

# *By Faith*



*The Life and Ministry of John Kemp*

*By Faith*



I am yours  
affectionately  
J. Kemp

# By Faith

*The Autobiography and Selected Works of*

JOHN KEMP

*The First Pastor of  
"Ebenezer" Strict Baptist Chapel,  
Bounds Cross Biddenden, Kent*

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." Hebrews 11:8

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# *Publisher's Preface*

It may be asked why we are dusting down another old book to reprint and present to the public. What is the relevance of the life of a man who died nearly 100 years ago? The answer is, we believe that John Kemp has something to say to the church, to the ministers of the gospel, and to individuals today. What is that message? Quite simply it is this: the vital need of faith in the life of the Lord's people.

We live in a day of small things. Many churches have closed over the last two decades. Congregations are getting smaller. Ministers can feel discouraged preaching to small congregations each week. Congregations can be dispirited. Divisions and troubles within the church cause much searching of heart. Some who faithfully struggle to keep causes of Truth open may fear what the future holds for them. We pray that the Lord would grant revival and yet there is almost a palpable measure of unbelief in prayers for the Lord to revive his work. At times the Lord's people sensibly feel this unbelief in their own heart, and it is a pain to them. But what is the relevance of John Kemp to our situation?

In 1880, the Lord moved a farmer, Mr James Hickmott, in faith to build a chapel in one of his fields, on a cross roads ("Bounds Cross") a few miles outside the village of Biddenden. By faith he wrote to Mr Kemp asking him to become pastor of this chapel. It had no stated congregation (although there were a few friends of the Truth in the locality), it was well over a mile from the village, in a neighbourhood with few houses. The people were poor and the

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few that might be expected to gather would have no means to support a pastor. At the same time Mr Kemp received a call to become pastor at Jireh Chapel, Tenterden. The church at Tenterden was well established, and numerically thriving. Mr Kemp's ministry had been blessed amongst them and Mr Kemp was naturally drawn to the people there. But the Lord was at work.

By faith Mr Kemp had to walk out a path which defied sense and reason: he accepted the call to become minister of a newly built chapel with as yet no stated congregation and with no church. By faith Mr Kemp had to walk the same path as the patriarch Abraham did: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). Mr Kemp knew not what the issue would be, but he walked by faith. The Lord rewarded that exercise of faith and he received that inheritance appointed for him.

Within a matter of weeks Mr Kemp was ministering to a thriving congregation which, although some after a time walked no more with him, maintained its numbers throughout his pastorate. He had to prove that the Lord had many people in Biddenden and the surrounding villages which the Lord was pleased to gather under his ministry. Not only that, but Mr Kemp was also remarkably supplied with a house and the means to furnish it too, not a small thing for a farm labourer in the 1800's.

However, Mr Kemp was not without his troubles. Even amidst the blessings of the spiritual inheritance he received in his pastorate, he had to prove that the wheat and tares are growing up together until harvest, and that the Lord's people still have old natures which at times sadly predominate. It was only as the Lord graciously enabled Mr Kemp to trust in His word of promise, that Mr Kemp found grace to persevere.

## PREFACE

There is much therefore in this book to encourage the Lord's tried people, and perhaps especially those who minister among the churches.

In our day, a day of small things, Mr Kemp's autobiography especially serves to remind us that when the Lord works, nothing is impossible. But, at times that work seems impossible to the Lord's people. It seems the most unlikely work and the most unreasonable time, place and manner, to expect the Lord to work. But that is as we judge, and we are not asked, nor required to judge the Lord's dealings with his people. Rather, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight; to believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Mr Kemp had such a faith. Living faith is a precious gift that comes alone from the working of the Holy Spirit within the soul. We are encouraged to covet earnestly the best gifts, and chief among them should be the grace of living faith within our soul, that we might credit contradictions, trust the Lord when we cannot see Him, and believe that all must work for His honour and glory and therefore for the good of our souls.

For this reason we warmly commend this book to another generation of readers. May it be an encouragement to churches, who fear they do not have the means to support a pastor, to venture in faith, believing that the Lord will provide. To ministers might it serve as a reminder that numbers are not everything. It may be that, as with Mr Kemp at Biddenden, in the place appearing a most unprofitable place of labour and least likely to yield fruit, the Lord has many souls not yet made manifest. On the other hand, the Lord's servants should not judge their ministry entirely on outward fruit. Isaiah was called to a solemn ministry, to declare the Lord's will but for this end: to make their heart fat, their ears heavy and their eyes shut, that they should be solemnly

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confirmed in their unbelief. That is a most difficult and heavy ministry, but it is no less the Lord's work. Isaiah needed much faith to exercise such a ministry. We fear such a ministry is, in part, what the Lord's servants are solemnly called to today. May the Lord bless us with living faith that we might rest on Him and Him alone, and thus seek to worship and serve Him faithfully in our day and generation.

The God of John Kemp still lives, reigns, and works His will; as His favour rested on Bound's Cross Chapel, Biddenden, under Mr Kemp's ministry, may it yet rest on His servants and His churches today. This is the earnest prayer of the publisher.

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Mr Kemp's autobiography was originally published in 1933 and was supplemented by a few letters, sermons and poems. Here we republish the autobiography, but the letters and sermons appearing in this volume are not those which appeared in the original edition. Instead we have collected together a number of sermons and letters which have either never been published before, but are published here from manuscript sources for the first time, or that we have collected out of old magazines or pamphlets which are now difficult to obtain. To this we have added a number of new illustrations, and a complete list of Mr Kemp's known works and writings for those that want to read more of Mr Kemp's ministry. New footnotes in this edition are signed "Ed."

# Foreword

The history of the church of Christ has furnished many notable instances of the wisdom of God in raising up His faithful witnesses at, different periods. In each case we see how timely was their appearance, and how well equipped they were for the work to which they were called. In some cases the materials out of which God fashioned His instruments appear to the carnal eye most unsuitable, but it is a striking evidence of the fact that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty," etc. (1 Corinthians 1:27). At the same time we see how such instruments were furnished with grace and gifts suitable for that special work they were ordained to accomplish, and how even their natural disposition and temperament, sanctified and sweetened by the grace of God, was made useful to the cause and interest of Divine truth, and the welfare of Zion. This was very manifest in the case of my beloved father, as the thoughtful reader will observe in perusing the following account of his life. As we note his humble parentage and birth, his youthful days with all its surrounding evils, the clear call by grace without any human instrumentality, the call to the ministry in spite of all his natural shyness and reluctance, and the wonderful way he was led along both in grace and providence, we can but say, "What hath God wrought?"

As a Minister of the Gospel he was a "Brother Beloved" to many God-sent servants of Jesus Christ. His ministry was marked with simplicity and sincerity, and bore the stamp of an inward

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experience of the things he spake, and it was attended with a freshness and power that testified he was under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

As a Pastor he was faithful and affectionate, and shewed much patience and tact in dealing with the difficulties that attended his long pastorate at Biddenden. His people found him a wise counsellor both in spiritual and temporal matters. They lay very near his heart, and he wrestled with God on their behalf, and travailed for their souls. It was not in vain, for in his last days he had the pleasure of seeing "Immanuel's offspring come" to testify of the work of grace in their souls, and of the profit they had received under his ministry. Also his love to the cause over which the Lord had placed him was seen in the constant labour of his own hands to provide for the comfort of the worshippers, and lessen the burden of expense in the maintenance of the material house of God. Yet all was done in a quiet and unobtrusive way, but with thoroughness. He was blessed with an inquiring mind, and it is truly remarkable how successful he was in putting into practice the knowledge he gained in such a variety of ways.

As a Husband he was affectionate and tender. The wisdom and kindness of God is seen in the gift to him of my own dear mother to share with him the sorrows and joys of his early ministry and pastorate. When she was taken home the Lord again provided for him another helpmeet who not only equally shared his sorrows and joys, but was able to assist him in the added responsibilities of his later years, when he became a guide and counsellor to other pastorless causes of truth. She was able to help him in a way that my own mother could not have done, with all her love and willingness, and further to faithfully nurse him to the end.

