TRUST
IN
FREEDOM

THE STORY OF
NEWINGTON GREEN
UNITARIAN CHURCH

1708 - 1958

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Printed for the Trustees of the Unitarian Church
by
Barnes Printers

CHAPTER I

"THE FERTILE SOIL"

A Church has stood on Newington Green for 250 years; throughout ten generations men and women have looked to this building as the sanctuary of their hopes and ideals. Such an anniversary encourages us to pause and consider the path by which we have come and to look to the way in which our feet may tread. Over the entrance to Newington Green Church is written the word "Unitarian". This may not always mean a great deal to the passer-by but in it is the key to the past, present and future life of the congregation. In this small corner of London, the tides and influences which have brought about the gradual liberalising of religion for many, were felt, and enriched the lives of a few. This brief study of the congregation reveals in cameo the root, stem and flower of the Unitarian Movement.

As with all hardy plants, the roots go deep, but the real origins lie in the Puritan awakening which stirred England in the 16th and 17th centuries. When King Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome in 1534 and established Protestantism throughout his realm, he was moved by private interests. Nevertheless a great number of his people at this time had grown tired of the authority of the Roman Church with its lax and corrupt practices and were beginning to feel after greater freedom and a purer spiritual life. The establishment of a State Church seemed to offer some improvement and so, through loyalty to the King, the changes which were made were accepted by the majority of people. Although a breach had been made with the old order, there was as yet no relaxation in the discipline of the Church, which was now in a stronger position, backed by the power of the throne.

At this time, Newington Green was a small hamlet just north of London near the road to Enfield, amidst a heavily forested area. In these times the great nobility including Henry, Earl of Northumberland, Thomas, Lord Cromwell, and the powerful family of Dudley kept up hunting lodges in the vicinity, but changes were taking place. Gradually rich London merchants were coming to live in the larger houses while among the poor, conditions were slowly improving. With a better standard of life and education, new ideas spread a light that germinated the seeds of independent thought. No doubt from earliest times light-hearted religious scepticism was heard in the ale houses, but now the questionings

of the need for blind obedience to the Church in spiritual matters became more earnest. This fresh zeal for a purified religious life affected the whole of society but it was especially strong among independent tradesmen and merchants who had made their own way in the world; with the confidence born of success they began to search for the treasures of heaven in the same way that many had found the treasures of earth.

The test of the infant Protestantism came in the terrible years 1553-1558 when Queen Mary I sat upon the throne. The new sovereign was a Roman Catholic and sought to re-establish her religion in the land. The horrors that followed left a permanent mark upon the English character and caused all serious Christians to consider the foundations of their faith. Rather than smother their consciences many fled to exile—to Holland, Geneva and the Protestant States of Germany. Others were despoiled of property, imprisoned and faced torture and death by fire. During these years it is clear that many Protestants worshipped secretly in the neighbourhood of Newington Green, as at the Saracen's Head in Islington. We know that in 1557 at least seven persons perished for their faith, four of them in Islington, and in the following year out of a party of twenty-seven worshippers who were seized in the fields just outside the village, thirteen suffered in the flames at Smithfield, while others rotted in Archbishop Bonner's prison at Newgate.

The time of trial passed, however, and with the coming of Elizabeth in November 1558, Protestantism was permanently established, but its character had altered. During the Marian persecution men suffered without relying on the authority of a Church to tell them how to act or what to believe; they had been guided only by their hearts and the Bible. Now that times were better, they did not want to surrender cheaply that freedom of conscience that had cost them dear when times were worse. Again, many of the exiles, amongst whom were the most pious and scholarly men of their day, returned home, having drunk deeply of Calvinism at Rotterdam and Geneva. The gloomy philosophy of John Calvin is familiar enough, with its teaching of the damnation of the majority of men, but it also fostered a tough individualism, ardent for liberty, if not for tolerance. The Calvinist felt himself answerable personally to God for the salvation of his soul and between man and his Maker no Church or other authority could intercede or interfere. There was, however, a great deal of confusion in religious thought and ideals, but whilst the menace of the Roman Catholic Church to Protestantism in England threatened from within and without, most people were content with the Elizabethan settlement which sought to contain the moderates of all parties within one Church.

