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## THE MORAVIAN CHAPEL IN FETTER LANE.

BY A. J. SMITH.

SIXTY years before Luther nailed his famous Theses to the door of Wittenberg Church, the Community of the United Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) was founded in Moravia in 1457. This was the beginning of the Moravian Church, now a world-wide organization operating in distant parts of the mission field, as well as in several European countries. Its ministry consists of Bishops and Pastors, framed on the lines of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, which through Wesley has some connection with the Moravian Church.

The primitive Moravian community sprang from the Hussite Movement, which in turn was inspired by Wyclif's teaching, carried to Bohemia from this country. The Moravian Church survived the Wars of Religion of the seventeenth century and the campaigns of Gustavus Adolphus, Wallenstein and Tilly, and in the eighteenth century rapidly increased its influence, largely through the efforts of Count Zinzendorf, who repaid the debt to England by assisting with the foundation of the community in this country at Fetter Lane. The Chapel is situated in the two parishes of St. Bride and St. Dunstan. The minister preaches in the former, while the congregation sit in the latter. The parochial boundary tablets can be seen on the walls in Chapel Place, Nevill's Court, property which formerly belonged to the Moravian Chapel.

The Chapel was opened on November 10th, 1742, when John and Charles Wesley attended the ceremony. The contact of the Wesleys with the Moravian community had been established some years before; indeed, the Moravians exerted a decisive influence upon the conversion of John Wesley and his brother. After his return from America, John Wesley made his way one day into a little meeting of devout people in Aldersgate Street. Browning also once entered an Evangelical meeting-house, and if the visit left its mark on the poem entitled "Christmas Eve," it does not seem to have appealed to any spiritual chord in his nature. At Aldersgate Street Wesley met Peter Böhler, and in later years attributed his conversion to Böhler's influence. This decisive event in his life is recorded on a tablet, placed on the railings of the church of St. Botolph Without, Aldersgate Street, by the International Methodist Historical Union, on May 24th, 1926.

The house, mentioned on this inscription, may have been the place where Wesley first met Böhler, situated in Little Britain, near St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It appears to have been owned by a Dutch merchant named Weinantz, a friend of Peter Böhler. The inscription also says that the site of the meeting-room was No. 28, Aldersgate Street, now occupied by Barclays Bank, where another tablet also records the conversion of John Wesley. It says:

"The probable site where on May 24th, 1738, John Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. This experience of grace was the beginning of Methodism. This tablet is gratefully placed here by the Drew Theological Seminary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Madison, New Jersey, U.S.A., August 1926."

But the authorities have come to no definite conclusion on the actual site of Wesley's conversion.

In the middle of the eighteenth century a close connection was formed between Fetter Lane Chapel and Chelsea. Here Count Zinzendorf lived for a time at Lindsay House, which was sold in 1774. For nearly two centuries the members of the London Congregation were buried in the Moravian Burial Ground, King's Road, Chelsea, now known as the Moravian Close. Quite early in its history the Fetter Lane community established the custom of walking in procession to the burial ground at Chelsea on Easter Sunday. It is reported that on April 7th, 1765, they started at 3 a.m. After arriving at the burial ground, the Brethren and Sisters sang hymns in the chapel or hall. They then formed a circle round the ground, while their friends and strangers remained standing behind them. The Easter Morning Litany was recited, and was followed by a Love-Feast, when the account of the Resurrection was read from the Gospel, interspersed with suitable verses. In the Address the meaning and purpose of the Litany were explained. The procession from Fetter Lane and the ceremony at Chelsea were witnessed towards the end of last century by a relative of the writer of this article.