As a Father he was equally affectionate and tender, but very firm and faithful. His life and letters show how near to his heart was the

## FOREWORD

welfare of the writer. I have been very reluctant to write this Foreword to his life, feeling: unworthy of the honour, but a deep sense of the goodness of God in giving me such a father, has constrained me to undertake it, not only as a labour of love, but also as a debt of gratitude to the Father of nil mercies. Without flattery and in real sincerity I would say as a father he was one among a thousand, and his home life was ever consistent with his profession as a minister of the gospel. It was my privilege to often visit him in his last illness, and to hear from his lips his dying testimony. He has entered into his rest, and has received the highest honour than can be bestowed upon a minister of Jesus Christ: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." His memory is fragrant in the church of God, as well as in the home, and we desire to be followers of good men such as he was.

May the following pages be blessed to the many that knew and loved him, as well as to many other readers that did not know him personally. There is much matter not included in this book, such as Sermons, Addresses, and Letters, as we felt it would make the cost too high for many friends. Should, however, the present volume meet with a good reception, it is hoped a second book will be published in due course.

John Kemp (Junior)  
Luton, 1933

BY FAITH



**Mr Kemp in 1911**

*The Autobiography  
of John Kemp*

**Completed with an account of his life between  
1909 and 1932 written by his second wife**

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## Preface

I had at times felt some promptings to write down some of the Lord's dealings with me, but thinking myself too insignificant in life and experience to produce anything that might greatly interest or profit the reader, I often put it from me, till the year 1897, when, through the earnest request of friends, I made the attempt, feeling sure it would be appreciated by, at least, some of my friends, and would be for the glory of God; for, however lacking in depth my experience might be compared with some of the Lord's servants, I felt it was real and of the Lord, and therefore should be recorded to show forth the saving grace of God; so that saints might rejoice and take courage, and sinners see and fear.

Many things are too far gone for my memory to bring them back, nor have I the inclination to write various details respecting myself – only what are needed to set forth the main things of which I treat.

My life before called by grace being comparatively moral, and my temporal circumstances both before and since the Lord called me being comparatively even, I have not those ups and downs to record that some men have, and I cannot run in another man's line of things, nor have I any wish to exaggerate, but rather the reverse. What I have written are a few honest and truthful facts as they have come to my mind, and I trust the Lord has helped me to write them down – for it has refreshed my spirit, and the old things have been new to me.

What I have written dates to the end of 1905.<sup>1</sup>

It is written for the use of those dear to me, and not for critics, who may easily find therein food for their carnal mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Kemp continued his autobiography after writing this preface, until 1909.

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The Lord bless all who desire to love and fear Him, is the prayer of  
His unworthy servant,

John Kemp  
Biddenden,  
January 18th, 1906

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**Four generations: Mr Kemp (left) with his mother Eliza,  
son John (right) and granddaughter Dorothy in 1903**

## The First Nineteen Years of my Life

I WAS born at Flattenden in the parish of Wadhurst, Sussex, on June 22nd, 1850, my parents' names being Thomas and Eliza Kemp. I was the seventh of a family of nine. Like all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, I was "born in sin, and shapen in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5), and though I lived a comparatively moral life, there was no spiritual concern in my heart nor filial fear of God before my eyes, till nineteen years of age.

"In vanity I spent my youth,  
The thought now fills my heart with shame."

(949 Gadsby's)

When I was about eight or nine years of age, my father died, and soon afterwards the youngest of our family followed, and mother with her young family moved about a mile distant to keep house for Frederick Till at the "Miner's Arms" Inn, Wadhurst. Mr Till was then a widower with a family of nine children, and my mother and he afterwards married. Here was a large double family, brought face to face with drunkenness, obscene language, gambling, song singing, and various kinds of debauchery, as is common at such dens of wickedness. My heart trembles when I think of those evil days, and the sad fruits borne by living in such an impure atmosphere; for not only did Mr Till become a hardened drunkard, but several of his sons, and a brother of mine, followed in his steps.

O parents! if you have any regard for your own moral character, and the welfare of your offspring, never, never take up your abode at an inn; for sure I am that none can retain a good conscience with such an occupation. If they escape defilement themselves (which is next to impossible,) they are encouraging corrupt practices and promoting destitution in many houses. Are not the piteous cries, the distress and sorrows of poor broken-hearted wives and

children, lodged against them? What I have seen at the Inn and elsewhere in consequence, is heart-rending; but the proprietor must harden himself against what would melt the adamant heart, or lose his custom and leave his business. Though defiled by my impure surroundings, I was preserved from grosser sins by the Lord's care and keeping at a time when I "desired not the knowledge of His ways." We soon left the Inn to reside in a house close by, but those drunkards before mentioned, still visited the place, and "wallowed like a sow in the mire." How true it is that "childhood and youth are vanity" (Ecclesiastes 11:10), for at this time, there being a large tribe of us together, we were often into many foolish, hurtful, and dangerous things, especially on the Lord's Day (which I then regarded not,) and on more than one occasion I was mercifully preserved from being drowned whilst bathing in a pond on that day. Living close to the railway, we were often trespassing upon it, and would at times lie nearly close to the rails, for the train to run as near as possible without touching us, and sometimes when a heavy-laden goods train passed we would clamber on to a truck, and ride for about a mile, and then jump off when the train had increased its speed. Many other experiments of a very dangerous nature we tried with the trains, wherein I *now* see and acknowledge God's preserving mercy over me. Sometimes we would walk to Wadhurst Station at night (two-and-a-half miles) and bribe the driver of the last down train, and thus get a ride on his engine to Ticehurst Road Station, escaping unobserved by the station officials, and then walk back (two-and-a-half miles) highly pleased with our doings, but forgetting that by thus defrauding the Railway Company and breaking the Sabbath, we sinned against God and man too.

In those days I seldom went to chapel or church, the Lord's Day being spent in pleasure, being greatly influenced by older members

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of the family, for it is true that "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15. 33), but when corrupted, it becomes our own sin. The sight of my godly grandfather on his way to Shovers Green Chapel would often make me ashamed of Sabbath-breaking, for it was as a light upon my dark path to discover my doings, and I would hide myself till he had passed by. The Bible would be read on Sunday evenings by those who spent other evenings at the Inn, or with the newspaper, and when at home I would take part in Bible reading, and this soothed my conscience, and seemed to put many wrong things right, but once a week was sufficient for such employment. My education was very poor. I could only read and write a little on leaving school.



**Shovers Green Chapel**

On one occasion when we lived at Flattenden, our neighbours killed a pig, and their son was to return home from the village with some salt for pickling it, so I played the truant in order to go back

with him and see the pig killed. On the same morning my father gave me a horse's collar to take to the harness maker for repair which I was to bring back on my return from school. But, alas! I forgot it when I returned with my companion. I dared not show myself, and so went into a wood close by, and spent a miserable day. My companion sometimes visited me, but my conscience was guilty, and I feared the consequences of playing the truant and not bringing the collar home. My father was kind but firm. He was not severe with the stick, but I must obey; so, on his arrival home, he commanded me to go and fetch the collar. It was about two-and-a-half miles to go, lonely roads and a dark evening, and I was very timid, so that it was a great punishment to me, notwithstanding one of the family was sent to meet me on my way back. That cured me of playing truant, and also of forgetting articles which I had to take home from the village after school. I longed to leave school, having a great dislike to it, chiefly on account of the severe schoolmaster, for though I seldom had the cane myself, I frequently saw others have it, and I greatly feared him, and could not serve him from love. I left school when very young, and began to work for four pence per day, and then sixpence - gradually rising as I grew up to manhood, being employed as agricultural labourer, chiefly at Scragg Oak Farm, Wadhurst. When very young I worked with a team of oxen, and often with horses, and sometimes we made up a team of oxen and horses combined. The men I worked with were very ungodly in their conduct and conversation, and often very unkind in their treatment, so that there was everything calculated to harden and defile me when in their company, but neither precept, example nor admonition given for my profit, so that it is a marvel that I was kept moral during those days, and feared both a lie and an oath - both of which were continuously poured into my ears. I had these things to hear when at work, and drunkenness to witness when at home, but the Lord kept me

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comparatively moral – though I had no fear of God before my eyes, nor any desire after Him.