As time passed and the dangers of Roman Catholicism were receding, differences arose on matters of ritual and church government which made it increasingly difficult for the Puritans to stay within the Anglican Church. Early in the 16th century small groups began to break away and to found their own churches, but subsequently persecution forced many of these into exile, including the "Pilgrim Fathers". Furthermore, the position was aggravated by the Stuart kings who succeeded Elizabeth I; they did not have the gift or the wish to compromise in matters of religious or political authority. Until well after this period the power of the Church and the State was regarded as indivisible and any threat to one appeared to menace the other. It therefore came about that the causes of religious and political liberty marched side by side for many years. The political troubles which gave rise to the Civil War in the reign of King Charles I greatly altered the position of the Church in this country.

In the meantime the changes which were affecting the locality of Newington Green continued. At the time of the Civil War there is little doubt that the majority of the inhabitants, having City connections, supported the cause of Parliament and were Puritan in sympathy. The Manor of Stoke Newington was no longer held by the Dudleys who were kinsmen of the Royal Family, but had passed by marriage to Francis Popham, a Colonel in Cromwell's army. The Rector of the Parish was Dr. Thomas Manton, the famous Puritan divine who often preached before the Roundhead Parliament. Thanks largely to the support of London and the prosperous Home Counties, the Parliamentary forces were successful in the field. But there was no settled government. Political and religious faction broke out amongst the Puritan party and the Protectorship of Oliver Cromwell provided only a temporary solution. For a time it looked as if there would be further bloodshed, but the country was tired of war and the majority of people were glad to welcome the restoration of the Monarchy with the return of Charles II to the throne.

Amongst the Puritans, the Presbyterians were the largest and most moderate party. They were not as strongly opposed to the Monarchy as to the King's misrule in ignoring the rights of Parliament, neither were they against a National Church. During the Commonwealth they had lost power to the more extreme Independents who enjoyed the support of the Parliamentarian army but now they looked forward, perhaps too trustingly, to a new era of stability in political and religious life. After the King's return, discussions were held in the Palace of the Savoy between the leaders of the Presbyterian, Independent and Anglican Churches in order to find a basis which might include the whole country within one broad Church. This hope was not fulfilled, although many Presbyterians, led by Richard Baxter, nourished it for a great number of years. With the failure of these talks, the country was fated, for good or ill, to have a divided religious heritage.

During the Commonwealth many Puritans within the ranks of the Established Church had made their position clear. With the return of the King it was not long before measures were taken to silence or eject these men from their livings. For most of them the blow came on St. Bartholomew's Day 1662 which was the day when all the clergy were required to comply with the Act of

Uniformity demanding conformity to practices and observances that cut clean across Puritan beliefs. Rather than abjure their convictions, nearly 2000 clergymen came out of the Church of England. These men included some of the most learned and talented the Church possessed. Many were elderly or in poor health and very few had any other calling which they could follow, but they forsook everything for conscience' sake. For a time the position looked hopeless, since persecution followed the ejection when it became clear that loyal men and women were prepared to stand by their Ministers and their beliefs.

The reaction to the Act of Uniformity demonstrated once again the power of the human spirit to rise against oppression. The Government which passed the Act did not expect that, in spite of persecution and suffering, new congregations would spring up faithful to the cause of religious freedom and the right of conscience.

