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Allington in Wilts, 1867.

IN the third decade of the last century, when England had recovered from the distractions of the long continental war, many earnest people were moved to attempt something for the social, moral and spiritual welfare of the nation. Amongst these efforts the founding of Evangelical places of worship was extensive, as the date on many a town or village chapel and roadside meeting-house records. Some of these buildings are in such isolated districts as to suggest a wave of spiritual fervour and concern that can hardly now be realised. One of them stands in the quiet village of Allington near Devizes, at the foot of the Wiltshire downs. The inscription in front reads "Bethel Chapel, 1829."

Living at Andover in 1867, the announcement of the Anniversary and the presence of the Rev. J. C. Philpot, attracted me. I had heard him some years before in Nottinghamshire and he was a friend of some of my people. There were no motor-coaches in those days, so it meant a pilgrimage on foot one pleasant Saturday afternoon, past Weyhill, Ludgershall and other little hamlets; past sheep farms, along dusty roads, till at Upavon, weariness and the westering sun suggested rest.

The little village and its few shops were busy with week-end rural customers, and no place of rest responded to my inquiries; but it was suggested that at the "Charlton Cat," an inn two miles further on, I should be sure of hospitality. My informant noticing my perplexity at the strange name, explained that it was once "The Tiger," but during a renovation the sign writer depicted such a curious animal that the natives called it "The Cat." This I reached in the shadows, and the landlord, a youngish labouring man, and his wife, seemed pleased to receive me, "and so to bed."

Morning dawned, a golden summer Sunday morning. Breakfast and family prayer with the landlord and his little family, then to walk along the pleasant Vale of Pewsey, seeing the famous "White Horse" on the steep slope of the Downs; on through cross-country lanes to Allington, the end of my twenty-seven miles' walk.

A good congregation was assembling to fill little Bethel. More than one distinguished adherent drove over in his carriage from a distance. Friends came, some in gigs and other vehicles,

from far and near. Farm labourers and village folk—on one purpose bent, remindful of Dr. Watts' verse—

“Lord, how delightful 'tis to see
A whole assembly worship Thee;
At once they sing, at once they pray.
They hear of heaven and learn the way.”

At 10.30 the Rev. J. C. Philpot, M.A.,—erewhile Fellow and Tutor of Worcester College, Oxford, whose scholastic gifts and family connections would have led to a Bishopric had he remained in the Established Church—took the service and preached one of those deep experimental sermons that touch serious minds and anxious souls.

At the close friends welcomed friends, spoke to strangers and introduced visitors, and then many had dinner in the vestry. I was noticed and questioned, and my walk rather surprised some. One kindly farmer said, “Well young man, if ever you're tempted to think you're all wrong, remember you had enough concern for the truth as to do all that journey to hear it. I'll give you a lift part of the way back.”

The afternoon service followed; after partings and last words the congregation slowly departed; horses were harnessed to the vans and gigs, and Bethel ended its great day.

My farmer friend fulfilled his promise and drove me several miles, then set me down at the nearest cross roads, and with a few directions and a hearty handshake went on his way, leaving me to go mine, with much to think about, in the rural beauty of that sweet Sunday evening, till late and weary I reached Andover.

The little cause, like many others, alas, has declined. Old members long since dead and their places not filled up. At times “on the ebb of closing.” Now no church members but a few friends who love the place still attend on Sunday afternoons only, depending for ministry on some one coming from Devizes or other neighbouring Chapels.

The Centenary was celebrated last year, 1929, when Mr. H. E. Carr, of Chippenham, preached, as he also did at the 101st Anniversary on August 4 this year.

T. R. HOOPER.