When about seventeen years old (if I remember rightly) I went to live in the house at Buttons Farm, close by, with Mr Jacob Wells, a notorious drunkard, where I looked after stock, milked fourteen cows, and took it to the railway station daily, with a young, high-bred, spirited horse. Here again temptations of various kinds were strewn in my path. I was enticed by my drunken master both night and day (for he would be drunk day and night sometimes for a fortnight or more together, and would at times break the windows, furniture, crockery ware, and nearly everything within reach, casting butter, milk, etc., upon the floor,) and there were other strong temptations in the house, congenial to nature, the escape from which I attribute to the Lord's unseen and unsought-for hand alone, which held me back. Often when there has been every enticement to sin, and a full intention of doing it, I have been held back during my youth. I was at that time – Jehu-like – a very furious driver, both up-hill and down (in a hilly part) with the high-bred horse before mentioned, and many very narrow escapes I had in consequence. On one occasion (which was rare) on the Sabbath Day, when returning from the station, strong drink quite took away my senses, so that I remembered nothing until I awoke, to find myself safely conveyed into the farm-yard. Surely the Lord guided the horse, when I was "more brutish" than that dumb creature. O the many times He kept me and preserved my life and my limbs when I endangered myself by furious driving!

"Determined to save, He watched o'er my path,  
When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death."

(232 Gadsby's)

Whilst at this situation I was so fully employed on the Sabbath and cared so little for the Lord's honour, that I scarcely knew the

Sabbath from week-days. I left there at the end of twelve months because Mr Wells failed in business, as such men may reasonably expect to do. About this time I went (with two others) to Willingdon in Sussex, harvesting, walking as far as Hailsham, and then taking train to Eastbourne on the Sabbath Day. Whilst there the Sabbaths were spent in pleasure by the seaside, and on Beachy Head, etc. How I have looked these things over since, when in those parts on a different errand, with *shame* for my conduct, and *wonder* at that grace which made the change. How gladly since those days, had I been in those parts, I would have sought after a chapel instead of spending the Sabbath in that way. One of my companions, being very inclined to spend his money on strong drink, and the other having a wife and family at home, and wanting money to send to them before we could draw on our work (as it was too wet to commence the harvest on our arrival,) I was banker, and only got straight with them by *giving* them what had been borrowed from me; so the harvesting was not at all remunerative, and I saw the folly of going with such unreliable companions, and would caution others against doing so. But I ought also to add that during a part of the time we were there, one of them had a bad back and could not work. On finishing our work, we took train again to Hailsham on our way home, on Saturday night walked to Cowbeach, or thereabouts, and slept in a cow-crib for a few hours, then walking back to Wadhurst on Sunday. Thus the reader will see how I disregarded the Lord's Day and was living destitute of godly fear, and went on doing so until nineteen years of age. The Word of God, good books, and good people, had no charm for me, nor was there but little reflection on my state, or thought about eternity. As for religion I looked no farther than a comparatively moral life for that, not concerning myself greatly about other people's religion, only the sight of my grandfather would condemn me, especially when on his way to

chapel. I was now living at home again, and working on Scragg Oak Farm, attending to the stock.

## **My Call by Grace**

In the month of October, 1869, when just over nineteen years of age, the Lord did, I trust, without human instrumentality, quicken my dead soul into spiritual life and concern.

The exact hour or day of the month, or the first thought about my condition as a sinner, I do not remember, but it was near the end of the month whilst working in the field called "The Dunsteads," that I first saw and felt myself a guilty sinner before a pure and holy God, whose law I had broken, whose mercy I had abused, and whom I had dishonoured all my days. No particular words of Scripture do I remember being spoken at the time to cause the first concern, nor any circumstance being connected with it, nor had I read any book, or heard anything from man to cause such concern, but "the eyes of my understanding were enlightened" by the Spirit's blessed, effectual working (Ephesians 1:18), so that I "saw out of obscurity, and out of darkness," my sins being then "set in the light of God's countenance" (Psalm 90:8), so that like Isaiah I felt, "Woe is me, for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5). My sins did then appear exceeding sinful, and lay upon my conscience with terrible weight, whilst God's wrath against me for the same made me tremble. In His awful majesty He then appeared as "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) in a way that I never saw or thought of before. Now did my guilty soul cry for mercy with a personal, heartfelt cry, such as had never gone out of my heart before; for never had I before felt my guilt or my need. I then turned aside into a small wood at the top corner of the field, and for the first time

bowed the knee, with a heart-cry, but nothing but condemnation could I see or feel.

This deep exercise went on for days and nights together (when awake), and for weeks my burden increased upon me, with intervals of comparative rest therefrom. About this time, as I was working in a field called "The Dean," the tolling bell at Wadhurst church bespoke the death of an aged man, named Richard Gadd, with whom I had often worked, and knowing that if he had died as he lived (which I feared was the case) there was no hope respecting him; it troubled me greatly. But my own case troubled me much more, and never had I heard the bell toll like that before, nor realised the awful departure of a lost soul. Oh how I envied the birds and beasts their happiness, seeing they had no soul to be lost as I had! One evening, on leaving my work in the before-mentioned field, I crept into a ditch at the bottom close to the railway hedge and tried to beg for mercy, but a sight of God's righteous vengeance bursting over my guilty head drove me from my knees, and I durst not pray. Then was I tempted to go to the Inn and drown my troubled mind with strong drink. I went and drank a pint of ale, but this only increased my guilt. "The troubles of my heart were enlarged" thereby, rather than diminished. I was also tempted to cast myself down a deep shaft in Snape Wood close at hand, Satan telling me it were better to die than to live in such misery, and without the least prospect of a better state of things. I went and looked down the shaft, and my soul hung, as it were, between Satan's temptation and despair, and my better judgment which told me of the sad and awful consequence of such a rash act; also there was a tiny hope, a "who can tell," at the bottom of my heart. Thus the Lord kept me back from the pit at that time. All this while I knew not God's dear Son as the way of salvation, and the only channel through which mercy could flow down to me. The

Lord so ordered it that I was working by myself for several weeks together during my first exercises of this kind. The farm where I worked abounded with docks and my work was to pull them up with a tool made for that purpose, so I had time for reflection, and used to sigh, groan and pray nearly all day long in the open field. The Lord had begun to work without the aid of the creature, and He kept me by myself till I had learnt deeply my fallen condition, and had had many times of close dealing and pleading with Him.

### **My Taste Changed (Jeremiah 48:11)**

I had been very fond of novels and songs, and had collected quite a number of them and kept them in my clothes-box as a part of my treasure, but now they became very distasteful to me, and my guilt for having delighted in them became great upon my conscience. So, one day I cleared out the whole lot of them, casting them upon the fire, telling my mother that the time had now arrived when I had done with them. So they acted with their conjuring books in Paul's day when the truth entered their hearts (Acts 19:19). Those who are thus made sick of such trash will want it so completely destroyed that others cannot read it; for if they could make money by the sale of it, they dare not do so. What! sell poison, when one knows that others will poison themselves with it? No, they dare not. The parent or head of the house, with such feelings as these, desires as much as possible to keep his house clear of such things.

I had become a member of a Benefit Society whilst "dead in sin," more with a view to drinking deep into carnal revelry; but before the Anniversary Day arrived my soul was wounded with the arrow of distress, and Oh what a sorrowful Club Day that was to me! I earnestly besought the Lord's preserving mercy through the day, and felt at night I had been wonderfully "kept by His power,"

for the carnal delights of the club were a burden to me, and after filling my place, as a member, I gladly and thankfully hastened home, leaving others to its vain delights. That night I thanked the Lord for His keeping power, and that my taste was changed. Nothing at the Club seemed to give me delight that day, except a sight of my minister's (Mr James Jones<sup>2</sup>) house, which was situated nearby. Gladly would I have retreated there but for lack of courage to do so. After this, I durst not go to the Club, choosing rather to pay a fine than mix up with such a company of the ungodly. Those about me could not understand my conduct in this, but "So did not



**James Jones**

I, because of the fear of God" (Nehemiah 5:15). My old companions I could no longer join in their pleasures, nor did they long desire my society, because my presence spoilt their company, neither could I feel comfortable with them when on the way to or from chapel (they would sometimes go, and had done so for years past), so I would avoid them if possible, and pray and meditate alone by the way.

