, and for the very laudable reason that they lived in the hope that the somewhat high-handed conduct of the Wesleyan Conference of that day might be overcome, by being set aside, and the unfortunate breach repaired. It was not until this hope had for ever vanished that the Bridgwater branch of the United Methodist Free Church was established, in or about the year 1851, in the dome of the Market-house, where they continued to conduct Divine service for about twelve months. From thence they removed to a building in Gloucester-place, at the top of Albert-street, a locality sacred to Bridgwater Nonconformity. The building in which the old pioneers of the United Methodists met to worship God has long been used as a warehouse or furniture store. After spending three years in this now dilapidated ruin, the congregation removed to their new chapel in St. Mary-street, where as we write they still worship. The first settled minister was the Rev. D. W. Pennell, who was appointed more than thirty years ago. He was succeeded by the Rev. J. S. Palmer, now President of the United Methodist Free Church Assembly ; it was during his ministry here that the amalgamation took place between the Wesleyan reformers or United Methodists, and another body then known as the Wesleyan Association, which had seceded from the Wesleyans some years before the rupture which led to the expulsion of Messrs. Everett, Dunn, Griffiths, and their followers. Amongst their other pastors are to be found the names of the Rev. J. W. Ackrill, the Rev. B. Glazebrook, and then the Rev. D. W. Pennell again appears upon the scene as pastor, which post he held until the year 1881, when the Rev. Tubal Casely was appointed, and he in turn was succeeded by the Rev. Jabez Langford in the year 1885. Very few of the old expelled reformers are now left ; some have been removed by death, and some have

returned to end their days within the old Wesleyan fold, whilst others have doubtless drifted into other connexions. Only two of the old reformers remain actually connected with the Bridgwater Chapel.

THE MARINERS' CHAPEL.

This Chapel, situated in St. John-street, was opened for worship in the year 1837. The late Mr. Peach was the original mover and was mainly instrumental in bringing about its construction. The Rev. Mr. Duck was its first minister, which post he held for about 30 years, and during his ministry the chapel was the means of doing a good work, particularly among the seamen of the port of Bridgwater. At the decease of this gentleman the Rev. John Lawrence was appointed in his stead, and remained in office until about the year 1879, when he left Bridgwater and went to reside at Bristol, where he is believed to have died. The congregation, which was once fairly good, had at the time of Mr. Lawrence's resignation dwindled down to quite a small group, and the services of the Church were from this time carried on by laymen until Mr. John Gamling was appointed by the congregation as their regular minister.

At the close of 1883 the members of the Mariners' Chapel offered to unite with the Congregational Church. A committee of fourteen gentlemen connected with the Congregational Chapel was thereupon appointed to consider whether the Trust allowed of such a union. These deliberations had not gone far before the Mariners' people withdrew, and proceeded to appoint twelve Trustees, all but one of whom were professing Churchmen. The Congregational committee, who had let the matter drop, thereupon proceeded to call the attention of the Charity Commissioners to this breach of the Trust, which declares that the trustees must be *Protestant Dissenters of the Mariners' Christian Society*. The Commissioners at once revoked the appointment made by the Church party, and as the *Mariners' Christian Society* died out in 1857, appointed fifteen Trustees, all of whom held the Congregational theory of Church polity, being distributed thus 10 from the Congregational Church, 2 from the Baptist Church, and 3 from the Mariners' Church. At the same time the Charity Commissioners affirmed the Chapel to be an Independent Chapel, by ordering that the original Rues of 1837 (which are pure and simple Independency) should henceforth form part of the Trust, the Trust-deed was handed over by the surviving

Trustees to the Minister and deacons of the Congregational Chapel, and has been deposited by the Trustees appointed by the Commissioners in the strong-room of the Independent College, Taunton. The Chapel, which accommodates nearly 400, cost about £400, exclusive of the school attached, which was subsequently erected.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL.

In 1793 a small Independent congregation gathered, in Roper's-lane, now Albert-street. The population of the town was, at that time, only about 3,000, and there existed as places of worship the Parish Church, the Friends' Meeting House, the Baptist, Wesleyan, and Unitarian Churches, those of the Baptists and Wesleyans being much smaller than the present buildings. The new congregation met in a malt-house. Scarce one is living who can remember the gloomy little room that served thus as a place of divine worship. The indenture of lease and release reads: *Part of the said premises whereon a Malt-house lately stood, a Meeting for Divine Worship by Protestant Dissenters believing the Godhead of, and atonement by Christ, and being desirous and willing that the same should always remain, continue, and be made use of for the purpose.* The Rev. Thomas Tatton was first called to officiate as minister in the said meeting. He remained pastor there until his decease. There were some cottages attached to the property, the rent of which formed a small endowment for the minister's support.

