

A Wesleyan Minister's Dream.

Some Interesting Associations.

Like so many of our hill-side villages Oakridge Lynch has its origin in a few houses built round the upper part of acombe—a depression in the face of the hill down which runs a stream, the natural water supply of the inhabitants.

About the year 1798 a Wesleyan Methodist Meeting House was built on the eastern upper part of the combe, and was the first place of worship in the village. The land on which this chapel stood seems to have been the property of the Rev. William Jenkins, who in June of the preceding year conveyed that land to William Webb and eight other persons whose names are not recorded in the document from which this information comes. It is with this chapel, with its successor, and with the associations common to both that the following is concerned. The record is by no means a complete one, but it is of deep local interest, and it has been made possible to publish it by the courtesy of two Oakridge ladies who readily gave access to notes and documents which they have carefully preserved.

COPY OF WHAT WAS WRITTEN BY MISS ELIZABETH WHITING.

"My dear mother was born at Bournes Green, a small village in the parish of Bisley, in the year of our Lord 1779, and died January 10th, 1831, aged 51 years. She was the eldest daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Parsons. They were poor but moral people. This part of the world was then in a state of spiritual darkness, and there were no means of grace in the place (Oakridge) where her father had removed to. A Sunday school was not so much as thought of. Her parents lived according to the course of this world, without God or any hope beyond the grave.

"In the year of our Lord 1794 the Rev. William Jenkins was stationed at Gloucester, for Stroud was not then the head of a (Wesleyan Methodist) circuit, but was made so in 1797, three years later.

"Mr. Jenkins came to Stroud in his round, as the circuit was then a large one; and one Sunday night he dreamed that he ought to go to a place called Bisley. He had not heard of such a place, and took no further notice of it then, but shortly afterwards he dreamed again he was to go there. He then inquired if there was such a place, and was told there was, about four miles from Stroud, but he was told it was such a wicked place that if he did go there he would be killed. But he was resolved to go, so some of the members belonging to Stroud went with him, and they went to Church in the morning, and as the people came out one of them stood upon a tombstone and told the people there was going to be preaching in the Market House, and my grandfather was at the Church, and heard Mr. Jenkins preach.

"When he had done some man said 'That is just such preaching as we want at Oakridge.' Mr. Jenkins inquired where that was, and came over in the afternoon and preached on the Common. My mother went, and that was the first sermon that anyone could remember preached there, and the first that ever my mother heard, though she was so ignorant that she did not know what he took for his text. She, with her father and mother, attended whenever anyone came.

"Some time after that William Davis opened his house for them to preach in, and a class was formed, and grandfather and grandmother and my mother joined, but grandfather did not fully give his heart to God till he had a long and severe affliction. He was confined to his bed for two years from a hurt he had received while working in Sapperton (Water) Tunnel. Some part of it fell in on him, and hurt his thigh, and from that his sufferings were very great, but he bore it with great patience. He often said the Lord had permitted it to come on him to bring him to himself. After he had been in his bed of suffering for more than two years his thigh broke off, and then he died, leaving room to hope that he was gone to Heaven.

"My dear grandmother died some time before her husband. She died of the smallpox. My dear mother joined the Society and received her ticket in September, 1797. She very soon received the pardon of her sins.

"Mr. Pickersgill, a local preacher in Stroud Circuit, was the first and greatest in the building of Oakridge Chapel; by many he was called the founder of it. The preachers used to preach in the week at night, and again in the morning at 5 o'clock. She used to rise and walk about the Common, waiting for the time to come, having no clock.

"She was very kind to her brothers and sisters. Some time after her father's death, in the year 1805, February 5th, she was married to my dear father, Monday, January 10th, she died in the morning about 8 o'clock.

"My dear father, John Whiting, was born at Frampton—the youngest son of Thomas and Hannah Whiting."

Here, then, we see that from a minister's strange dreams there came to Oakridge the teachings of the brothers Wesley. We see also the building of the meeting house. The Mr. Pickersgill to whom Miss Elizabeth Whiting refers as being called by many the founder of Oakridge Chapel must have stood at the head of affairs when the Chapel was built, for he is concerned in a legal indenture dated the 19th day of March, 1798, "made between William Pickersgill of the one part, and Rowles Scudamore and seven others of the other part." This seems to indicate the approximate date when the building was completed, to be handed over by Mr. Pickersgill to the trustees.

