WESTON ON THE GREEN

METHODIST CHURCH

CENTENARY

1838 1938

BUCKINGHAM AND BRACKLEY CIRCUIT

FOREWORD.

While talking about the Village Methodist Chapel, which was built 100 years ago, and about the history of the Village during the last century, the outstanding characters, the changes that have taken place, my friend said to me, " Why don't you write down these things, otherwise the things that happened in village life in those days, seeing that such a char ge is taking place in the rural life of England, will be lost."

This I now try to do, having no literary gifts, and very few school-days, having had to start work on the land when 9 years of age, I can only tell these things in my own language, things told to me by men and women of the Village who lived 100 years ago, and later, of things and people seen and known by myself.

It is a kind of mixed medley history, mostly of people centred around the Methodist Chapel, so I will call it

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF VILLAGE LIFE AND METHODISM.

H. P.
July 1938.

Reproduced from an old photograph of a made-up group for the occasion. The two supposed prisoners are " stock still ".

Group taken at Chapel Anniversary about 1893.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF VILLAGE LIFE AND METHODISM.

THE VILLAGE.

WESTON-ON-THE-GREEN, OXFORDSHIRE.

The Village, as the name implies, stands on the Green, nearly a mile in length. The part of the Green not built on until recently is about 80 acres in extent and runs the whole length of the Village; this was enclosed under Inclosure Acts.

A great amount of the surrounding land was open or Common land formerly.

The Oxford—Brackley road runs through, or rather in front of the Village (between Village and Green). At the northern end of the Village is a field called " Shepherd's Close "; this is where the cattle and sheep which roamed the Green and Common were housed during the night; in a very dry time one can still see the marks of the old foundations of the buildings.

Near the southern end of the Green is a long Corner, running farther back, a rather large pond where cattle could drink; this is called Piper's Folly. The ground on the other side of the pond is called Boxer's Ground. Many tales are told of why these places were called by these names, but I cannot vouch for such being true. One, that it was where fights used to take place, is not I think well

founded, because those places have been pointed out to me by the men themselves who used to fight; these were on the Free Board, or perhaps more strictly speaking, Fuel Board, at the Corner of Weston Wood, near Oddington Boundary. And at the Corner of Nine Elms, ' local Nineum ', this bounding on Bletchingdon parish.

The reason for this is obvious, if, which often did happen, the Village Constable interfered in the fight, they stepped over the boundary and carried on.

The population of the Village then was nearly double what it is today.

The Cottages, mostly with thatched roofs, show that this is a very old village, but how old it is difficult to tell.

The old Cottage in which I write this was built in 1617.

The Cottages were mostly ' Key Hold ' property, that is, the key of the door was the right to the Cottage. This I suppose is why eventually I myself became a native.

One of my ancestors was a Carrier and used to drive a Dog Cart, ' small cart and three dogs to draw same ', from one of the neighbouring villages to Oxford. He carried news as well as parcels, he brought a Weekly Paper for the leading farmer each week. Many of the people used to get down to ' The Chequers ' to meet him, this being the first port of call. He, being able to read a bit, used to read out the news. If reports are true, he often read what was not there if it

suited his purpose; but it was bound to be right, ' it was in the paper '. One of the cottagers being hard up and having no children to follow him, sold his Key for two shillings and sixpence, hence my ancestral home. This old cottage was later pulled down, and the stone was used for building a wall around a garden. This garden was then put to a farm house adjoining, exit my ancestral home. Several of the old cottages met with a somewhat similar fate.

It was not until 1887 that any more were built in their place; in that year two new cottages were built, one called Jubilee Cottage, the other School House.

Owing to what was called Agricultural depression, many of the young men drifted away from the Village. I remember the time well when there were over 20 young single men out of work; this in summer. These drifted away, walked off in some cases, one or two got as far as St. Helen's, Lancashire, found good jobs; one eventually became Manager of a Glass Works there. Others got as far as Birmingham where they got jobs mainly as Horse Keepers on the Railways. These in turn sent for others until the Village was cleared out of most of its young men. It was not the lure of the town drew them away, it was the death creeping over the Village made them flee from it.

Of all the boys leaving the Village school during the last 50 years, so far as I am able to find out, there are but three I am sure of, and one doubtful, who are working on the land here or anywhere else.

The whistling plough lads, the old songs often sung at night in the old Village Inn; the shouts and laughter of the lads and men playing 'Rounders' on the Green, these in spite of hard work and poor pay, made their own amusements.

Changes must come, and we cannot but feel the loss.

The dying out of Village life is a great loss to the nation.

Crafts, Customs, etc., which were carried on in the Village, appear in a later chapter.

THE METHODIST CHAPEL.

A stone built into the wall of the Chapel :—" Wesleyan Methodist Chapel 1838 " showing that the Chapel was built 100 years ago.

At that time Rural England was going through a period of change which altered the whole outlook.

Had the powers that were, who were responsible for the change, only had a wider outlook, it might have saved us at least from some of the problems which disturb men's minds today, although in fairness to them, it is possible we should do little better today.

Economics, that blessed word which I confess at once I do not understand

but which is doubtless a very useful word, appears to be the basis to give warranty for any change wanted.

I wouldn't go so far as old Dicky, who, when asked what it meant replied: " It's like the word ' Brumegum ', you can use that if you have no better word, or don't know the one you should, it may hide a multitude of sins for awhile at any rate."