In 1818 Mr. Joseph Corp, a student of the Western Academy, commenced an *aggressive evangelistic work* in connection with the congregation, and he also held meetings in a room on Salmon Parade. Three years' earnest work in the town and neighbourhood resulted in such increased prosperity that the need of a larger Chapel was generally felt. As the old building could not be enlarged it was resolved to put up a new one, and a system of collecting weekly subscriptions for this purpose was inaugurated in 1822. Mr. Thomas Helliier appeared on the scene; he supported Mr. Corp very materially and chiefly through his efforts Zion Chapel, in Friarn-street, was built. The foundation stone was laid March 6th, 1822, and the Chapel was opened August 20th in the same year. On the opening day Mr. Corp was publicly ordained to the Christian ministry. After a lengthened stay in Bridgwater, during which he did a most useful work, Mr. Corp resigned in order to accept the care of Kingswood Tabernacle, near Bristol. In March, 1830 (four months

after he left Bridgwater), Mr. Corp died, and a handsome tablet to his memory now hangs on the wall of the vestry of Fore-street Chapel.

The next ministers in succession were: Rev. Evan James, Rev. John Bishop, Mr. Robert Panks, Mr. Philip Chapman Barker, Rev. Edward H. Jones, Rev. Edward S. Prout, and the Rev. Edwin J. Dukes. Mr. Jones's ministry in the town was marked with great success. The Chapel in Friar-street was filled to overflowing, as well as the school-rooms built for the Sunday school, adjoining.

The year 1862, being the Bicentenary of the ejection of 2,000 clergy from the Establishment, the Congregationalists in Bridgwater resolved to celebrate the event by the erection of a more commodious Church. The foundation stone of the present building in Fore-street was laid August 25th, 1862, by Mr. Samuel Morley. An evening meeting was held, with Mr. W. H. Wills, of Bristol, in the chair, and addresses were delivered by the Revs. B. Alliot, LL.D., John Stoughton, D. D., Wm. Guest, E. H. Jones, and Messrs. Samuel Morley, William Hurman, Thomas Manchip, Thomas Ware, and George B. Sully. The new Chapel was opened September 22nd, 1864, the Rev. Samuel Martin being the special preacher. There was a dinner in the Market House at which 600 sat down, and a tea at Zion Chapel, attended by 1,100 persons. Mr. Jones was afterwards appointed the Home Secretary of the London Missionary Society.

Some notable events in the pastorate of Mr. Prout were the building of the fine suite of lecture-rooms covering the space from George-street to the south end of the Chapel; and the erection in 1865 of the commodious Chapel and school at Somerset Bridge as a mission; in connection with Fore-street Chapel. In 1874 a new organ was placed in the Chapel, the instrument having been erected by Messrs. Beale and Son, of this town. In September, 1877, the present commodious schools in George-street were opened, the foundation-stone having been laid by Sir Charles Reed, Chairman of the London School Board. In 1880 Mr. Prout's health failed seriously, and in June, 1881, he deemed it his duty to resign the pastorate. He afterwards became a district Secretary of British and Foreign Bible Society.

Before the close of the year the present pastor, Rev. E. J. Dukes, was called to fill the vacancy, and entered upon his duties in January, 1882. During that year the Chapel was thoroughly cleaned and re-decorated, a

new rostrum and choir gallery erected, 900 new pipes were added to the organ which was placed on the apse, at a cost of £310; and shortly afterwards the whole amount, about £700, was paid off. In 1877 a new heating apparatus was placed in the Chapel at an expense of £130.

The style of the architecture of the Chapel — or, as it is better known, Church — is the Early or Geometric Decorated. It presents a striking appearance in the midst of business, premises in one of the busiest streets of the town; whilst internally everything has been done to please the eye and not offend the taste. There is accommodation for about 1,100 persons. From first to last the premises and improvements have cost considerably over £10,000, and are free of debt.

CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

A branch of this Church, which still exists, seems to have been first established in Bridgwater about half a century since, and was doubtless an outcome of the Tractarian movement. The earliest preacher in the cause in this town is stated to have been a Rev. Mr. Finlater. But as far as we can ascertain the first meeting at which anything in the form of a religious service was conducted in connection with this body took place in the Grand Jury-room, when the late Mr. Spencer Perceval preached. This Mr. Perceval was the son of the late Prime Minister Perceval, who was shot dead in the lobby of the House of Commons by the lunatic Bellingham. The late Mr. Henry Drummond's name is also connected with the Church in this district. The meeting at the Grand Jury-room seems, however, to have been only preliminary, or temporary in character, for they are next found worshipping in a house somewhere on the West Quay, and then on the premises now occupied by Mr. Basker, the chemist, and from here they removed to the house in King-street, where services are still conducted upon one Sunday in each month. The members of the congregation for the most part fall back upon, the Established Church, and worship there on the Sundays when services are not conducted at the church in King-street. The congregation was never very numerous, and is still small but select. The Church is supported by the voluntary tithes of its people, and the branch at Bridgwater is subject to, and is served from the Church at Bath, and the chief seat of the *Prophets* is at present at Albury, Surrey.

PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

This sect was founded in the year 1827, by

four men, who held their first meeting at 9, Fitzwilliam-square, Dublin. Their first public meeting-place in Plymouth was Providence Chapel. From this place they were accustomed to go into the country to preach, and the people whom they addressed grew accustomed to speak of them as the *brethren from Plymouth* hence the term *Plymouth Brethren*. About the year 1845 it was discovered that a Mr. Newton, who was a brother, was teaching false doctrines, and this brought about a hopeless division which was never bridged over. It was about this time that they first became known in Bridgwater. Their first meeting-place was a room in Gloucester-place, which has been referred to in our remarks on the Free Methodists. The next place of meeting was in a room above a stable in Friarn-street and then they removed to their present public room in the same street. They do not use the term *Church* or *Chapel* nor have they any settled minister in Bridgwater or elsewhere, but preach when moved to do so.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Previous to the year 1846 the Catholics of Bridgwater had to attend the Chapel of the Holy Name, at Cannington. On February 17th, 1846, a School Chapel, 50 feet by 25, was opened, built on part of the *Close* formerly belonging to the ancient St. John's Hospital, by Mr. J. M. Capes the then late vicar of St. John's, Eastover, aided by subscribers, one of whom was the celebrated Cardinal Wiseman. This School Chapel was superseded in 1882 by the new and handsome Church of St. Joseph, in Binford-place, built from funds given by the late Mr. Philip M. Hewett, from the designs of the Rev. Alexander J. C. Scoles, the present pastor. It is built in the Early Decorated style of architecture, of red brick and Bath-stone dressings and consists of the chancel, nave, side Chapel, and a isle, with porch, organ-gallery and sacristy. It will seat about 250 at present, but the design contemplated an enlargement to accommodate twice that number if the adjoining ground could be purchased, and which has since been accomplished. It is upon the partly-completed interior of the Church that the art of the architect has been principally directed; the beauty of the altars attract attention, especially the new reredos altar in the side Chapel, erected by the Rev. A. J. C. Scoles, in memory of his late father, J. J. Scoles, and is the finest piece of ecclesiastical sculpture in the town or neighbourhood. Amongst the painted glass windows is one to the memory

of the founder of the Church, Mr. P. M. Hewett. In 1883 the first part of the new schools was built, the intention being to build the main block on the Quay in front of the present one. In 1885 the priest-in-charge founded a convent of the Sisters of Mercy.

THE SALVATION ARMY.

This organization commenced operations in Bridgwater about the latter end of 1880, by Captain Tom Crocker, of Bristol, who since then has opened many stations of the *army* and has had many hairbreadth escapes from brick-bats, kicks, &c. His first appearance with a handful of followers, as he walked through the streets singing and playing an accordion, caused no little interest. Meetings were held for a time in the old Primitive Methodist Chapel, West-street, and frequently in the Methodist Free Church and Bible Christian Chapel. At Easter, 1881, the services commenced in the present *Barracks* formerly the skating rink, and earlier still the Zion Chapel used by the Independents before removing to their handsome Chapel in Fore-street. The army at first met with considerable opposition, and at one time it appeared likely to be of a serious character, as the mob on one occasion besieged the place and smashed the windows. But the army now are unmolested, and bad behaviour by outsiders at the services is exceptional. The *roll* now numbers over 200 members, including a band of music.

It is due to the Army to say that the Bridgwater corps has not only been the means of reclaiming many who were apparently beyond the reach of any other religious organization, but several who were brought under the influence of this peculiar system of religion are now carrying on the work in England and in the Colonies.