ELIZABETH, SUSAN, AND JABEZ WHITING.

"Elizabeth, Susan, and Jabez Whiting were sisters and brother, all pillars of the Society at Oakridge. The sisters were independent of work, but not very well off. They entertained the preachers for many years till their death, and tea being very expensive in those days, it is said they put some fresh tea in the pot for the preacher on Sunday and used the same all the week after.

"They started the day school in the Wesleyan Schoolroom and carried it on till Elizabeth died and Susan was too infirm for it, since when Miss M. A. Gardiner taught till it fell through from lack of scholars. They were also helpful in the Sunday School, but Elizabeth died before my memory.

"Jabez Whiting held some offices in the Oakridge Society, and was a class leader as long as he was able, but he was old, and very bent as I knew him. He was liked, but was peculiar in some of his ways. He was very much in earnest about Sunday morning prayer meeting, and for years he went round the village on his pony between 6 and 7 Sunday mornings, singing to wake the people to get up and go there."

The day school established by Misses Whiting was conducted on lines of a dame school. Save for interest of some fifty shillings per annum on some local bequest, the teachers had to rely for their pay and expenses on contributions of the parents, at the rate it is understood, of twopence per week per child.

For many years this school seems to have flourished, children coming from other places besides Oakridge—Bourne Green, Waterlane, Tunley and even from Sapperton.

Miss Elizabeth Whiting seems to have possessed a heavy hand, which she never hesitated to use on a refractory pupil whenever she thought it necessary. She died in 1874, and was buried in the chapel yard. The chapel was then in process of rebuilding, and to make it available for the funeral service the aisle was hastily and temporarily paved.

Miss Mary Elizabeth Gardiner, who succeeded Miss Whiting, continued to teach for many years. Her methods of instruction must have been successful for a friend of the writer of the foregoing notes, when she left at the age of eight to attend Oakridge School (which then stood within the present churchyard) found herself in advance of the rest of her class in reading, writing and arithmetic, though backward in such subjects as geography.

Unrecognised by Government, the Methodist Day School received its downfall by the introduction of parliamentary measures for what is improperly called "free" education.

AN APPEAL FOR FUNDS.

"To the benevolent the case of Oakridge Wesleyan Chapel is presented.

"In a small chapel that will only seat about 140 persons there is a Sabbath School containing 230 children, and a population within a short distance of 400 adult persons without any other place of worship. It is with considerable difficulty that the school is conducted in so small a place, and when there is public worship the children are obliged to leave the chapel.

"It is proposed to add 20 feet to the building, and reserve a place for the children at public worship. The cost is estimated at £150. There is a debt of £200 on the chapel already. It is desirable to liquidate the whole, as the greatest part of the population are weavers. Subscriptions and donations will be thankfully received and faithfully applied by Messrs. J. Whiting and Co. of Oakridge.

"September, 1835. Paul Orchard, Wesleyan Minister, Stroud."

JOSEPH PAUL GARDINER, DOCTOR OF DIVINITY.

"The Reverend Doctor Joseph Gardiner was born at Oakridge about the year 1824-1826. His father, Paul Gardiner, kept the Butchers' Arms Inn, and attended the Wesleyan Chapel, and was in the choir. Joseph Gardiner became a member of the Wesleyan Society and a local preacher, and offered his services for the ministry, but was rejected. Afterwards he became acquainted with a lady who had him educated, and he became a clergyman of the Church of England. He went as a missionary to Rupert's Land, Canada, where he laboured successfully. When he returned to England finally was given his degree for his work translating, and was appointed to Bishop Ryder's Church, Birmingham. The Sunday before his return after a visit to England from Rupert's Land he preached at Oakridge Church in the afternoon, and in the evening in the Taut grounds, the church and chapel being closed.

"After leaving Oakridge, Joseph Gardiner was Scripture Reader at Brimscom for some time."

The Taut-grounds lie between Oakridge Lynch and Far Oakridge, overlooking the valley. In past years the Taut was a hamlet of small cottages, but they have long since disappeared.

RICHARD PASH.