Should it mean " A sound thing; making both ends meet ", it looks quite good. But when tackling Rural Problems it looks as if the greatest factor, ' the human factor ' did not always have time and thought enough given to it.

' So that the land can be put into better use ' appeared to be the claim made when passing the many Inclosure Acts. Round about the period when the Chapel was built, the Green and Common lands had been or were being Enclosed.

Rural England was passing through a dark period. It seems quite possible that the coming of Methodism played a great part in saving the dark day from becoming a much darker night, when ugly things only seen at such times have been let loose, causing revolution and bloodshed. The labourers, of whom there were many more than now, in this and surrounding villages, finding themselves shut off from the land over which they had aforetime roamed and had somehow managed to live, had nothing left whereby to live, only their labour to sell; for

this the market was poor. The farmers who had taken over or rented the land, were in some cases possibly not very well off.

So with no work to earn money to get food, many of them, taking their wives and children, went to the workhouse. These being so many, room could not be found. Feelings running high, the men began to be troublesome when they got to the workhouse, and one might tell of things of which is said happened there.

My father who was a young man at the time, told me much of what happened, if not at the workhouse, outside. I will put in their own words, words of my father and others, as nearly as I can, how they felt :—

" It was not the poverty of which we suffered much, God knows, that is in not having much to eat or wear, we felt as if we were cast out, of no account, not recognised as human beings, we can't tell you how we did feel, we felt as if we were in the way."

In an endeavour to cope with the situation, the Speenhamland System was set going. The men were put to work on the land, but to use their own words for it, ' they didn't do much work, the spirit to work wasn't there '. They were sent in gangs to work on one farm for awhile, then on to another, until they had gone the round (they called it ' rounds ') of all the farms, then started again. One of the men being somewhat of a wag, called it ' the tread mill ', others with a sly

wink would say ' he had some of both so he ought to know '. The single men had, while on this work, 6/- per week. When married 7/- per week.

One would be hard put to it even in these modern days to keep and clothe one's wife on 1/- per week. But the wage of the single man coming so near to the married standard, possibly meant that he may have been expected to save up before marriage to help keep a wife.

I have heard tell of one who did try and save up for a rainy day, but he said it snowed instead of rain on the day, and that knocked him out.

Before the building of the Chapel the Methodists held their meetings in a little Cottage near where the Chapel now stands; the ground whereon the Chapel was built was gardenground belonging to the Cottage.

This is one of the very few bits of Freehold that was left in the Parish after Enclosure.

Mr. White, the owner of the Cottage, which was also the Village Shop, sold the bit of ground to the Methodists for £20. How they were able to get the ground had better be given in the Chapel Steward's own words at an Anniversary Meeting 50 years later :—

" We have been able to buy a Stove, and have fire which makes the Chapel warm and comfortable, and this is paid for. I see the Hand of God through it all."

" Mr. White was sometimes willing to let us meet in his Cottage, sometimes not quite so willing, but being short of money he offered to sell us the ground, which we bought. Had it been a fortnight later we should not have had a Chapel. A fortnight after getting the ground Mr. White came in for some money."

Although the ground was secured, building the Chapel was a tremendous task. The Methodists, being working men with very small wages, proved conclusively " That faith is the ' substance ' of things hoped for." The farmers lent the men horses and carts to cart stones and other materials for building; the men working for a wage of love only (possibly that is the real interpretation of what has become rather a vexed question, viz : ' a living wage '; one thing it can never die).

It took many years to pay off the building debt. I remember the time when there were tickets on back of seats bearing name of a man and his wife; they paid 2/6 per quarter for the privilege of sitting in front of this ticket. Official name, ' Seat Rent '. These rents went to clear off the debt. The labourer's wage was then 10/- per week, so that 2/6 out of the 10/- meant much.

These men had faults, they said so themselves, and used to pray mightily for forgiveness. But they had learned what Christianity is. They knew it was more blessed to give than to receive. Their religion was not to get, but to give; not to expect others to do things for them, but to help others; they gave themselves.

Some may, in these later days, be inclined to think that they were too puritanical, or perhaps too old-fashioned. If any should think this, let such try and imagine what it meant to live during the hungry '40's. It has been said that they talked and thought too much of the next world. But to them heaven was a place of rest.

A favourite Hymn they often sang :—

" My rest is in heaven, my rest is not here.
Then why should I murmur when trials appear.
Be hushed my dark spirit, the worst that can come,
But shortens my journey and hasten me home."

A place where they could rest was heaven to them, their bodies often bent nearly double by hard work; work may not be the right word, slavery might be nearer what it really was. How often have I heard them say :—" I feel more tired on Monday morning than any other time." Being able to relax on Sunday the body was getting fit for rest.

When they got to Chapel after they got the stove going, which made it warm and comfortable, they had great difficulty in keeping awake. One of my earliest recollections is :—One Sunday afternoon one man fell asleep. He dozed

off, then tried to rouse up, but no use, his head gradually sank down in restful sleep. His wife, who had a friend with her, was sitting in the second seat behind. She was keeping a watchful eye on him; she gently raised her umbrella which had a knob on handle, and reaching over she tapped him on the head. Being rather flustered she hit harder apparently than intended; husband's head being bald the whack sounded a bit. The husband suddenly woke, sitting upright but not looking round; possibly he knew where it came from. This made the youngsters laugh, but this was soon silenced.

Yes, Worship in those times was stern, and I think more sacred than now. These men and women worshipped a God much greater than themselves. Perhaps there is a tendency to err on the other side today.

