

## Paisley New Central Hall.

A METHODIST FORLORN HOPE: A GREAT METHODIST TRIUMPH.

"We have a few Churches in Scotland which are weak and are never likely to be self-supporting, but we do not consider that retreat would be the heroic course. My view is that we should hold what we have but our further



The Paisley Central Hall Site: Clearing out the Museum Bar

development, must lie in the big cities and in the midst of the great populations. It must take the form of the Mission and the Institutional Church and there we have a great opportunity. I believe with all my heart in the mission of Methodism to Scotland."

So the Rev. J. Williams Butcher expressed himself at the Leysian Hall on the occasion of the Home Mission Anniversary. Mr. Butcher has a very intimate and accurate knowledge of Methodism in Scotland and his judgment must weigh in our Methodist policy across the Border.

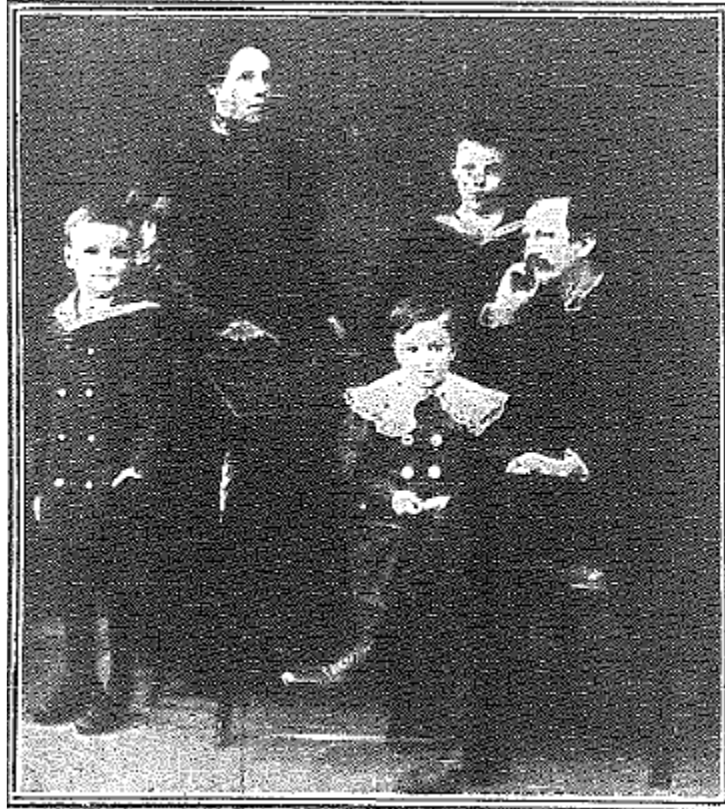
The Paisley Central Hall scheme is the outcome of the knowledge of what is best for a great centre like Paisley. It is also part of a very much needed Methodist forward movement in Scotland. The Edinburgh Mission, the Windsor Halls in Glasgow and Paisley. are three of the most encouraging developments Methodism has had in Scotland. The Methodist people have become familiar with the success Methodism has achieved in Paisley. Methodism tried to get established in Paisley time after time and failed. Now, at last it has triumphed. The present success has, been won by the work that Methodists have always appreciated and honoured.

We should be grateful if every reader of this article would have a share in the building of the home for a very loving and spiritual Church. Paisley is a witness that Methodism when Methodist, triumphs. That this large Church has been created in Scotland and from the people without the Churches, is splendid witness to the work that the Rev W. H. Rolls has done and to the power of God's Spirit still to make the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation." in most unlikely and difficult surroundings.

When Methodism first entered Paisley, we cannot say, but Mrs. A. W. Black of Nottingham has in her possession Sunday School anniversary hymn sheet which shows that in 1825 there was a Sabbath School with 600 scholars and that on Sunday, March 13, 1825, the anniversary services were held, and two services preached by the Rev. J. Hicks. It would seem from this that there must have been a very considerable Church in Paisley at that time. The '49 movement, however, swept over the Paisley Church and in 1850 the chapel was sold. The handful of people

that were left hired a room in Old Sneddon Street. The Rev. J. D. Stevens will know this room, for in it he preached his trial sermon as a local preacher. The Rev. John Bell, of our Home Mission Office, can also tell, when he was a boy, he often went with, or met his father returning from, his appointment at Paisley. Ten years Paisley is part of the Old John Street Circuit, Glasgow. In 1853 the Society ceased and for thirty-three years Methodism had no services in Paisley.

The Home Mission Committee of the District during that time had great uneasiness as to our inability to re-enter Paisley, and enquiries were made on several occasions as to the possibility of again establishing ourselves there.