"Richard Pash lived at Waterlane. He was club-footed, and was intended for a schoolmaster, but afterwards became a shoemaker. He was at one time Superintendent of our Sunday School."

JACKY COX.

"August 12th, 1928. Today an old man called, asking for picture postcards. He said he was born in Oakridge where uncle S. now lives, and was a grandson of Jacky Cox, who was a double-jointed man. He was buried in our graveyard, but the body was got up and carried off, but was soon found again, and buried under the old chapel. When the new chapel was built (1874) the remains were found, and re-buried under the new chapel."

"This man left Oakridge when he was 6 and went to Halifax, Yorkshire. Frederick Gardiner (Crew) was also a grandson of Jacky Cox."

"A boy named Hunt who assisted at the 'resurrection' of Jacky afterwards went to Australia, and at his death left £50 to Oakridge Chapel, which, with accrued interest, was spent on a new heating apparatus and the lamps in the aisle, 1924-1925."

A story based on the "resurrection" of Jacky Cox appeared in the *Wills and Gloucestershire Standard* quite recently.

WILLIAM HUNT.

"William Hunt attended church until his conversion when he was a young man, after his marriage. Then he became a member of the Oakridge Society, and continued until his death. The death of a brother was the cause of his conversion. At one time he wanted to be a local preacher, but evidently was not fitted for this work, and for a while lost his reason, it is said because of this. He got right again, and sometimes gave an address in the Sunday School, or in the Chapel, when the appointed preacher failed. He was Society steward for many years, and was always there except on the rare occasions when he was away from home. He was also class leader and Sunday School teacher. He refused to go to work on the railway on Sunday, and after a few times he was never asked to go. He died in Stroud Hospital after several months painful illness, January, 1901."

MRS. RACHAEL GARDINER.

"Mrs. Rachel Gardiner was a class leader, and was much respected. She was a very quiet woman. Her early life, till after she was married, was spent in this district. Then she went to Hull with her husband and family for a few years. Her husband died, then she came back to this part. She was not converted till after she was 20 years old. She was also a teacher in the Sunday School as long as she could. Her life ended rather suddenly. She was ill a few hours, and on Sunday afternoon, while service was being held, she passed away. Her son, George, is connected with a Wesleyan church in Adelaide, South Australia."

JOHN THOMAS PEACEY.

Rather less than two and a half years ago there was laid to rest in the quiet upland graveyard of Oakridge Methodist Chapel the mortal remains of John Thomas Peacey—a man of ninety-two years, who as a child had been carried in the arms of his parents to that same chapel where they worshipped, and where he worshipped without break over the whole period of his life.

At the early age of eighteen years he was secretary of the Oakridge Wesleyan Society (afterwards the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and now the Oakridge Methodist Church), and in that Church and in the Sunday School he held every office in turn, save that of Sunday School superintendent, a post which he steadfastly declined.

Beneath a quiet and reserved demeanour, and a somewhat stern appearance, there lurked the kindly heart of one who would bid the Recording Angel "Write me as one who loves his fellow men"; for John Peacey was a man who did much good by stealth, and if he blushed not to find it fame, he scorned comment of any sort on his many deeds of kindness, finding ample reward in their commission.

This hardy Cotswold man, when long past the allotted span of life, actually learnt to ride a motor cycle—not for purposes of recreation, but as the readiest means for journeying between Oakridge and Stroud on business. It was in his ninetieth year of age that he met with the accident which put an end to his motor cycling, but from which, however, he recovered—a tribute to the amazing recuperative powers of the iron-willed man who had mastered the motor cycle at such an advanced age.

In the early days of his life John Peacey worked at the silk mill that had been built and opened at Oakridge about ten years after he was born. He worked at every process carried on in the mill, and held every position save that of manager. Then he successfully embarked in business on his own account, as a baker and grocer.

Had a stranger asked John Peacey if he were an English gentleman, he would probably have stared with those clear, straight-looking eyes of his; smiled, claimed the land of his birth, and said "I be a working man, and proud on't." Yet, in all that matters, John was essentially an English gentleman—the highest title of all, and one which peasant equally with nobleman may attain.

And this, too, I know:

Where the Light Eternal shines, there surely stands the rugged son of our dear Cotswolds, John Peacey.

F. G. K.