" Amuse the people, make amusements, do almost anything, to get the people to come to the Churches. If we can amuse the people and get them in, they may eventually find salvation," is the excuse sometimes put forward.

All this is summed up very much better than I can do it, by a writer in the *Oxford Guardian* of date 18/1/38. Although he was writing from a different standpoint, it is true of both. He says :—

" Persecution can be ennobling; one is lifted from the valley of sloth on to a pinnacle where the winds beat fiercely, where all that is false or untrue cannot endure. But the silence of a self-erected Ghetto, of a self-set standard, of a


WESLEYAN
CHAPEL
BUILT 1838

" The best is yet to be."

superior moral outlook, presages the fall of those who set it and the silence of the tomb."

SUNDAY DRESS, CLASS MEETINGS, ETC.

In the old days the congregation looked much more picturesque than today. The women wore shawls of many colours. Bonnets on which were flowers of many colours. Some wore sun bonnets, these also of various colours. Not quite like sun bonnets seen today. Many wore tucks and frills. My mother made some of these. Home-made lace around the neck. (Of this, more said later.)

The men. Some wore Smock Frocks, finely worked. Others short jackets called ' Drab Jackets '. Others ' Slops ', something like a blouse loose fitting, with sleeves buttoning like a shirt sleeve. Others with a ' Smock ' called a ' round smock ', very like a shirt. White shirts, home made, with finely pleated fronts, with collars like one sees in portraits of Gladstone. A cravat or sometimes a silk (real silk) handkerchief tied around the neck. Corduroy trousers. Thick home-made boots. Nearly all the men wore ' Billycock hats '. Taking these off when they got in Chapel, they then took from their pockets a clean brightly coloured handkerchief specially kept for this occasion. This was folded three-corner-wise and placed on their heads; they feared the draught. These, with the bright bonnets and shaws of the women, made a bright picture.

But more of this later.

In giving a sort of character sketch, I wish it to be understood that the word ' old ' may not always mean ' old ' in years.

It was the local custom to say ' old ' when speaking of one, this not in any disparaging way, rather the reverse. If after the ' old ' the full Christian name was given, it meant quite a lovable way. Some, who before their conversion had been what was termed ' rum characters ', they generally had a nickname and many of the children knew them only by that name; although quite innocent, they sometimes got their ears boxed for calling them by that name.

I myself happened to be one of the privileged ones amongst the youngsters.

These old Methodists were not satisfied with two services on Sunday, and two, often three, week-night services. Sunday School met at 9 o'clock Sunday mornings. So they decided to have a Fellowship Meeting on Sunday mornings at 11 o'clock. Then a difficulty arose. They could not read but very little, most of them not at all. The Class Leader, who could read a bit, could not always attend, so they asked me if I would go and read for them; being very young I felt a bit shy of it at first, but I went. I didn't know it then, but it was the greatest thing I have ever been asked to do in my life.

Although not able to read, they knew much of the Bible by heart, and in heart. They would tell me what they wanted read, and I did my best to read it.

They would then talk about it. They made it a living, everyday Book. When they talked of the great stories, of Abraham offering his Son, the Children of Israel, and the Promised Land, of Joseph, and David, what a grip of the thing they had; it took me to the very scene and place.

Often after talking of the things that must come, which things to me seemed impossible, they would say to me, " Ah, lad, we shan't live to see these things; you will." I have.

Although strictly against the law of Official Methodism, because I helped them, I was allowed to attend their Class Meetings.

THE CLASS LEADER.

The Class Leader was one like themselves, an ordinary labourer. He had a nickname, but was seldom called by it, unless by those who scoffed at him for his religion. They would then call him ' Spike '. This was because he had been in the workhouse (called ' Spike ') at the times I have mentioned before. In his young days being very fleet of foot, he acted as ' Runner ' for the poaching gang.

Three of the ' gang ' had been caught. These were banished to Van Dieman's Land. Chained together, they were put on the sailing ship ' London '. I have read the letter sent by one of these, telling how when about half way across

the sea, the sailors being so sorry for them filed their chains off, and saying how they thanked God, it was so nice to be free from chains.

It came to the Class Leader's turn later. They got him somehow. I think he lost his hat, and fearing to turn back for it, they found it, and were thus able to say, " you are the man ".

But he was to be married shortly, so sentence was suspended, so that his happy event could take place. He was married at the Village Church. When the marriage ceremony ended and he got out, the arm of the law was waiting for him outside; he was taken to prison for his honeymoon which lasted for twelve months and one day. " Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." But being only an Agricultural Labourer, well he was ' only an Agricultural Labourer, and that was of little account then '.

I dug his grave and buried him in the middle of the night, putting his body in the grave about 12.5 midnight in the shadow of the Church where he was married.

Change was gradually coming. The labourer was now getting 10/- per week, if working Sunday 12/-.

It had gone as high as 15/- per week for a few weeks.

Joe Arch's Union had come. A strike took place, followed by reaction. Many were out of work, and feelings were running rather high.

To be a Methodist was looked upon as something a bit dangerous, but to be, as many of the labourers were ' a Methodist and a Joe Arch's man ' was looked upon as very bad.