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<sup>2</sup> Mr James Jones was the pastor of Mr Kemp at Shovers Green Chapel. His obituary notice can be found in *The Gospel Standard* 1888 p. 412f. See also: *A Brief Memoir of James Jones* (1889) Wadhurst. Ed.

My eldest brother, who kept the inn, had engaged me many times to help serve his customers at a busy time, but now I could no longer endure the company, the conversation, and serving beer to drunkards. Therefore I left off doing so, for I felt miserable and guilty in it. We had also done some butchering and sheep business together, but, on finding Sunday business had been transacted by my brother, I discontinued my connection, my conscience being now tender in the fear of God. I now desired the company of the godly, but was afraid lest they should speak pointedly to me about religion.

### **My First Bible and Hymn Book**

Now, from the time of my first awakening, I began to read the Bible *as the Word of God*, which spoke to me *personally* in the threatenings thereof, which all seemed to point at me, but the promises I read for other people better than me, as I thought. My soul clave to that Word which smote me, and day and night did I look therein with great reverence and many tears and prayers, so that my sleep went from me, and my eyes became very weak with so much reading at night after the family had retired to rest. Gadsby's Hymn Book, also, I began to read with delight, and soon felt a strong desire to possess a Bible and hymn book myself, not having had either heretofore. So I went to Ticehurst one evening (four miles) and ordered them, and on another evening to fetch them, with great delight, and never had I seen such books before. They were highly prized by me, and today they are to me like Goliath's sword was to David when he said, "There is none like that; give it me" (1 Samuel 21:9).

## Going to Chapel

When brought into trouble about my lost condition, I felt in me a principle which now began to desire God's house and public service. Hitherto I seemed to have no time (and certainly had no mind) for chapel going, because my time was so much taken up with cattle on the Sabbath. But now I began to prepare on the Saturday, and did make great provision for Sunday for two reasons: first, my conscience being now tender, I durst not do unnecessary labour on the Sunday; and second, I must be at God's house, if possible, seeing my heart and my people were there. Consequently, the waterings were all put in order, the hay got ready, and the lodges littered on the Saturday, so that I seldom, if ever, missed a service in God's house on Sunday.

But now "the fear of man [which] bringeth a snare" lay hard upon me. How could I endure the eyes and sneers of my former companions when I started off to chapel? So I would make as though I intended another journey, and then wend my way back to chapel. There were at that time three services on the Sabbath at Shovers Green Chapel, and I must have three, but feared the chapel people would begin to notice me. Therefore I would go to the Pell Green Chapel<sup>3</sup> in the morning, taking a piece of food in my pocket, which I would eat in the lanes or fields after the morning service, and often went into Whiligh Park, taking care to avoid the people as much as possible, and then get to Shovers Green for the

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<sup>3</sup> At the time there were three chapels in Wadhurst at which Strict Baptist ministers preached: Shover's Green, Pell Green and Wadhurst Town chapel. Sadly all are now closed. At the time Pell Green was not Strict Baptist, but practised open communion. The pastor at Pell Green was William Winslow. This fact explains why, a little later in Mr Kemp's account, he describes hearing both Mr Joseph Hatton (the editor of *The Gospel Standard*) and Mr Andrew J. Baxter (an Independent and paedobaptist) preach at Pell Green. Ed.

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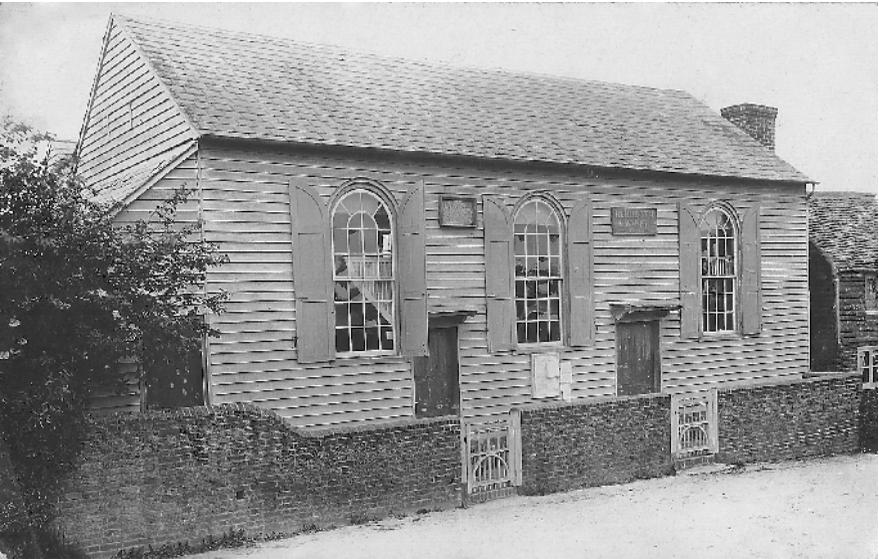
afternoon service, go home and fodder my stock, take tea, and then go back to the latter chapel for the evening. I went on in that way until at length I settled down at Shovers Green.

Often there were prayer-meetings held on the week evenings at the houses of different friends, and to these I nearly always went; at one of which Mr Jones read Isaiah 48, and when he came down to the last verse, "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked," it cut me up, root and branch, for I keenly felt myself a wicked person, and thought I must be lost. The Word of God searched me in those days exceedingly, and many a sermon wounded me and sent me home with a heavy heart, yet with a mixture of comfort and encouragement, seeing I had experienced many things that were set forth as marks of godliness. Ah, there seemed so much against me being a Christian. Often did I feel in those days that God would be just in my condemnation, and that if He sent me to hell I must speak to His honour among my lost fellows. But this helped me: "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Matthew 11:19), for it encouraged me to believe I was one of Wisdom's children notwithstanding so much stood against me. The brethren at the prayer meeting often seemed to speak out of my heart, and the hymns helped me, and also Mr Jones' addresses. I longed for the Sundays to come, because I was encouraged and comforted by hearing my exercises traced out, and felt the House of God to be a solemn, sacred place – though at present having no right view of Christ and His finished work.

One morning, before going to work, I, in my usual way, turned aside into an outbuilding to pray for mercy and that God would save my guilty, lost soul. Whilst upon my knees, Micah 7:18: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy," dropped sweetly

## BY FAITH

into my mind, and at the same time Christ was set before me as He had not been before. Now I saw how my sins could be pardoned, and how mercy could flow down to one as guilty as I through that blessed channel - Christ and His finished work. This raised me to a sweet hope in Him, such as I had never had before, and from that time I sought mercy through Him alone. This put new life into my pleadings, and I believed I should yet rejoice in Christ as my portion. Now the gospel and its promises looked my way more than formerly, only I lacked their application. That slavish fear and dread of God also partly subsided, and the hymns talked with me more than formerly. Hymn 303, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," etc., greatly helped me, and I wondered that one had gone before with just such wants and exercises as mine.



**Pell Green Chapel**

About this time a prayer meeting was held at my grandfather's house, and I crept into a back seat, when to my surprise hymn 737,

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“Gracious Lord, incline thy ear,” etc., was sung, and I greatly wondered that they should sing a hymn so expressive of the very feelings of my heart, and I looked upon those who took part in the meeting as being so very different from me. Often was I encouraged at the prayer meetings and under the preaching too, but for the most part my biggest blessings came in my secret intercourse with the Lord. Often did I bow the knee in some secret corner of the farm buildings, or in the barn’s head amongst the straw when threshing corn. The old barn, now nearly razed to its foundations, is dear to me, and when passing that way I love to look upon it, and also at many places about the farm, such as ditches, woods, etc., where there seemed such a reality in both my sorrows and my comforts, beyond what I have felt of late years.