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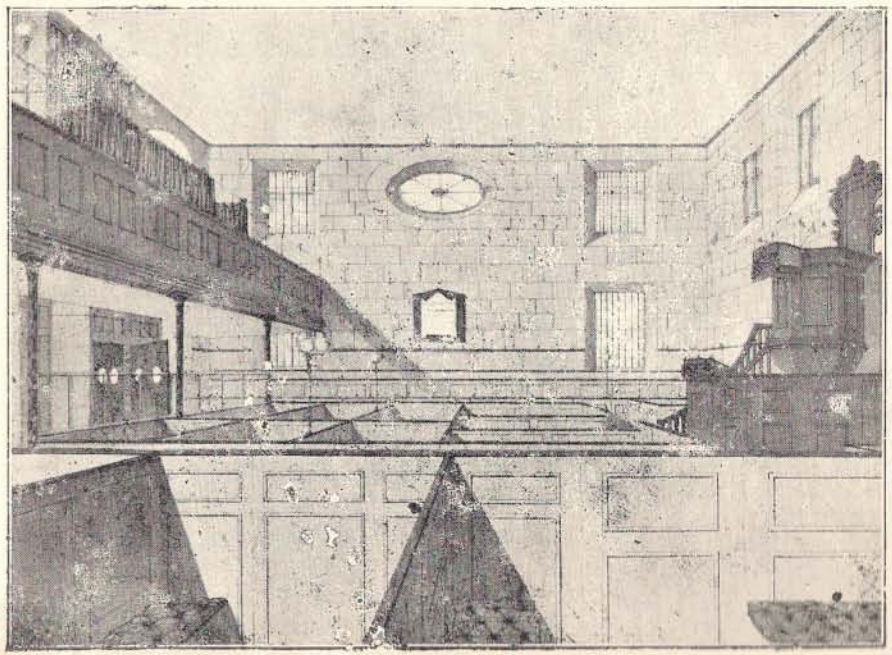
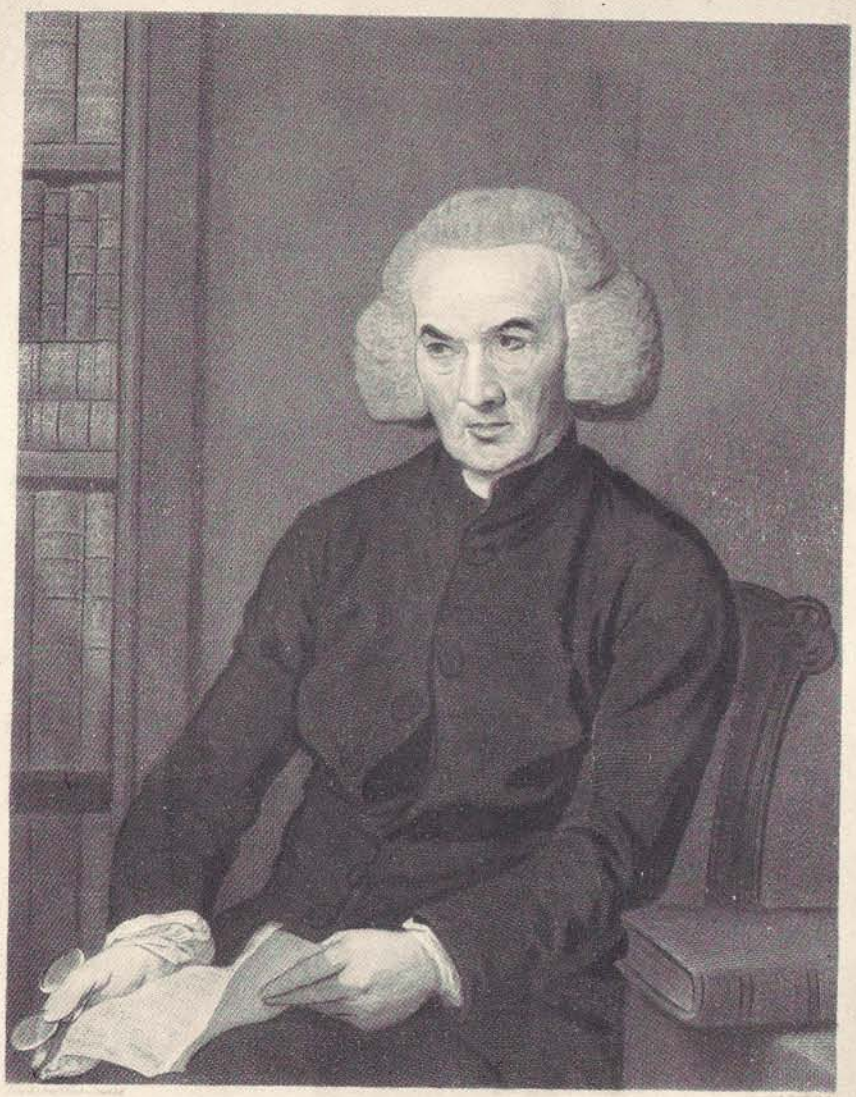
The Meeting House as it appeared during the first 150 years after its erection.