The struggle and oppression was in the mind while at Class Meetings. At such times the old Class Leader was at his best. The custom was :—The Class Leader called on the members by name to give their experience. Old Dicky sat nearest so was called first. He generally was what was called ' long-winded '. At one meeting he kept on long, even for him. The Leader looked at him several times, making motions for him to stop. This was of no avail. He was saying ' If I had a thousand tongues I could never praise the Lord enough for what He has done for me '. Like a flash came from the Leader :—' Praise Him with the tongue you have, but sit down '.

Another always said when giving experience :—' I cannot help thanking the Lord for giving me bread to eat, clothes to wear, a bed to lay on, and a roof over my head '. (I think God accepted such thanks.)

Old Jim was a bit better off. He worked in the woods, wore a velvet jacket, but said he had always to fight a battle against himself. ' I feel I be selfish, and I know it's wrong ', was the burden of his cry.

He could sing. He loved singing. If one of the Class seemed to be losing hope in the battle, he would start right off singing :—

" Courage brother, do not stumble,
Though your path be dark as night.
There's a star to guide the humble,
Trust in God and do the right."

The brother would say ' I want to trust in God, but the road is hard for me '.

Old Jim would strike up again :

" Let the road be rough or dreary,
And the end be far from sight.
Foot it bravely, strong or weary,
Trust in God and do the Right."

Old Thomas was quite a different kind of man. A big strong man, ready to do battle with any who might oppose. His theme was :—' Let us arise and fight '.

Then from the Leader in quiet voice :—' Vengeance is mine saith the Lord. Wait His time, brother '.

Then again Old Jim would start singing :—

" Be hushed my dark spirit, the worst that can come,
But shortens my journey and hastens me home."

Little Billy. He was old, but seemed to alter but little. His body almost double, he worked hard, his work was thatching. He had a wonderful face; it made me think of Angels. Also a great voice. Billy was not only a Methodist, but a politician also, although if one had asked him ' What is a politician ', I think he would not have had the slightest idea. His politics was " Righteousness " and possibly that may not be the first thing always seen in politics

At the extension of the franchise, Billy had something to say about things. ' Three acres and a cow '; Old Age Pension at 70, was in his opinion something good.

Three young University men were holding a political meeting on the Green. The chief speaker later became a prominent member of the House. Billy stood just in by him. Just as he got well on with his speech, telling that the Government would sometime pay a Pension of 5/- per week to the labourer when he was 70 years of age; how this would save them from the dreaded workhouse, Billy raised his body to its full height, and with his mighty voice shouted ' Glory '. The speaker was so nonplussed that he ended his speech rather abruptly.

Billy later had to learn that it was not quite the proper way of ease, to shout ' Glory ' to a thing, unless the colour was right. He didn't get the Pension, but I am glad he died in his cottage; he had a dread that his end would be in the Workhouse.

SUNDAY SCHOOL.

The Sunday School met in Chapel at 9 a.m. Sunday. A good number of scholars.

The small children were in charge of ' Little Billy '; he could just manage to tell them the letters of the alphabet; and could get them to learn many of the Psalms. These, and much of the Bible, he himself knew by heart.

The Leader, who was also Superintendent, took charge of the elder children.

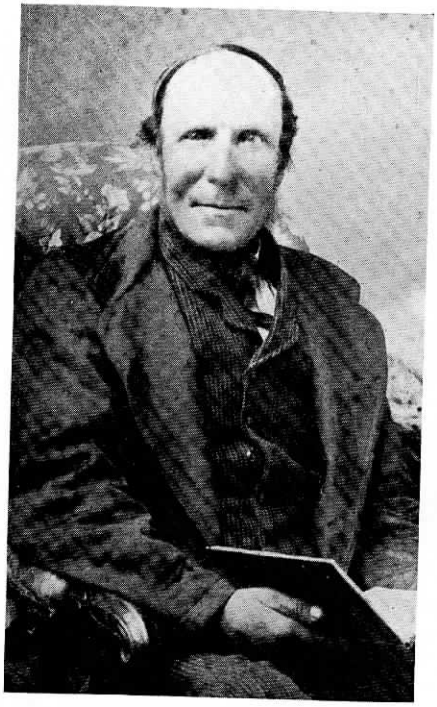
He was something of a musician although he could not read music, or play any musical instrument, but the soul of music was his. So he also taught the girls and lads to sing. (One would like to tell here what that meant in later years, of something like a miracle that happened. But no, not now.)

A favourite hymn of his was one from ' Sankey ' :—

" Jesus Saviour pilot me over life's tempestuous sea."

That hymn in itself was a splendid guide to the young.

How the children loved him. He would sometimes give us a treat. He was a shepherd, and ' his ' sheep (they were not ' his ' in the sense of ownership) sometimes during summer they were out in grass fields by day, and put in pens in arable fields for the night. After Sunday evening service which ended at 6.30,



Thomas Clarke
(Shepherd).

Weston-on-the-Green Young Hopefuls.
The Forward Movement.

Rev. E. R. Bishop. Rev. Baker. Rev. Morton.

he would take a few of us with him to pen the sheep. He would ask us to go quietly when nearing the field; when we got near enough to see the sheep, some grazing, some laying down, apparently asleep, scattered all over the field. Then he would start whistling the tune 'Ascalon'—"My heart and voice I raise"; immediately there was a babel of sound, the sheep who apparently were sleeping, suddenly awoke, all hurrying to the gate.

He would sometimes let one of the lads whistle the tune first, but the sheep took but little notice.

Although there were many sheep, he seemed to know each one. To me, then, they all looked alike, but he would point them out, saying, 'That's old so-and-so', tell of its character, or peculiarities, would call one to him, and tell it to behave itself and not get jumping out of the pen, etc.