**(Left to right) John Philips and William Vine, pastor at the Dicker**

## BY FAITH

In connection with the barn, now in ruins, I have thought of that scripture, “Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof” (Psalm 102:14). The company of God’s people (indeed, of nearly all who professed Christianity) I now appreciated, though seldom saying much to them, being afraid of saying too much, and naturally timid and reserved. I liked to hear them talk, if they did not speak to me. But ungodly companions in labour tried me much with their light, vain, and sometimes filthy conversation, and at times I was entangled thereby to the wounding of my conscience, whilst they rejoiced thereat. O the heavy times this caused upon my bed at night! I was at that time greatly clinging to the law of works. Therefore my hopes were strongest when I could live the best (if indeed there *was* any best,) so that when I miserably failed in keeping my tongue, eyes, and ears during the day, I fell to despairing at night.



(Left to right) John Newton, Thomas Russell and George Mockford

I heard Mr Philips<sup>4</sup> preach at Ticehurst from Isaiah 25:4, and Mr Newton<sup>5</sup> at the same place from Hosea 14:7, both of which sermons

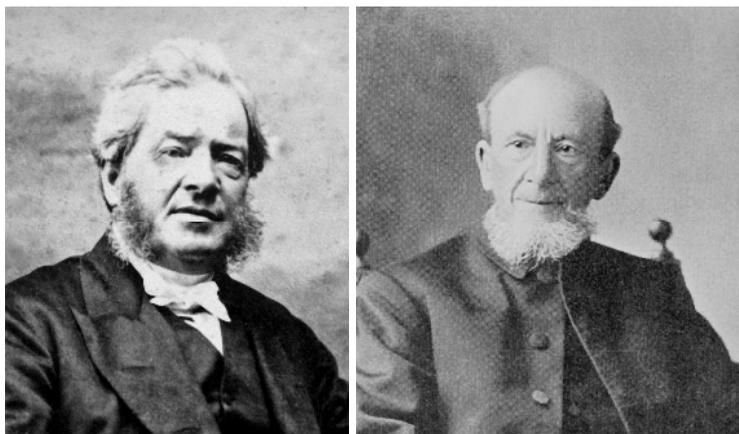
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<sup>4</sup> John Philips of Rotherfield (See *The Gospel Standard* 1872 p. 263f). Ed.

<sup>5</sup> John Newton, pastor at Hanover Chapel, Tunbridge Wells (See *The Gospel*

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greatly helped and encouraged me. A sermon by Mr Mockford,<sup>6</sup> preached at Shovers Green from Micah 2:13, was also very helpful.



(Left to right) Joseph Hatton and Andrew J. Baxter

In reading some sermons by Mr Russell<sup>7</sup> of Rotherfield, “The prisoner of hope and his deliverance,” and “The distressed sinner and the divine Saviour,” I was instructed, strengthened and encouraged to press on after a revealed and applied Saviour. Mr Hatton<sup>8</sup> preached at Pell Green one week evening from Psalm 63:1-2, and so traced out my exercises and desires that I wondered greatly, and much enjoyed the discourse. I was well repaid for my journey that evening, and would have stayed in chapel much longer. A sermon at the same place by Mr Baxter<sup>9</sup> from Hosea 14:2

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*Standard* 1915 p. 51f). Ed.

<sup>6</sup> George Mockford, pastor of Ebenezer Chapel, Heathfield (See *The Gospel Standard* 1900 p. 93f; also Ramsbottom, B. A. (Ed.) (1994) *Six Remarkable Ministers*. Gospel Standard Trust Publications, Harpenden). Ed.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Russell, pastor at Rotherfield (See *The Gospel Standard* 1911 p. 254f; also Russell, T. (1864) *A Monument of Mercy*. Collingridge, London). Ed.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Hatton, editor of *The Gospel Standard* and pastor of the chapels at Smallfield and Redhill (See *The Gospel Standard* 1884 p. 343f). Ed.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew J. Baxter, pastor of Cavendish Place Chapel, Eastbourne. Mr Baxter was

greatly strengthened me. I had also many lifts by the way under Mr Jones at Shovers Green Chapel.

## Rejoicing in Christ

As I said before, the application of Micah 7:18 had caused me to hope in the Lord and to find much sweetness and encouragement in both seeking and waiting for Him. It was a word with power, though I still lacked the blessing it contained, and I often sank very low in soul trouble and despondency, being “disheartened with waiting so long,”<sup>10</sup> and often feared my light was only sufficient to light me down to hell, and that no further progress would be made by me unto realising my interest in the Saviour. Hymn 293 was very expressive of my case, and I could use it as my own and say,

Yet, Lord, if Thy love has designed  
No covenant blessing for me,  
Ah! tell me, how is it I find  
Some sweetness in waiting for Thee?

Many ups and downs did I have till one night I went to bed early, before my companions, in great distress. There being a large family of us in a small house, four of us slept in one room. I could not go to bed without bowing my knee in prayer, neither could I muster courage to do so before my ungodly companions who occupied the same room, so I would either go off early, or sit up to pray after they were gone to bed. On this particular occasion my distress was very great, and I went off early, and wrestled hard in prayer upon my knees. But the horror of my mind was so great that I hastily

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also editor of *The Gospel Advocate* (See Baxter, A. J. (1909) *Memoir of A. J. Baxter*. Farncombe and Son, London). Ed.

<sup>10</sup> Hymn 293, Toplady.

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crept into bed, and wrapped myself in the clothes, fearing Satan was in the room, ready to take me down to the pit. O! the deep anguish of my soul, and the deep heart cries that I put up to the Lord at that time, feeling I *must* have the blessing.

Often before that time I had in my feelings almost laid hold on the Lord Jesus, and then He had withdrawn Himself, but now my feelings were so intense I *must* have the blessing. Just then, when my heart was ready to break with sorrow, the Lord Jesus seemed to so drop His love, and Himself, into the arms of my faith, love, affection and embrace (without applying any word to my soul) that I had all I wanted this side of heaven. I embraced Him and blessed Him too, and was more full of joy than I had before been of sorrow. My cup ran over with a sense of His great love and compassion to me. O how I loved and adored Him in return, and dreaded the thought of ever sinning against Him again! *Now* I was ready to die, and be for ever with Him in glory. Indeed, the power of His love I felt was too great for me to live beneath. I desired Him to stay His hand, lest I should die with love.

This overpowering visit did not last long, but whilst it lasted I was happy, and my soul was on the stretch for His glory above. Also I felt, great as were my sins, His precious blood and grace were sufficient to atone and save and His pardoning mercy to cover all, had they been ten times greater and more numerous. O the power of His dying love and blood when applied by the Holy Spirit to my conscience! "Old things [had now] passed away;" (my sins and all) and "behold, all things [had] become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Now I desired to serve Him from love, and to live without sin in order to glorify Him for what He had done for me, for heaven was now set before me as my eternal home, nor did I expect to grovel in the dust as I have since done, or to mourn His absence and long for His return so often.

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Now under this sweet, soul-melting blessing, I was glad to be alone, for my eyes were “sweetly drowned in tears,<sup>11</sup>” and everything about me lost its hold for the time being, and as I thought, for ever. But alas! I, in great measure, “returned to my own place<sup>12</sup>” again, though not to that same bondage under the law of works, for now I was under the gospel, and sealing of the Spirit, and “went on [my] way rejoicing,” even after the keen edge of that joy was gone.

Now, all creation presented another face, as being the handiwork of my Father. The birds, whose sweet songs had before aggravated my woe, now helped my song of praise, and the happiness of the beasts I no longer envied, for my soul was redeemed to praise Him when birds and beasts are no more. On one occasion as I sat eating my dinner by a stream of water in what is called “Birchet Wood,” the sweet murmur of the water and the feelings of my soul blessedly harmonised and conspired together in singing the high praises of God my Saviour. Now the promises in God’s Word sweetly spoke to me, and the preached word was honey to my taste, and communion of saints was sweet to me, so that I could now talk to some of whom I had been afraid before. I wanted all Sundays, and wondered why some who could afford it did not pay a minister to preach every day. I wondered at the sloth of many in their attendance, either getting late, or missing a service altogether without much concern. Also to see some, especially members of the church, sleeping during the service, much perplexed and tried me, nor could I really believe it to be compatible with Christianity, but I lived to learn.

The Sabbaths were golden days with me now, for my labour among the stock on that day I had now given up, so that I could

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<sup>11</sup> Hymn 268, Berridge.