Rev. W. H. Rolls, Mrs. Rolls and Family

It was felt that in such an industrial centre there was a great opportunity for the Methodist Church. It was not until 1896 that services were held again. The Rev. T. H. Mawson, with the Rev. T. Brian Castle met some twenty persons favourable to the formation of a Wesleyan Methodist Church in Paisley, a room was taken in the Clark Town Hall, and on November 5 a week-night preaching service was held, the class meeting after the service. Mr Mawson, with the Glasgow and neighbouring ministers, gave their services, and gave this effort a trial, their congregation varying from ten to seventy-five. The Stone Street Baptist Chapel was next secured, and the opening service was conducted on February 4, 1897, by the Rev. H. J. Sugden of Greenock.

The record is: "Result, 75 to 80 present – not commensurate, with advertising." The Rev. Edward Grainger was liberated from Falkirk and sent to try his hand at Paisley; he was succeeded by others sent; from the President's List of Reserve. In 1898 the Paisley Road Circuit, Glasgow, had Paisley under its care. During five years Paisley had six ministers and this constant change did not, in Scotland help the work at Paisley. Accustomed as the Scottish people are to long pastorates, pastorates of a few months did not give Methodism a chance to take hold. and the renewed effort to establish Methodism in Paisley seemed doomed to fail.

The Synod Home Mission Committee in 1902 considered the case of Paisley and concluded that the work there was in such an unsatisfactory condition that they could not continue the grant, and the cause, must be given up. Withdraw from Paisley! They appointed a deputation to meet the Paisley Leaders' Meeting and convey to them this decision. Their visit gave them a surprise. One member said, "We went down to conduct a burial service, but the corpse was too lively to be buried."



Paisley Leaders' Meeting

The Paisley friends asked to be allowed to go on for another year, and they would not ask for the grant. One leader, a good North of England Methodist, said. "You may shut chapel up and take preacher away but, I'm a Methodist and shall hold a class meeting even if I have to hold it in my own house!"

The Synod recommended that the offer of the Paisley friends be accepted, and that they be allowed another year. "It's no use prolonging the agony, the sooner we abandon our work in Paisley the better; let us withdraw with as little disgrace as possible. Later we may organise a well-considered attack upon Paisley." was the judgment, of one, at least. This, however was not, the opinion of another member who had felt the shame of withdrawal. and believed Paisley might yet be a success. Springing to his feet he said, "Here is a town with 80,000 people. Everyone knows that non-church going is increasing in Scotland and in Paisley large numbers are outside all the Churches. Instead of withdrawing we should attack the problem as if we intended to solve it. My judgment is to take a large hall and send the best men you have got and establish a Mission on the lines of the English towns. What's the use of spending large sums in propping up little causes that are never likely to be self-supporting. We need to spend one large sum in the place where there is a prospect of making an impression. If you wanted to sell boots in a town of 80,000 people you would not take a deserted shop in a back street and send an inexperienced salesman. The wrong policy has been pursued at Paisley."

Methodism always gives a chance to a man with ideas and pluck. The Rev. W. H. Rolls saved withdrawal from Paisley by his bold and sensible speech. Although he was engaged to Chester for the next Conference, it was clear that God had given Scotland the man for Paisley and instead of Chester. Mr. Rolls went to Paisley as Methodism's forlorn hope The, last five years has justified Mr. Rolls's faith and policy, and his appointment to Paisley. Success has meant hard work, but it has meant hundreds of conversions, and it is this that always delights the Methodist people. It also means money – to house the Church that has been created and Methodists never withhold their support to Methodist need. Mr. Rolls took the Good Templar Hall that seats over a thousand people and in the early days he had a difficult, task. The Congregations were not large, but the membership quarter by quarter increased. The, handful of members have now become nearly 400 and the morning congregation 500, whilst in the evening; the Hall is crowded. The class contributions in the June prior to Mr; Rolls's entering upon his work, were £4, now they are £24. The collections average £4 a Sunday. There is a school of 250 scholars.

Chatting with Mr. Rolls the, other day. I asked him "Tell me something about your start. What did Methodism mean in Paisley when you took charge? "A membership of 60; a Sunday School of 80," he replied. "On the first Sunday morning I preached to a congregation of 100 but it was many months before there were as many present on an ordinary occasion on a Sunday morning again. In the evening, congregations varied from 150 to 300. We had, however, from the, first, some striking conversions. The class meetings greatly increased in attendance, and the outlook became increasingly hopeful. In the early days the, Rev. H. Howard May conducted mission and by his attractive preaching, he gathered large congregations, many being the members of other Churches in Paisley That mission did much to established the, work in the favour of the people of the town, and to-day no one is

more eagerly welcomed.