When a labourer such as this goes from the land, it's a great loss to the farmer, and he is not easy to replace

THE LOCAL PREACHER.

What these men have done and are still doing for Methodism, especially in the villages, has probably not always been recognized. It would be a sad day for Methodism if Village Methodism should die.

Times have changed, the Local Preacher can now get to his Appointments easier than aforetime. It used often to mean 12, or even 20 miles walk. To start after Sunday night's service on a walk 8 or more miles on a dark night, and much of the way across fields (if by road much more)—well, the man had to love his work to do it.

Sometimes he got home late, drenched to the skin if it was wet, and maybe had to get some of the clothes he wore dried ready to put on early the next morning for work. I have known some who have come here, wet through when they got here.

Yet these men would sing and talk with God, and had some of the greatest times of their life, feeling that they were close to things Immortal.

Some could read but little; one even had to get his wife to read the Bible to him during evenings of a week, so that he could commit it to memory, and they had a good memory. I have heard them spoken of as :—" Unlearned and ignorant men ". Well, much depends on one's standard of learning and ignorance. One thing, they were original. Possibly if one had his sermon written out in that day, he would have read it to an empty Chapel.

When the Hymns were given out, they were mostly given out a verse at a time.

If a verse ' lay hold ', they would sing it again. At times the tune was too high or low, and sometimes the wrong meter.

I have said that the Local Preacher was original; this of itself often made the preaching interesting. In this more fashionable day we should be shocked, saying it was bad taste.

When giving out the Hymn :—" What means this eager anxious throng " the first verse sung with all the gusto of that day. Then it came to the next verse :—" Who is this Jesus ", the preacher stops, looks hard at the congregation :—"Ah, who is He. Do you know Him? I'll tell you who He is; He's my friend who saved me from hell, to where I very nearly got to ".

One was great when preaching on Ahab and Naboth's Garden. Had he lived in the time of Ahab his life would not have been long. If he were alive today and preached likewise, ' he should not preach politics ' would possibly be the verdict.

Their religion was real, no dividing line; it was not a compromise. Evil, however respectable, whether political or not, they opposed with all their might.

They made mistakes, may not always have acted wisely, but they did a noble work for Methodism in Rural England. May the present day Local Preacher be enabled to serve the present age as these men served theirs.

This is a great and glorious day for Local Preachers. Also for Methodists, especially the young, full of opportunities.

How often it is said :—This is a pleasure-seeking age, the young especially appear not to care or bother about religion, etc. The Great War is often blamed for this. This may be true or partly true, but the most dangerous thing of all is, when a preacher or teacher talking in this strain allows a pessimistic tone to creep in, a kind of inuendo, which murmurs a kind of question, viz : Is the Great Salvation purchased by the Saviour on the Cross, and the Christ that rose from the Tomb, able to save the young people of today? It is.

I have often looked on a field of wheat after a severe winter, looking a dull colour; when taking hold of it it felt limp and lifeless. I once said to a farmer : ' I should plough that wheat up '. His very look taught much. He replied : ' I don't think I shall plough it up, it's the harvest that counts; the yield may be better than if it was Winter Proud now '.

If the youth of this age should be careless and indifferent, I tell them a story which I read many years since. It was in the day of ' Carriage and Pairs ', but it might apply also to the day of motors.

" A gentleman lived near where the road ran along the top of a high cliff, in places very near the edge; he was interviewing applicants for the post of Coachman. Asking the first how near he could drive to the edge without going

over, he replied within a few feet. The second said he could drive within inches. The third, an Irishman, when asked the question replied, ' Begorra, I could drive on the other side of the road to save me own life '. He got the job."

CUSTOMS, ARTS AND CRAFTS OF VILLAGE LIFE.

LACE MAKING.

" Mum, I wish you would put that ' Bobbinging ' away."

The many times I said that when I wanted mother to play with me. Also many times later when I could see she was so tired she could scarcely keep going.

The Lace Pillow, with the many coloured Bobbins, with a ring of coloured beads at the end to keep the Bobbins down in the right place. Mother's fingers went, I used to think, like bees' wings. How she knew which to take hold of among all the cluster was a mystery to me. Parchments of so many patterns, on some the pins close together like a regiment of soldiers, other in various formations, the pins making a picture and a puzzle.

Lace making was carried on in many cottage homes in the Village. One who was called ' The Lace Man ' called around at certain times, taking any lace the women had to sell.

Sometimes lace was sold locally to people who wanted a special pattern. This

was often paid for at a higher price, but when hearing of the value which was placed on some of this, well, the buyer generally had a cheap bargain. The few shillings earned was of immense help in keeping the home going.

The earnings, after paying for materials for making lace, and much of it night work (my Mother sitting up a good deal of the night, when she sadly needed rest), may have worked out at about one penny per hour; both hands going like bees' wings, didn't gather much honey. But the joy of making something beautiful gave them something which cannot be bought with money.

THE SHOE MAKER.

Old John worked in a little thatched shed near his cottage. Like many of his kind, he could tell wonderous stories, and we spent many winter evenings in his shop, it was warm.

If we behaved properly he would allow us to snuff his candles; he had generally three candles going, to give a proper light; these being made of tallow they guttered and often needed snuffing.

I think he should have gained a Professorship on the uses of tallow and wax. Tallow especially, if we had aches, pains, bruises, sore throats, etc. Tallow was the remedy. I have much faith in it still for many things.