<sup>12</sup> Hymn 251, Hart.

have the morning prayer meeting and three services besides without hindrance and without tiring of it, though sometimes tired in it by the end of the day. Truly I dwelt in His courts with great delight in those days, and would not willingly miss one service either Sunday or a weekday through the whole year.

### **Darkness and Leanness**

After walking in the warmth of my heart for some while, darkness and coldness seized me (yet not so as to hinder my attendance), and now things went on heavily, and duty rather than love and spiritual zeal often kept me upon my legs, for now did I tire more in the services and wished the sermons were shorter, nor did I wonder so much at seeing sleepy hearers, empty seats, or late arrivals. Now also, I would avoid contact with the people as much as possible, lest they should speak to me upon spiritual things for which I felt but little heart, or experience either. Taking part in the prayer meetings much tried me now, and more than once, on my way there, did I turn aside from my friend into a field or elsewhere, to groan and sigh before the Lord, for the thought of praying at the meeting did exceedingly try me. Also my felt lack of religion did weigh upon me.

Often I felt the fight was against me in those days, and yet there was frequently something to pick me up again. This experience tried my faith, drove me to the Lord, made me look more closely into my standing and my heart, and to anchor more firmly upon His covenant mercy apart from sensible comfort. This also brought me more into touch with the tempted, tried and dejected children of God. It was a fire to consume much of my dross and tin, for there was much self-righteousness and fleshly zeal about me, and less *real* religion than I had reckoned upon. How I longed for the

light of the Lord's countenance, and His manifested favour as formerly, but had to learn and painfully feel that His children are in due course "weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts" (Isaiah 28:9), in order to be better established in the truth.

## **My Baptism**

I cannot speak of my baptism being laid upon my mind with that great overpowering weight that some do, so that they "stayed away as long as they could" and were "*compelled* to go forward." When the Lord Jesus began to be precious to me and I felt at home in His House under the truth and with His people, I loved His Word and His ways, and felt a desire to honour Him in whatever He had commanded, out of love for Him and in obedience to Him. I believed baptism to be a New Testament ordinance, together with the Lord's Supper and church order upon strict communion principles, and it was much upon my mind to walk in that path, and caused me many prayers and much self-examination (with searching the Scriptures) to know whether *I* was the *right character* to walk therein. Sometimes when my heart was warm I felt that I must go forward, but then fear of presumption and sometimes the fear of man would keep me back.

The Scriptures, the preaching and my inward feelings all said, "Go forward," as I thought, though I remember no very powerful application of any one Scripture to decide it for me. Yet in prayer about it I felt a good conscience, nor did the Lord appear to frown upon me in laying it before Him. So, at the age of twenty-two years I went before the church at Shovers Green and gave them a little outline of my experience in the things of God, and being received by them, was baptized. At my baptism I felt a good conscience that what I did was right before the Lord, but no overpowering joy.

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Moreover the fear of man which had somewhat haunted me was gone, and I felt that "all flesh is grass" before the Lord. I had a sweet view of the Lord Jesus Christ set forth in baptism by immersion, as going under the waves and billows of that wrath due to His church's sins, and how one, by attending to that ordinance, professes to be "buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). I viewed Him as King in Zion, and saw that He had both given the command and also set the example by being Himself baptized. Moreover I felt love and obedience to Him, and had faith to look through the water to Christ's cleansing blood, and could embrace the substance by faith, whilst attending to that ordinance. This took place at Shovers Green where Mr Jones was the pastor, and he, of course, baptized me. Next morning, on going to my labour, one work-fellow said, "Are you better this morning, lad?" My conscience was good in that matter, my spirit was calm, and my tongue silent, and so the thing passed off. But many questionings did I have about it afterwards, and fears lest I had taken too much upon me, nor did Satan spare his fiery darts, till I sank very low, but the Lord helped me, and lifted me up. In my darkest moments when soberly reflecting upon the thing, I would not undo my baptism, or that church fellowship into which I was brought, or my position as deacon and clerk afterwards.

### **My Marriage**

From the age of about sixteen to twenty I walked with a young woman who was three months my senior; but after being called by grace, I soon came to a fixed mind before the Lord to have a godly partner or none. This, with other things, caused me to give her up,

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sorrow on that account being felt by us both, our friendship having been sweet and long. After a time my affections settled on Mary Baldock, one of the members of Shovers Green Church, and thirteen years my senior. She was maintaining herself, and keeping a home over her aged parents by dressmaking. There seemed at that time an insurmountable difficulty in the way of my having her, but,

Thither *my* warm affections moved,  
Nor could I call them thence,

(Gadsbys 1064)

and it became a matter of wrestling prayer before the Lord, who alone could manage all hearts and all circumstances. This went on for a long while, till one day when cutting wood in what is called "Dens Wood," I felt such an earnest wrestling with the Lord, and so embraced the desired object by the prayer of faith as from His hand, that I was sure of having her though a mountain still existed, the removal of which I dare not ask the Lord for, as it would have affected my pastor whom I sincerely loved. Therefore I waited and watched His providential working, not having given her the least hint of my desires and exercises about her either by word or act.

I afterwards found that Mr Jones had, at that very time, promised her marriage, which greatly tried my faith, but I felt the Lord would grant my request in His own time and way without putting my hand to it. As time rolled on, the Lord made the way clear and brought the thing about without me pushing the matter forward in the least degree. Mr Jones afterwards broke off the engagement, which caused a great stir among some of the people, and it greatly troubled her that he should act so fickle after she had cautioned him not to be hasty in such an important matter. We could all see afterwards that this was permitted for wise ends, and I have had the satisfaction of knowing that the Lord brought about the whole

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thing for me in answer to prayer. In June 1873, in her simplicity, without the least intention of seeking my love, or suspicion that I had any such thoughts, she asked me a question about another party, which compelled me to open my heart to her, and so the engagement began quite unexpectedly to both at that time. He will put honour upon the prayer of faith.



**Mr Kemp's first wife, Mary Baldock**

We were married at Shovers Green Chapel on November 9th, 1873. It was on Sunday morning before the service commenced that we made our solemn vows. We had been to the morning prayer meeting, and after our marriage stayed to the morning service, and then went again in the evening. But as some of my relatives were there who cared not for chapel, we stayed at home during the

afternoon service. This we afterwards regretted, and also that we married on Sunday. Instead of trying to please my relatives, we ought to have gone to chapel, where our hearts were, and thus set them an example.

Our first and only child (John) was born February 17th, 1876.

### **Prayers for my Brother**

When I was first in soul trouble, my brother, two years my senior, was much afflicted with fits (probably the result of injury from a horse) and at the same time he was much addicted to drinking, the result of living at the ale-house before mentioned. We tried various means, and spent much money on him in medicine, but as neither his fits nor his drinking habits left him, my soul was greatly bowed down on his behalf, beside my own deep exercises.

His falls during his fits were fearful to witness, and as he would often be up on the railway, and sometimes fell there, his life was greatly in danger. Finding that no medicine touched his complaint, and neither threats nor entreaties altered his habits, I took the medicine (having purchased it myself) and locked it up away from him, feeling at the same time an unusual spirit of prayer for the removal of his fits, and on one or two occasions I felt such power in prayer and so took hold on the Lord that I embraced the cure in anticipation, for I felt persuaded it *would* come. After a time his fits left him without any apparent cause in the eyes of others, but *my* soul blessed God for answering prayer. It was, however, suggested to me that without prayer the fits might have been removed, but anyway, my request was granted and I therein did rejoice. So far as I know he had no more fits during the next fourteen years. But in June 1885, he fell in a fit, it is supposed, and died from suffocation,

his face being in his hat. I did not find it in my heart to pray so earnestly for his soul as for his body, nor can I say anything definite about a change of heart in him, though some things that I gleaned from those about him (he was among strangers at Bletchingley, Surrey, when he died) give a ray of hope respecting him.

### **A Fresh Situation**

For about three years after our marriage we continued to live in the same house where my wife had previously been living with her parents – a corner house, now (1897) used as a shop and situated opposite to the post office, and next to the little chapel<sup>13</sup> in Wadhurst village. There our son was born, and there also my wife's father died.