The Interior in 1850, substantially unchanged since 1708, except for the Gallery, which was erected in 1846 and the memorial to Richard Price, put up in 1843.



RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

CHAPTER II

"THE CHURCH IS BUILT"

After 1662 times were hard for those who would not conform and during the next ten years there was cruel persecution of dissenters found at worship. There can be little doubt that one or more of the large houses overlooking the Green were the scene of such secret religious meetings, although to be descovered meant heavy fines, imprisonment or even transportation. As the neighbourhood of Newington Green was isolated and the Lord of the Manor sympathetic, there appears to be no record of a mass arrest of worshippers which was common elsewhere. Not far away, in Stoke Newington, we learn that the fines levied upon Charles Fleetwood and his son-in-law Sir John Hartopp for such offences amounted to £7000.

During this period, the silenced Ministers were not anxious to draw attention to themselves as the authorities were quick to act against them. In the circumstances, many were glad to find shelter at Newington Green, remaining at the same time conveniently close to London where they had many friends. A surprising number of these Ministers settled in the locality, often only briefly, soon after the Ejection. One of these was Daniel Bull, who had been Rector at the Parish Church. It is likely that many of his old parishioners stood by him in these dark days, for we read in one early record that the dissenting congregation which was later established at Newington Green, was made up chiefly of these who had been hearers of Dr. Manton and Mr. Bull at Stoke Newington " and could not fall in with the National Establishment ". At this time, however, there was probably no settled congregation of dissenters but it seems likely that services were conducted from time to time in private houses by one of the Ministers living close by. Among these was Jonathan Grew, who was constantly harried and spent some time in hiding, before founding a Presbyterian Chapel at St. Alban's in 1698.

Many of the dispossessed clergy sought to make a living by taking in private pupils or conducting schools, although they were often greatly hampered by the authorities. Such a one at Newington Green was Luke Milbourne whose wife maintained a small school as he was not licensed to teach. These schools varied a great deal in standard and were usually small.

But in addition there were the Dissenting Academies and of these four or five were real centres of learning and compared favourably with the ancient Universities in their academic standards. These latter had reached a very low ebb in both scholarship and morals, so much so that it was not unusual for Anglicans to send their sons to Dissenting Academies. It is, therefore, remarkable that two such Academies should be found at Newington

the congregation at the time of this great step forward. Little is known of him except that he was early orphaned and had a difficult struggle in his younger life. His preaching was noted for its practical usefulness which emphasised good conduct rather than the niceties of theological belief; " his doctrine was Truth according to Godliness ".

We do not know much about the congregation in these early years. It is possible, but not likely, that they had built a Meeting House before the present one, although it is certain that they had formed a well established society long before 1700. They met in the houses of their leading members, Mr. Morton (probably a relative of Charles Morton), Major Thompson, who had apparently fought with Cromwell's army, Mrs. Mogart and Mrs. Hewling, whose two sons Benjamin and William were condemned to death by Judge Jeffries after Monmouth's Rebellion in 1685. The time came, however, to make more certain provision for the future. Nicholas Locke had bought a house and garden in 1694 for the benefit of his married daughter, Mrs. Rebecca Harrison, and in 1708 her son, Edward Harrison, a goldsmith, erected the Chapel at a cost of £300. He leased it to Messrs. Mason and Morton, two members representing the congregation, at a rent of £17 per annum which was later reduced to £16 when part of the land was taken back. These gentlemen installed the pulpit, pews, and other furnishings at a cost of £96 which was largely met by the members buying or renting pews.

This was a great undertaking for a small body of men and women who probably totalled less than twenty subscribers, and who, although not actively persecuted, still had to suffer many disadvantages for their faith. Yet they had a firm belief in the rightness of their cause and were willing to venture much to establish and prosper it. Soon after the Chapel was built a new threat menaced its existence in the shape of the Schism Bill which, if passed, would have greatly worsened the lot of dissenters. The threat was averted, however, by the death of Queen Anne in 1714 on the very day the Bill was to have become law. In the same year John Russell, the first Minister of the newly built chapel, died.