He had a large pebble on which he hammered leather. This had five dents, looking exactly as if one had laid hold of it with fingers and thumb while it was in a soft state; but if so, a very large hand. John's explanation of it was :—' The Devil took hold of it while hot, but would not burn, and hurled it out, hence the finger prints '.

' Shoe maker ' may be misleading in these days. He made shoes, but mainly boots. Thick boots, good leather, last for years at rough work. One cannot put an epitaph on his his tomb-stone, as there is no stone there, so I put it here :

" Old John made good ' LEATHER ' Boots and Shoes for the poor."

I am not aware if the same custom prevailed in other villages, but the usual custom here was to make (this for working boots, not Sunday boots) them straight, not right and left; we called them ' straights '.

If there was only Father in the family, or to those who could afford it, he would make them shaped in the ordinary way. ' Straights ' were made where there was a family of boys.

Made thus, they served a dual purpose, and often threefold cruelty. I seem to feel it now. Being straight one could wear them on either foot. This saved ' treading over '.

And on the principle ' that anything will fit a naked man ', when the elder lad's feet got too big for his boots, the next down had to take them.

The boots, being good quality and well made, lasted a long time, but imagine, if you can, the first day the younger brother had to wear them. The boots by then had got almost as hard as board, and even brothers' feet are not all alike. The day my turn came I was leading horses at scuffle on fallow that was rough hard clods. (Four horses at scuffle, I walked between the two foremost with a hand on each rein.) I hung on these reins; the horses partly carried me along, feet sore, and being encumbered with boots I got taps from the horses' feet when turning, but the horses would never step on you if they could help it. The carter would sometimes manage a ' bout ', looking after all four horses himself, and let me rest, but starting again was agony. After getting them off, I cannot describe the feeling; it did hurt if foot was kept up; to put it on the ground was the worst, or lift it again, it was the blood pressure possibly. To put the foot on cold stones eased it; this we did. It left no ' footprints on the sands of time ' but on the stones.

We had some pity for a younger brother when his turn came.

Labourers couldn't afford new boots for all, so the eldest brother came in for new boots. The boots were paid for after harvest; while harvest lasted all the family worked in the harvest field.

The foot made the shoe fit better after a while, and one was able to go up and down the field whistling and singing.

Mrs. James East.

The occupants of this Cottage left the Village under Joseph Arch's Emigration Scheme to New Zealand.

The swaying of body often noticed in the labourer in former days was often due to bad fitting boots, the foot could not bend or expand. Thus, with a good amount of mother earth hanging on, he had to swing his body to lever along his leg.

What a joy that someone later had the idea to put seats on many farm implements. The farm labourer's work is thus easier than it once was.

CUTTING THE CROPS.

Most people have heard the song ' Men that went a-mowing '. Soon, few people will know what that means. I have met a few already. To see men mowing was a pretty sight to watch. Moving in perfect rhythm, the swish of the scythes, the smell of the new cut grass—it took a bit of skill to wield a scythe, but the art of being a good mower did not always depend on how one wielded the scythe : ' If you could ' whet ' you could mow '. I well remember my first trial. One of four, as was the custom, being a starter I was put next the leader, the idea being that the third man drove you from behind. If he took a wider cut each stroke, or you happened to have a false blow, his scythe got dangerously near your heels and you had to step out of the way. If that happened you

were ' shod ', that is, the third man picked up your foot, tapped on bottom; this meant you were expected to pay for so much beer to be shared by all.

Luckily for me my father had taught me how to whet, so that the scythe would make a single bent fly. This alone saved me, having no special strength or gift in using a scythe, although the leader said I was very good at it, but this must not be taken as meaning ' very good ' in our language; it means ' fairly good ' or ' not too bad '.

So beware in this locality, if, what you do or are is thought highly of, the verdict ' good ' without the ' very '.

If not thinking much of yourself or what you do, the verdict ' very good '. This may really mean quite the contrary, but the natives know which way by the tone in which ' very ' is said.

I mention this because I have known even a politician to be deceived thereby.

Good cheer to the inventor of the Mowing Machine. I hope he is in heaven.

CUTTING CORN.

Sickle, Fagging Hook and Stick, Reaper and Self-Binder.

' To plough and sow, reap and mow ', is much easier now.

I have seen the sickle used but not used it myself, that is, not working with it for a wage.

Fagging Hook and Stick were used for many years. " Starting harvest next week ", this was the signal for getting Hooks ground, Mother's doing all the washing of clothes, getting ready the old garments, " garments few and mostly old ", but a few that were got really bad and put aside were fetched out.

Starting fagging in " Horns " (the name of a field) Monday morning. Wheat not quite ripe, but must start or before we get to the other fields it will bash out. With much excitement, off we go on Monday morning. Seven sides in all. A side meant man, wife and family, the greater the family, the heavier the burden to carry. All went, even the baby.

The men and elder boys to the fields first. Then, seven straws cut in different lengths were put in a hand to draw for places. The men did not often wish to draw first place, this meant starting alongside the hedge, often the heaviest crop, sometimes down. The youngsters liked it, they could often find the earliest blueberry and a bit later, crab apples, sour, but they quenched thirst.

On heavy ground it went in lands—two lands each.

A knot was tied in the ears of corn at each boundary to mark the pieces for measuring, as some lands were bigger than others. The ploughman would plough a few extra furrows on one land if he could see by so doing it would drain off water better.