In January of 1901 a ten days' mission was conducted by Josiah Nix. There were 500 pledges taken, and there were a large number of conversions. At a gathering of the converts a week after the mission sixty joined the Church. Four of the present members of our Leaders' Meeting were the converts of Mr Nix's Temperance mission. Mr. Nix's mission touched the non-church-going people. The congregations were doubled, and ever since have continued to increase. We have never looked back since then. That mission was the turning point in our work."

"How did you manage to get your orchestral band?"



Paisley Mission Orchestral Band

"I had not been long at Paisley before I felt the need of an orchestral band to lead the singing. That need was met in quite a providential way. One November there were five enquirers. After the, prayer meeting I had these five persons in the enquiry room. During the week I had been reading Dr. Denny's book on the Death of Christ. It occurred to me it was a fine chance of testing Dr. Denny's theory of the Atonement. I began by telling them of my reading and said that Dr. Denny stated that, after all, the words of the old revival hymn — "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe" — had the root of the matter in them. I expounded the words to them. Sin is a debt the sinner can never pay. Jesus Christ has paid the debt the sinner could not pay. By faith in Him we may now receive the assurance that our debt is cancelled. Very quickly and with little emotion the five trusted in Christ and began the new life. Among them was a man and his wife who had been separated for several weeks. He had tramped the streets of Glasgow some days with little food, and more than one night without shelter. Heart-sick he returned to Paisley, found his wife and said, 'I have come back. Will you give me another Chance?' She replied, 'I can do no other. I was praying for you this morning. The next night they found their way to the Good Templar Hall and decided for Christ. On the way home one of the stewards of the mission said. 'I hope that man will stand, but I am doubtful. He ought to be in a good position in Paisley to-day, but he has been completely mastered by the drink.' The man took a great interest in the Mission and gradually regained his position in society. When the suggestion was made to form an orchestral band, this man said. 'Do you know I can play the violin and teach it? If you will give me a room one night a week I will get a dozen young people to purchase violins, and we will make a start.'

Violins were not sufficient alone. The providence of God helped us again. John Slack had been won for Christ in Josiah Nix's mission and at the first meeting he conducted in the Canal Street Mission Room an ex-Drum-Major an of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders signed the pledge and gave himself to Christ. He had been an old public-house friend of John Slack's and now he had found the Christ John Slack had found. he naturally said, 'Where John Slack goes I'll go.' He applied to become a member of the Mission. I saw him and discovered he was a musician of the first order. I said, 'Can you play the cornet?' 'Yes, but I have not got one.' 'Have you another instrument?' 'Yes; a tenor trombone.'

'Is that any good for an orchestra?'

'Why do you not know that is the finest instrument in the world to assist an orchestra?' He came with his trombone and soon brought another friend with his clarinet. Then he discovered a young man, and trained him to play the 'cello.

Now we have an orchestra of fifteen to twenty performers, which renders magnificent service. The cost of the band to the Mission has been practically nothing and the work done by it has been invaluable. The choir, too, has been of very great assistance in our worship. We owe much both to choir and band under the care of Mr. H. Watson and Mr. W. Campbell.”

Mr. Rolls has thus not only been able to win men for Christ but has also secured their gifts and services for Christ. As Jesus secured Matthew’s pen, so he is ever turning the talents of men into nobler use. The weekly services at Paisley are such as are familiar to the circuit Methodist — or ought to be. Monday night has its prayer meeting, Tuesday its class meeting, Wednesday its class and choir practice, Thursday its fellowship meeting, Friday its band practice, Saturday its temperance meeting. This meeting has been most fruitful of good and has given to the Mission conversions that have become some of Paisley’s best members. “The day is coming when we shall learn how to value the Saturday night’s opportunity for getting at the people. Paisley has discovered the great opportunity Saturday gives and the friends are using it to good purpose. What the Saturday night will mean to Paisley when the New Hall is opened, God alone can tell. It is very pleasing to find that the circuit chapels are more and more using Saturday night — I think that all Glasgow Churches have their Saturday night gathering. It is most productive of good.”

Methodism in Paisley has many witnesses! The New Hall is to be their church and their home. Missions may be expensive, but they are justifying the expense by the people that they win for Christ. The Paisley Hall including the site will cost £16,000; £9,000 has already been raised. It is hoped that £7,000 will be secured by the stone-laying and opening services. This necessitates help from friends south of the Border.



The Methodists in Scotland have contributed very generously and will still do their utmost. It is hoped that £500 will be raised to place on the stone to be laid by Scotland’s Chairman, the Rev. J. Williams Butcher. Paisley is a witness to his capable chairmanship. Methodists throughout the Connexion are asked not only to help Paisley, but to unite, with the small company of Methodists in Scotland to do honour to one who has earned their confidence and secured their affection and esteem. The present success, which is the crowning of all the past work, gives an opportunity for many to find that in helping Paisley — “There is a blessing in it!”