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CHAPTER III

" THE EARLY YEARS " (1714-1758)

The congregation was known as Presbyterian for well over one hundred years after the building of the church. Although this description may have been true of the earliest members, it came quickly to have a wider meaning. These dissenters were originally as orthodox as their Anglican brethren but had refused to recognise the spiritual authority of a Church hierarchy. The earlier Calvinism had softened considerably but religion was still a personal matter between man and God, with the Bible accepted as the chief revelation of divine truth. Their faith lay in the trust of private judgment to discern the Scriptures. At first they did not consider that their conclusions might not be orthodox but gradually a few, then more, began to doubt the Scriptural authority of many traditional doctrines, especially that of the trinity.

This problem came to a head in 1719, when many eminent Ministers met in London at the Salters Hall, to consider a case of heresy in the West Country and whether a formal creed should be imposed upon dissenting Ministers and congregations. A small majority of the Ministers voted against subscription to such a creed, not because they condoned heresy, but because they refused to sacrifice freedom of religious opinion which had been so dearly bought. This was certainly the sentiment of the congregation at Newington Green, whose past and present Ministers, Joseph Bennett and Richard Biscoe, both took the side of liberty, the latter publishing a pamphlet against the proposal, entitled " A Charge of Partiality, Imposition and Assuming Authority ". The discussions were very heated, which widened the divisions between Presbyterians and Independents. The latter stood for orthodoxy and soundness of doctrine, whilst the former placed greater emphasis on integrity and free enquiry. It was a coincidence that in this year the Minister of the Stoke Newington Independent Chapel, Martin Tonkins, was forced to resign his charge after admitting doubts concerning the doctrine of the trinity. No such crisis occurred at Newington Green, but already the die had been cast which was to lead the congregation away from orthodoxy within the next twenty years.

Several of the congregation are known to us from this period but only a few are more than names. There are reasons for thinking that Daniel Defoe may have attended the church at some time during his twenty years' residence in Church Street, Stoke Newington, although he was never recorded as a subscriber. An American scholar, in a recent study* has summed up the evidence: " It is, then, probable that Defoe . . . went to the Presbyterian Congregation in Newington Green, where he had been a student in his youth." The other famous resident

* " Defoe in Stoke Newington." Arthur Secord, P.M.L.A. Vol. 66, p. 211, 1951.

of Stoke Newington at this time, Isaac Watts, was associated with Lady Abney's Independent Chapel, but in later life he was known to have adopted decidedly Unitarian opinions.

As we have seen, the number of subscribers to the church was not large. They formed a closely knit society, and their leader appears to have been the Treasurer who was responsible for the care of funds, the maintenance of the building and the distribution in poor relief of money collected at the quarterly Communion Service. The first Treasurer was probably John Hill who died in 1722. He was a prosperous London merchant who acquired land in Lancashire through marriage, as well as owning property in the City and at Newington Green. In his will he left legacies to two of the Ministers, Joseph Bennett and Richard Biscoe, but the bulk of his fortune was bequeathed to his young daughters, who were committed to the care of relations charged to educate " my dear children in the fear of God and in good living becoming their station in a middle way of life as usefull housewives ". At a time when a wide gulf separated rich and poor, it was these earnest citizens who followed " a middle way of life " who cemented the fabric of the nation and laid the foundation of Britain's greatness in the 18th century.

After the death of John Hill there was no Treasurer for a few years, during which time the Minister, Richard Biscoe, attended to the affairs himself. Biscoe had succeeded John Russell in 1714, and appears to have been a very able man. In 1727, he conformed to the Church of England. This is not altogether surprising, for following the years of persecution, Nonconformity passed through the shallows of disillusionment. Many dissenting churches perished at this time, for after the stirring struggle for liberty a new quality was needed to undergo steadfastly the disadvantages of a permanent minority group. The able dissenting Ministers were particularly tried, for they were poorly paid, had no hope of advancement and were sometimes narrowly checked by the congregations which maintained them. Paradoxically there was often greater freedom in the Anglican Church than amongst the dissenters. There is no evidence of such restriction upon the Minister at Newington Green, but it appears that Biscoe eventually decided that he could widen his sphere of usefulness elsewhere and so left, later to become Rector of St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, and Chaplain to George II.