But now, as we still worked at Scragg Oak Farm, we moved into a small cottage close to the railway, on that farm, in order to be nearer my work, etc. But my master being given to hunting, cricket and other pleasures, I felt very uncomfortable under him, as he would not come near his workmen for *many* days together, nor could I easily get my money. At that time, Mr Isaac Hoadley of Cottenden, Ticehurst, invited me to come under him, or at least to come and see him about it. My wife and I went to see him, but several times on the way did I stop and look back, fearing it was a wrong step, as the brook was not quite dried up at Scragg Oak Farm. It was a weighty and prayerful matter. How I begged the Lord to turn the man against us if it was not right, or to turn our minds against going there, but the Lord's leadings seemed in that

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<sup>13</sup> Wadhurst Town Chapel. Ed.

direction as we were all agreed about it, and we removed there in July 1877.



**Wadhurst Town Chapel (centre-left)**

## **Exercises about the Ministry**

Almost from the time of my first quickening, and when under the law, the work of the ministry would exercise my mind, but especially after Christ was revealed as the only way of salvation, long before I could rejoice in Him as “God my Saviour.” This greatly perplexed me, and many times did I pronounce myself a fool for such thoughts, which would again and again crowd in. O how I begged of the Lord to free me from such presumptuous thoughts! “What,” said I, “I preach Christ who am despairing of my interest in Him? No, never; I will rid me of such thoughts.” But still they *would* come, and my mind was at times nearly distracted,

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so that work became a burden by day and sleep was disturbed by night. When His love and mercy touched my heart, my exercise about preaching would increase with it, but a deep sense of my own unfitness for such a great work, my ignorance both in spiritual and natural learning, and my naturally shy, timid and retiring disposition would often clash with my thoughts of preaching and make me tremble.

Often did I most earnestly beg of the Lord to banish all such thoughts from my mind if they were not of Him, but if they were of Him that He would tell me what to do and make it quite plain. Sometimes whilst hearing a sermon my conflict about preaching was so great that I could scarcely listen to it, and after the service I would go out into a back building, fall upon my knees and cry unto the Lord for relief. Sometimes my wrestlings with Him were so great that I scarcely knew whether I was in the body or out of it, and when the feeling abated, it was as though I returned to myself after leaving self for a while. Often a portion of Scripture fastened upon my mind and so opened up to me that I seemed to be in the act of preaching. Then, again, all would be dark and my exercise seemed wearing off, only to return again. I durst not open my mind to a creature; only as my wife drew it out of me through seeing my distress of mind and pressing me for an explanation. Nor did I drop any hints in my public prayers for others to know my exercises, for it was such a big concern with me; too big to talk about. It lay between the Lord and me alone, and the substance of my feelings were these: "If it is the Lord's work, let Him work it out for me, let me not hasten the thing forward myself, nor let another touch it by influencing me forward in it; and if it be not of the Lord, but all dies out, then let others be ignorant of my thoughts about preaching." Thought I, "There are enough preachers without me, why should I meddle with it? And besides,

how can I stand up before a congregation, seeing it requires a great effort for me to look a solitary individual in the face? *If I do preach, it will only be as an occasional stop-gap.*"

One Sunday morning Mr Jones preached about Moses being sent to deliver Israel and his many excuses and backwardness to go, when he so traced out my feelings, that I knew not where to hide my blushing face. When I got outside, Mr Pattenden looked me in the face and said, "Do you think *you* shall ever be a preacher, John?" I said, "No!" and turned from him with a guilty conscience, not liking him to suspect me (yet wanting someone to speak to me), so fearful was I. I had been afraid of his keen eye many times.

I could not open my exercise of mind, and if I conducted a prayer meeting or otherwise read a chapter in public, I seldom gave a comment, though often feeling like "a bottle wanting vent," and feeling that to speak out would give great relief. But I feared doing anything to put myself more forward than the Lord might be leading me, or that would cause the people to think I was being exercised about the ministry. That portion would often speak to me: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1 Timothy 4:14). But then on looking for my "gift," it seemed not to exist. Many a sigh went out of my heart. One day, when working by myself, the ministry lay so heavy upon my mind that it seemed my life must soon come to an end if the Lord did not make it plain what He would have me do, and while on my way home at night near "Cooper's barn," these words dropped into my heart and reached my case, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD" (Psalm 118:17).

This was as a light on my path, and balm to my troubled mind. But how could such a poor insignificant thing preach? That portion, however, so "established my goings," that I believed the day would come (it was now four or five years distant), however

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backward I felt about it, for indeed I was backward. May I not appeal to the Lord that naturally I desired it not, and spiritually I shrank from it through felt unfitness? Many times did I ask the Lord to lay it upon the minds of the pastor and people, so that they would mention it to me, if it was His work, or else entirely erase it from my mind. I dare not do or say anything knowingly to make them think this of me, but very carefully guarded against doing so. Yet they felt it out in me, by my prayers, conversation, reading the hymns in the public service, and by my general carriage, so that the pastor and nearly every member of the church, and many of the congregation, believed the Lord had designed me for the ministry. The pastor and several of the members spoke frequently to me about it, but could get nothing from me for a long while, so fearful was I of hastening the thing on or of running before being sent of the Lord. These things, however, made me wonder whether after all the thing was of the Lord, for I had prayed for that token and yet feared they were deceived in me.

One day, while cutting wood at Cottenden, Ticehurst, the ministry lay so heavy upon me that I left my work and turned aside into the wood to pour out my heart before the Lord for relief, when, just in the act of prayer upon my knees, I heard a bullock in the hedge, and fearing someone was near, was greatly frightened lest any should see me in the act of prayer. I longed for some definite word from the Lord, but could not get it, though the Scripture in general, inward promptings, and the voice of pastor and church said, "Go!" Nor did the Lord seem to frown upon it, but I felt strengthened in the belief that it was His work whilst praying to Him about it.

Having now had many ups and downs about it for about eight years past, I felt it right before the Lord to venture forward – though trembling and afraid. This thing had troubled my mind while under the law, and also when the gospel was as honey to my

## BY FAITH

taste. I had many times felt determined not to preach, but continually felt a prompting to it. I had asked for a word of direction and decision, and Psalm 118:17 had, with other Scriptures, been spoken powerfully to my heart. I had asked for it to be laid on the minds of pastor and people, and this now had been the case for a long time past, and they had become quite impatient about it and would not let me alone. O the conflict of my mind! – willing to be led by the Lord and to serve Him, and *strongly* prompted to go forward, and yet determined not to go. The solemnity and greatness of the work in the face of my ignorance, deficiency and sin, and a natural backwardness to be heard or seen in public, made me tremble.



**Mr Kemp shortly after going out to preach**

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My case was very different from those who want to preach but cannot find an open door. Again and again Mr Jones asked me to do so. Now I felt, as before the Lord, that if Mr Jones asks me again, I dare not refuse. I think it was on the following Sunday that he asked me whether he might give notice that I would preach the



**Ebenezer Chapel, Hawkhurst**

following Wednesday evening, and I said, "Yes, you may." He gave notice therefore that afternoon that I would preach on the next Wednesday evening, if it was the Lord's will. But as the same was announced from the pulpit, it made me tremble. My first

sermon was from Hosea 13:9, and lasted about forty-five minutes. There was not that liberty that I desired, but I trust the Lord helped me, and also some of the hearers. This was in March or April, 1879.

Just after my first sermon (I think the next Sunday), Mr Jones, our pastor, was taken ill, and was not able to preach for some while, so that I was now requested to speak frequently at Shovers Green, and Mr Jones (and others) thought the Lord had raised me up as his successor, but men make great mistakes. After I had been several years settled at Biddenden, Kent, and Mr Jones was now near death, he sent for me and I visited him when he, in substance, said, "I wanted to see you. It has been impressed upon my mind that you are to succeed me at Shovers Green. I feel I can talk to you without exciting a wrong feeling in you, seeing you are not an excitable man. You know now, whether you have had any such feeling or have reason to believe the Lord intends such a thing." I answered, "I have seen the Lord's hand in leading me to Biddenden, and maintaining me there, and He has bound me and the Biddenden people together with a bond of love and union, and I should want to clearly see His leading before I move, and cannot at present see that Shovers Green is intended for me." He answered, "Very well, then, I can leave it now." I think he died the next day, or very soon afterwards.

