



A writer of no mean ability, who lived in Spen Valley about a century ago, concludes some observations on the attractive character of history, as follows :—“ Man indeed seems to have a natural tendency to the study of history, and seeks with eagerness to trace the revolutions of peoples and kingdoms which are known to him. He is anxious to become acquainted with the history of his own country, and is above all curious to learn something of those who have inhabited in former times the place where he was born or in which he lives, and of the events in which they were engaged.” We do occasionally meet with people who apparently feel no curiosity about the past, and who exhibit little regard for things ancient, but these form the exceptions to the rule. The words of Thomas Wright, just quoted, are fortunately true of the great majority. Intelligent men generally thirst for information of this kind, and some have been found in all ages whose love of antiquarian pursuits has become so absorbing that they have spent their lives in analysing legendary lore, testing doubtful narratives, and bringing out genuine history from a tangled web of fact and fable.

I have for many years felt that it was someone's duty to write a history of Nonconformity in Spen Valley. I was under the impression that the late Rev. M. Howard, after his retirement from the active duties of the ministry, was preparing such a work; and was disappointed to find on his decease that his labours had not extended beyond a few brief notes respecting the place of worship with which he had so long been associated. As I had in my possession, more information, perhaps, respecting the early history of Nonconformity, than any other person, I determined in response to many urgent solicitations to endeavour to compile a brief account myself, and this little volume is the result.

I need hardly say that if the detailed history of every Chapel which has been built even during the last half century, had been attempted, the volume would have been much larger; but my object has been rather to elucidate, so far as I could, the origin and early history of Nonconformity here, than to enter into lengthy accounts of events respecting which some of my readers would be much or more familiar than I am myself. That the brief record which I have been enabled amidst many difficulties and hindrances to compile, has many faults no one knows better than the writer; but I have told the story in the best way I could in the very limited time at my disposal, and the narrative, such as it is, will at any rate form a basis for some more worthy effort in the future.

With respect to the origin of the Academy or College at Heckmondwike much information will be found here which will be altogether new to the reader. This I have drawn chiefly from some recently discovered letters and papers written by the Rev. Thomas Scales, a deceased Congregational minister, who it is well-known took great interest in the early history of the West-Riding churches.

I have been asked how it is that the Moravians have not been classed amongst the Nonconformists of Spen Valley. It was my intention to include them, but I was informed by a good authority

that the Moravians did not consider themselves Nonconformists. As I had no wish to place this estimable body under a name to which they appear to object, I reluctantly omitted them altogether. A sketch of the rise of the Gomersal settlement would have made a most interesting chapter.

Before closing these prefatory remarks I desire to acknowledge the kindness of all friends who have given me aid in any way. I wish especially to cordially thank those who have enabled me to make the book more attractive by means of illustrations. The portrait of the Rev. Oliver Heywood is from a plate kindly lent by Mr. T. Horsfall Turner, the well-known antiquarian writer; and that of the Rev. James Scott, the honoured Principal of Heckmondwike College, is from a plate belonging to the Rev. B. Nightingale, of Preston. The picture of the College is from a block lent by Mr. Scruton, author of "Old Bradford," &c. A few of the chapels are from blocks belonging to the authorities at the places they represent. Those of the Gomersal chapels are from photographs by Mr. W. L. Berry of that town, and that of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Chapel is from one furnished by Mr. A. W. Knowles. Nearly all the rest are taken from photographs supplied by Mr. J. J. Stead, of Heckmondwike, to whom I am also indebted for much assistance in many ways.

F. P.