Many notable Moravians were buried at Chelsea, including Christian Renatus, the son of Count Zinzendorf (1752); John Cennick, the Moravian Evangelist, who sometimes preached at Whitefield's Tabernacle, and died at the age of thirty-six, in 1755, in the room later used as the vestry of the Fetter Lane Chapel. Over eight hundred people attended his funeral at Chelsea. In 1775 Peter Böhler was buried there; in 1794 David Kriegelstein, the Labrador missionary; in 1795 James Hutton, one of the founders of the Moravian Church in Great Britain. During the nineteenth century Benjamin Beck, the Fetter Lane minister, was buried at Chelsea in 1849; Charles Hindley, M.P. for Ashton-under-Lyne, and his daughter, Hannah Woods (both in 1857); John Andrew Porter, minister at Fetter Lane for seventeen years (1900). Another minister, Joseph Templeton Waugh, who died suddenly in the Chapel after conducting a service, was buried at Chelsea on August 7th, 1904.

The first wedding took place in Fetter Lane Chapel on June 22nd, 1750, although a wedding licence had been issued before that date to Miss Mary Badham. She was presented with a Bible by the congregation. Until 1750 members of the Moravian Chapel were married in the neighbouring parish churches of St. Dunstan and St. Bride.

The Watch Night Service, on December 31st, was held by the Moravians before the Wesleyans adopted it; but this service is no longer continued at Fetter Lane Chapel. Another institution of

the past was the Young Men's Breakfast. This was held monthly at 9 a.m. on Sundays, at a long table inside the Chapel. The meal consisted of eggs, white and brown bread, marmalade and coffee, and must have been eagerly welcomed by many a poor lad struggling to live in Fleet Street in those days. After breakfast a paper was read by one of the members, or by a missionary on furlough. For several years a flourishing Christian Endeavour Society, known as the Fetter Lane Society, met weekly in the Church hall. Its first Anniversary tea and service were crowded, not only by members of the Moravian Church, but by representatives of most other Christian bodies, including the Church of England. Much could be written about the Festivals, held periodically, for single Brethren, single Sisters, for married people and widows; but past and present are linked together by the old Moravian Love-Feast, which forms the most characteristic feature of Moravian Church-life to-day.

The Love-Feast is held at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and begins with the beautiful Liturgy, which is read by the minister. The Liturgy opens with the words, "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." The congregation respond, "For He is our God, we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." A number of hymns are sung, among them one for sick and absent members. During the service tea and buns are handed round by a Sister and a Brother. At one time the Brethren and Sisters sat separately on either side of the Chapel. Moravian texts are read from a book—which is now in its two hundred and first year of issue—together with passages from the Old and New Testaments, with verses of hymns. A chapter from the Bible follows, and the minister gives a short Sermon or Address.

The Communion takes place after the Address about 4 p.m. The bread and cup are handed round among the people, preceded by the recital of the words of institution, which are, however, combined from various passages in the New Testament, and not from any one Gospel. The Communion begins with a hymn sung kneeling:

" Most Holy Lord and God,  
 Holy Almighty God,  
 Holy and most merciful Saviour,  
 Thou eternal God,  
 Grant that we may never  
 Lose the comforts from Thy death,  
 Have mercy, O Lord."

At the close of the service another hymn is sung:

" We who here together are assembled  
 Joining hearts and hands in one,  
 Bind ourselves with love that's undissembled,  
 Christ to love and serve alone:  
 O! may our imperfect songs and praises  
 Be well-pleasing unto Thee, Lord Jesus,  
 Say, ' My peace I leave with you.'  
 Amen, Amen, be it so."

The presiding minister, or the Bishop, then turns to his neighbour and shakes hands, and each person present does the same. By the act of handshaking the Communion or fellowship of all the members, with each other, and with the unseen Lord, is symbolized. The service ends with the blessing, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee," and the congregation reply, singing, "In the name of Jesus, Amen."

The tea for the Love-Feasts was formerly prepared in the Chapel. It is now made ready in the lobby. In earlier days, also, a special children's Love-Feast was held at Christmas, when the Chapel was decorated and oranges and apples were distributed to the children. The modern survival of the children's Love-Feast takes the form of a simple little service, modelled on the German ceremony of Christmas Eve. The Chapel is decorated, a large star, lighted by electricity, being the chief feature. A simple Christmas tree is adorned with lighted candles. The children sing "Heilige Nacht" and receive oranges in which a little candle is inserted. The Love-Feast at Fetter Lane was made memorable on one occasion, some years ago, by the attendance of a party of Esquimaux, converts of the Moravian Labrador Mission.