But to return from this digression. Many doors were at once opened before me. My preaching now lay at Shovers Green, Burwash,<sup>14</sup> and Lamberhurst, frequently finishing up the Sabbath with a third service at Shovers Green after being at one of the other two places during the day. The church at Shovers Green now sent

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<sup>14</sup> Long closed, the pulpit Bible from Burwash is in the possession of Jireh Chapel, Tenterden. Mr Walter Gibb, the deacon at Jireh, preached the last services at Burwash. Some historical notes of the cause there are stuck into the Bible. Ed.

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me out, and bid me God-speed in the work of the ministry, Mr Jones giving me the right hand of fellowship on their behalf.

Very soon the Hawkhurst friends invited me, whither I often went for the Sunday evening. Mr Jonathan Wilmshurst now invited me to Crane Lane Chapel,<sup>15</sup> Cranbrook, Kent, where I went from Burwash for the evening, and also several times for the whole day until the chapel was closed and the congregation united with those at Providence Chapel under Mr Daniel Smart.<sup>16</sup> The Crane Lane preaching formed a sweet bond of union between me and Mr Jonathan Wilmshurst, which continues to this day. Mr John Row<sup>17</sup> of Tonbridge, at that time invited me to supply for him, whither I went many times, nearly to the time of his death, and a bond of union existed between us. On one occasion, when engaged for him, he was not able to take the journey to Rotherfield, and wished me to go there and let him stay at home, saying he would take the blame, if any. I went, and the Lord helped me to speak from Isaiah 22. 22-24, so that my testimony found a place in the hearts of the people, and I have continued to go there yearly since. Thus the Lord opened doors, far beyond my expectation, there being, I

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<sup>15</sup> The Crane Lane meeting was started in 1838 when, after the death of Isaac Beeman, Henry Birch left Providence Chapel because he desired to keep the gospel ordinances and started a meeting in his home, Dane House. After Mr Birch's death in 1857 they met in Crane Lane, where Thomas Oyler Beeman (Isaac's son) ministered to them. In 1880 they merged again with Providence Chapel. Jonathan Wilmshurst was a key mover in the formation of the Strict Baptist church at Providence Chapel during Mr George Rose's pastorate. (See Baldwin, A. F. (2004) *The Little Chapel*. Privately Published. p. 50f.) Ed.

<sup>16</sup> The pastor at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook. Although a Baptist, Daniel Smart observed no gospel ordinances at Providence Chapel. Mr Kemp rightly censures Mr Smart for this in his memoir. Mr Kemp was later involved in the formation of a Strict Baptist church at Providence during the pastorate of George Rose. Ed.

<sup>17</sup> John Row was pastor at Ebenezer Chapel, Tonbridge. (See Row J. (no date) *Even to Old Age*. Wilmshurst, London.) Ed.

think, only two Sabbaths since I began to speak until now (December 19th, 1905) that I have had no engagement.



(Left to right) Daniel Smart and John Row

### **Satan tries to hinder my Progress**

Before I began to preach, my wife and I had walked in sweet communion to and from the chapel with one of the female members of the church who lived near us. At the close of my first sermon this person said I had been preaching at her and she was a lost woman. This proved to be the beginning of insanity, for she said and did many strange things, and was presently taken to the asylum where she died. The strange things uttered by her were a sweet morsel to another member, who added thereto, till the enemies of truth – some at least – viewed me as a vile character.

This last mentioned member, being a well-known talebearer, did what she could by word and example to hinder people going to hear me preach. Not many, however, outside of the church

believed her report, and none of the other members in the church, except her husband, as far as I could find, gave the least heed to her statements, but rather reproved her, which much upset her, causing her to say many bitter things against me and my wife. My conscience before the Lord was clean in the matter, but thinking my usefulness as a minister would be hindered thereby, I was much troubled, not having yet learned to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3), nor that such things make a minister acceptable to tried souls.

This trial brought me most earnestly to the Lord in prayer that His cause might not suffer thereby. Ah, it was His cause that lay near my heart. Then did the Lord drop these words into my heart with succouring and quieting power, “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). Then did I begin to “glory in tribulations” a little, finding that “patience” cometh that way (Rom. 5. 3). But being then in the fire, I knew not as now that, “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Ecclesiastes 7:8). Satan meant to hinder my usefulness, but God meant to strengthen me, and others through me, by that trial. Now do I counsel those in such a case to be quiet, fight not their own battles, but ask of the Lord grace to live down slander and then watch His doing, for there shall be something visible to the observant beholder.

### **A Parent's Exercises and Prayers**

Soon after our removal to Cottenden, a dream respecting myself and son greatly troubled me, viz. that we were both in hell together. This brought me into deep anguish of spirit for many

days together, and I *now* regard it as God's method of stirring me up to earnest prayer, and no prediction of what should take place. But at that time I was overwhelmed with the fear of my son being lost. The thought of having been the means of bringing my tender offspring into the world, and perhaps to be lost, was painful to bear. None but a godly parent (and probably comparatively few of these) know what deep sorrow and what deep, heartfelt prayers I experienced.

One day, when working in a field close to Stonegate, the Lord did, I trust, suffer me to take hold on His great salvation on my son's behalf. Then did I believe the thing would come at length, for my prayer at that time was more than ordinary. My dream did not so much try me respecting my *own* safety, seeing I had felt myself "sealed," I trust, an heir of heaven. Then, as the dream included both, why so exercised about *one* only? Ah, surely this was the Lord's method of bringing me to travail for my son, after showing that we both merited hell.

### **Tried about Family Prayer**

It has been my privilege to bow the knee at the family altar with a godly partner, and oft-times with others of the Lord's people - which greatly helps one in praying at such times, for it must needs be a heavy matter when one feels to be quite alone in *heart devotion*. But constantly filling that post (and oft-times when out of season) exceedingly tried me in those days, so much so that I thought it must be given up, as there seemed much formality and repetition about it. On one occasion these words talked with me, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Thought I, "How can I draw nigh, seeing my heart is so hard? Let the Lord draw nigh to me first, for I cannot otherwise understand this

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portion of His Word." Well, heart or no heart for prayer, we went again upon our knees one evening together as usual, just at the time when the above portion came, and *then* the Lord so softened my heart with His presence that I felt Him near. Now I saw the meaning of the above text, i.e., "Be instant in season, out of season." Be found in the use of God's appointed means even when thy heart will not move after Him, and He will bless thee therein, when, and as often as He will. That was timely aid to me, and it has often helped me since when in a low place.

### **Working, Preaching and Fainting**

For about sixteen months after I began to preach I continued to work for Mr Hoadley, as one of his leading men. Consequently he



**Providence Chapel, Flimwell**

wanted me at my post as much as possible, but did by no means oppose my preaching, for he said he expected I should preach. He would drive me to chapel when I preached at Flimwell, and otherwise allow me to go and come as most suitable to me, nor did we quarrel upon that point. Yet being now mostly preaching three times on the Sunday, and sometimes in the week, it was difficult for me to fill my post under him without being overtaxed with working and preaching combined. I longed for more time to search God's Word, and for meditation and prayer, for often I was now feeling quite worn down in body and mind, feeling I could not go on long thus. This matter gave me many an errand to the throne of grace for direction. My mind was not to give up preaching, nor to give up work and lead an idle life, so what to choose I knew not, unless it was a small business of some kind that would allow me more time for study and rest. For this I was now on the alert, but nothing turned up.

One day when in the field, my soul wrestled with the Lord for direction and leading; for then my heart did cry in earnest, and the clay seemed to fall into the great Potter's hand in a special way, for Him to mould it according to His will. Methinks the spirit of prayer was poured down from heaven upon me on purpose for my heart to go up and bring a blessing down from His throne, for then did I embrace something in anticipation in the near future, though *what* He intended for me I knew not, nor where. From that hour my expectation was from God - I believed He would soon place me elsewhere, but could scarcely entertain a thought of settling over a people, through feeling quite unfit for a pastor. Just after this, a man whom I knew came past where I was filling a cart from a dung mixer, and said, "Ah, you will have something different from cart-filling soon." It made me ponder the thing afresh in my heart,