The knot was made by taking hold of about half a handful of straws, bending

about a foot from the bottom, twist round and loop, and pull top part through, cut off just above loop, putting top part with ears of corn in into the sheaf.

To throw corn about or waste it was looked upon as sin.

As soon as a fair start was made, along came mothers, girls, the very small carried or in perambulators, with food and drink for the day.

The mothers part.

Soon as Mother had unpacked food and drink, placing these in shade, and if there was a small baby, put baby comfortable, making shady nook with sheaves.

Then she started tying up sheaves, the small child who had gone with father, only able to lay bands.

If any lads big enough, they took hook and stick, helping father to cut a bit along outside. When Mother had tied sheaves and caught up, she would then lay bands also in addition to tying up, and let the child rest a bit. Poor Mother, so tired herself, yet to get on she often would ' shock ' sheaves.

How glad when dinner time came. Dinner at 12 o'clock, but starting at 6, it seemed long in coming.

Dinner in shade, a sleep, all in one hour, then on again till ' Beaver ' time —4 o'clock. Mother would start home after this if there was far to go, if near, she would stop a bit later Taking with her the smallest of the family. Then

she would light the fire, wash up crocks brought back, tidy up house, get vegetables, and start cooking for father when he got home; cooking enough to take to the field for the family next day. After supper, wash up, and then often she had to spend an hour or two washing and mending clothes. If working on the light land, she had to doctor youngsters badly bitten by harvest bugs wherever clothes fitted a bit tight. Many times I have heard Mothers say :—" I can never think what harvest bugs were sent for ".

I used to count the sheaves when old enough to know what price was given for fagging. The price here averaged about 12/- per acre, sometimes a little more, often less, to cut, tie, and shock.

Averaging the number of sheaves at 1,000 per acre, I was not educated enough to find out what we got for cutting, tying and standing up one sheaf. I expect it worked out at something like half a farthing per sheaf. So after overhead charges, tolls, wear and tear of clothes, etc., we didn't get rich in 6 weeks of harvest. Wet weather in harvest was very trying; although more rain, more rest, seemed good, it meant working more hours when fine. When all of us had to go home wet through, bedraggled with wet and mud, it made it even harder for Mother. Yet in spite of all, there was joy in it And the sleep of the labouring man is sweet.

What caused the feeling? When coming home weary and tired, if one saw people better off playing tennis or other things quite legitimate and right, one felt as if such were not having a part in things that mattered.

HARVEST HOME.

Great time. A real gathering of the Clan—farmers, labourers, all.

LEAZING TIME.

Gleaning is probably the right word. " Leazing " was our local word.

This was a great time, although fingers were again stubbed as at harvest work, this was taken little notice of. Thistles were the enemy of both harvest and leazing so many got in the ends of fingers that after the skin would peel off thickly punctured with thistles.

But the joy of picking up the ears of wheat which was our very own by Divine right, was akin, I think, to what the Children of Israel felt when picking up Manna. Leazing Laws, very strict, had to be carried out to the letter.

Old Mary, who in addition to seeing the people come into the world also saw them go out, was also Leader of the Leazers. Woe betide any who entered a field without her orders, or if it was not possible for her to be there, her substitute's. Likewise gather up handfuls and start home when time called, " the last through gate, shut it ". (This Order should be in force today for all, with some penalty if not complied with.)

When leazing was finished, the corn was thrashed out, often free, or at very little cost, by any of the farmers who may be thrashing out some of their own. As soon as this was thrashed out some of it was taken to the old water mill in the Village, where it was ground and dressed. Strict order to miller, " Do not take too much out ". This must not be taken to mean that the miller was dishonest. it meant bran taken out only.

Many of the cottages had a brick oven; most of these ovens were built by workers themselves. On baking day, two or more families would join together, and all bake in one oven. The oven was heated with thorn faggots. Girls and boys helped in this, and when about 10 years of age, they knew a good lot of how to make dough and bake. Any of us knew when oven was at the right heat by the ' old man at the back '. ' The fatty cake ' was the joy of the children. The neighbours, whether baking bread or not, each brought what fat they could; this was put into one big cake. When it was ready to take out, all joined in the feed.

The bread was a dark colour, but sweet and good. When it was several days old it was good, and more, it satisfied; the hunger pinch and ' lear ' feeling didn't come so quick.

Bakers' bread didn't seem to satisfy us after having this, so something must have been different because we were only allowed the same number of slices of either.

I have just asked a woman 70 years of age if she ever did any gleaning :— " Bless you yes, the year before I left home to go into service, we gleaned enough wheat to make two sacks of flour ". Many families did likewise.

It may be only fancy, but it seems to me that people then kept both their teeth and hair much longer. Possibly home-made bread with " not too much taken out of the flour " helped to keep teeth in, and hair on.

" Do not pull rick or load in field " was one of the Laws. A rick of peas in field held great temptation; youngsters gradually worked up the field towards the rick, keeping a watchful eye on parents, and other gleaners, then got near enough to snatch off a few pea pods from the rick. Watching the gleaners, they did not see the farmer to whom the rick belonged until he spoke to them; they were much afraid, knowing what it meant.

The farmer said :—" Now you children, you will make yourselves bad, eating too many of the peas, now you work away out in the field before the leazers see

you, or you know what you will get ". He said no more. He was not called a religious man, but the youngsters agreed that he would get to Heaven alright

They didn't touch his ricks again.