The present congregation is small and consists chiefly of adults. It is drawn from all parts of London and the suburbs. The service is held at 3 p.m., and members of other Christian churches receive a welcome. But, if they are few, the present generation of Moravians meets at Fetter Lane Chapel with the memories of the great days of its history portrayed all around. Portraits of the famous men of older times hang on the walls. The splendid chairs presented by Countess Zinzendorf are there, and, until 1920, the Snetzler organ, built in 1743, enlarged in 1796, and rebuilt in 1845 and again in 1896, was in use. It is reported that Mendelssohn played on this organ on a visit to London.

The Moravian contribution to hymnology has been large, and many Moravian hymns have entered the hymn-books of other churches. James Montgomery, the Editor of the *Sheffield Iris* (1794), who received a pension on the Civil List in 1833, wrote "For ever with the Lord," "Hail to the Lord's Anointed," "Songs of Praise the Angels sang," "Lord, teach us how to pray aright," and many other hymns. The first Moravian Minister at Fetter Lane Chapel was James Holland, and the long list of Pastors since his time includes John Gambold (1744), Benjamin La Trobe (1780), Christian La Trobe (1792), Ignatius Montgomery (1811), Henry, 55th Count Reuss (1813), Leonard Hassé (1891). The present Minister is the Rev. J. Norman Libbey, M.A.

In no sphere of Christian activity has the Moravian Church been more conspicuous than in the work of foreign missions, and the Fetter Lane community has taken a large share in supporting this work. The recent Lambeth Conference Report on the Unity of the Church says: "Although they are a very small body, yet their enthusiasm for missionary work makes our relations with them most important in the Mission Field." The Moravian membership in the foreign field comprises 132,794 converts, and the Moravian

Brethren have issued their 138th Report of Missionary Work. A distinguished modern Moravian missionary was Samuel Skene, or Skeen, who was born at 10, Nevill's Court, Fetter Lane. After serving in the West Indies he joined the Church of England. His first curacy was at Bromley-by-Bow, and in 1909 he resigned the benefice of Laneham, Retford, Notts. His seven sons all became clergymen of the Church of England.

The father of Samuel Skene, the great-grandfather of the present writer, was Steward of the Fetter Lane congregation for many years. He wrote a book entitled *The Unsealed Prophecy*, which was delivered in the form of twenty-three lectures in the Chapel in 1853. So past and present are linked together in this small community, not only by an illustrious history, but by intimate family ties. The Moravians began as a community of brethren, and much of their success in the mission field to-day is due not only to a simple evangelical piety, but to the strong family and fraternal connections which have always been a marked feature in Moravian life and organization.

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PRAYER STORIES. By Vera E. Walker. *London: S.P.C.K.*  
1s. net.

Does God answer prayer? The nine brief stories contained in this unpretentious little book, furnish an overwhelmingly affirmative answer to this question. The stories belong to the living present as well as to the past. Here are experiences from *A Thousand Miles of Miracle*—the experiences in China of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Glover. Here, too, will be found some of the wonderful deliverances God effected for Livingstone, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Theresa of Avila, etc., etc. They prove that God can protect and bless His own dear Children—in answer to the prayer of faith.

S. R. C.

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THE REST THAT REMAINETH. By the Rev. W. F. Pelton, M.A.,  
Vicar of Ullenhall. *London: A. H. Stockwell, Ltd.* 2s. 6d.  
net.

For the purpose of this exposition Mr. Pelton has rearranged the letter to the Hebrews—to bring out the meaning but not to reconstruct the text after the manner of the Higher Critics. The object of his treatise is to show how we who believe do enter into rest. The Saints of God have always rejoiced in this epistle with its clear setting-forth of the Redeemer's Person and Work, and this study will be found, with its helpful analysis, a useful Commentary on this clear-cut statement of a great truth.