It is easy to imagine that any one reading what I have written about the old days, especially if they are young and full of life, saying :—" Well, it's interesting to read of the old days, but what about this day, our day in which we live, things are different now ". They are, and all of us should thank God they are.

I have said before that this is a glorious day, full of opportunities, with possibly a greater need for real Leaders than for generations.

And in spite of whatever man can do through covetousness and selfishness and love of what he mistakenly calls power, through these things he may blight the face of the earth with devastation and death and all the horrors of war until he himself is thrown into the hell he has made.

He cannot take the life from the earth itself, and in a short time it will bring forth of itself and cover up the ugly things made by man, things often wrought by lack of thought, possibly more than want of heart.

But the Christ which came to save the world will save it. And out of the chaos and tribulation men will rise to higher and nobler things. The Knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth. ' Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done in earth as it is in heaven ' is not an idle tale.

To be a co-worker with God Himself in building His Kingdom on earth, is the splendid opportunity given to this and every age.

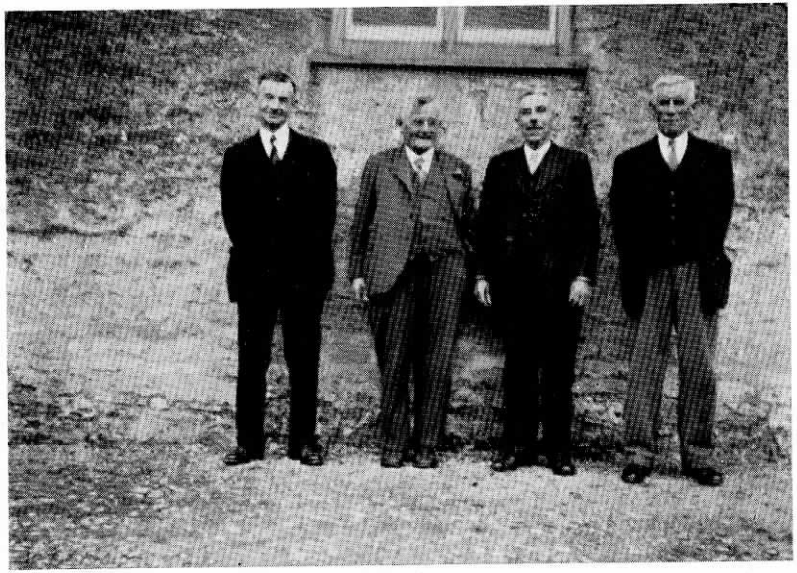
It looks as if this is a testing time for Organised Religion, or the Churches. But the Church that is a true Church cannot fail. If not true, it must fail. " He that delivered ME unto thee hath the greater sin ".

" Who, if a son asks bread, will give him a stone?"

" If my God is no greater than I or We, then am I only seeking to save my life, and the Church alone cannot stop me from losing my life ".

But if the Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ the Lord, then the gates of Hell cannot prevail against it. I think the name by which the Church is called matters little.

VILLAGER

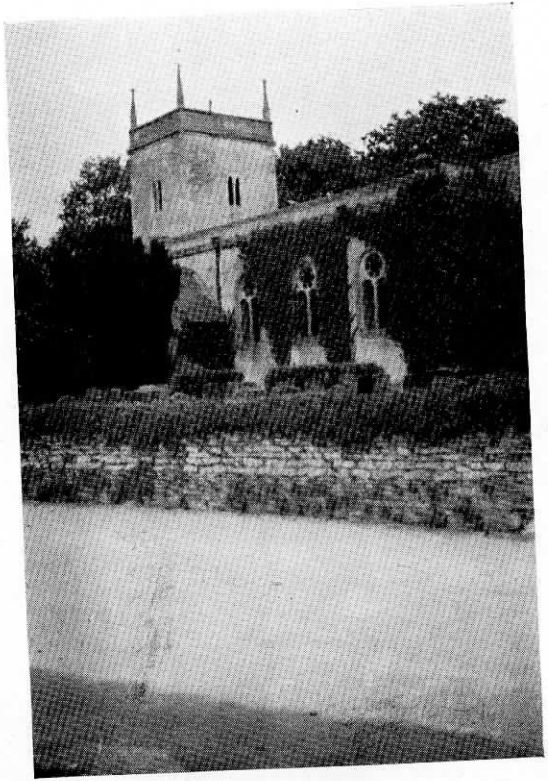


Eli East, Chapel Steward.

Joseph Colegrove, Oxford.

Haman Porter, Organist.

George Porter, Designer of Chapel Extension.



St. Mary's Church.

The Trustees of Weston Methodist Chapel thank the Rev. Ewart R. Bishop for the great help he has given in obtaining ground and making the Chapel Extension possible. We are fortunate in having a Minister who not only understands Rural Life, but also knows the value of Village Methodism.

To Mr. Joseph Colegrove of Oxford, and his family, who have made this little Booklet on ' Village Life and Methodism ' possible. Mr. Colegrove's unbounded faith and his great personality cheered us on even in the darkest hour,

To Mr. George Porter, the Senior Member of the Chapel, who got out the splendid design for the Extension of the Building, and who is now seeing fulfilled the thing for which he has worked and hoped for during his long life,

To all friends who were Members or in the Sunday School, now scattered over the world. And to all Members now with us for their splendid interest and help,

To the Children of the Sunday School who have so nobly helped in buying the ground by collecting Bun Pennies,

We give warmest thanks and friendly greeting.