The congregation barely survived the next twenty years, during which two more Ministers conformed; that it continued to flourish was due largely to Matthew Raper, who joined about 1720. Assisted in the early years by Timothy Guest, he was Treasurer from 1727 until 1748. A wealthy silk merchant and a Director of the Bank of England for many years, he supplies details of the early history of the Chapel in a short account which he wrote in 1744. From this we can judge that he was methodical and intensely interested in the cause of this small society. Although the prospect seemed dark he laid the foundation of a trust fund " for the better security that publick worship should be there kept up in future ",

helped by three other members, Mrs. Russell, Mrs. Hegg and Samuel Harris. Samuel Harris was an East India merchant who may have been one of the founders of the Church and whose family was destined to play a prominent part in its life for over two hundred years. On the death of Matthew Raper in 1748 the £300 he had collected was transferred to the charge of the congregation by the first known Trust Deed and Daniel Radford, son-in-law of Samuel Harris, succeeded to the office of Treasurer.

This year marked a turning point in the fortunes of the church. Since Biscoe had resigned in 1727 there had been six Ministers and several periods during which there was no pastor at all. No doubt this weakness was partly due to the small resources of the congregation who could seldom offer more than £40 p.a. for the Minister's salary. In the circumstances they were forced to accept Ministers who could supplement their income in other ways, and no less than four were also Librarians at Dr. Williams's Library. They were usually young men, newly trained, and without family responsibilities. Mr. Paterson succeeded Biscoe in 1729, but he conformed also within three years and was followed by Robert Whitear, who had previously assisted Dr. Calamy in the congregation at Princes Street, Westminster, which later moved to Stamford Street. Nevertheless, his stay was limited to four years, when Thomas Loveder took office until 1738 when he too conformed. From this time on matters improved, for on Christmas Day, 1738, Hugh Worthington came to the church. Like many dissenters denied entrance to the English Universities, he was educated at Glasgow and came to Newington Green while still a young man. He remained three years at Newington Green before commencing his long and memorable ministry at the Great Meeting, Leicester.

He was followed by Israel Lewis, a Welshman who is interesting as being the first Minister at Newington Green who was known to incline towards Arianism, the fore-runner of modern Unitarianism. This seems to show that the congregation had already quietly drifted from orthodoxy, since neither then nor later was there any upheaval as a result of his appointment. This was no doubt due to their small numbers and the close bonds that held them together, for as dissenters they were set apart and their social life was limited to their own circle which was further strengthened by marriage ties. This sense of being a large family has abided through the years and is just as strong today. Lewis left to go to Maidstone in 1745 and after a short interval the congregation received John Hoyle in 1748. He was the first Minister to stay for more than three or four years since Biscoe had left almost a generation before. Hoyle was noted for his skill as a preacher and remained at the Green for ten years; this must have helped to strengthen the church after the previous unsettled period. In 1757, however, he accepted a call to succeed the great Dr. John Taylor at the newly built Octagon Chapel, Norwich, where he served for the rest of his life.

The fresh energy which now discovered itself in the church's life was also due to its able Treasurer, Daniel Radford, who could

claim descent from that most celebrated ejected Minister, Philip Henry. He continued in office for nearly twenty years and distinguished himself in much the same way as Matthew Raper. The prominent part played by such members as these has always been conspicuous; in such a small society it is necessary for each member to share in the responsibilities and it has been this readiness to undertake such duties that has kept its witness alive where many larger causes have failed. By the middle of the 18th century, the church had passed its early troubles and was seeking to spread its ideals, which then lay in the field of religious and political liberty. The Toleration Act of 1689 had removed persecution but dissenters were still left as second class citizens, unable to hold public office, become servants of the Crown, or enter the Universities. In 1735 Matthew Raper had been elected to the Committee of Protestant Dissenting Deputies. This Committee had been formed in 1732 to bring pressure to bear on the Government to repeal the restrictive legislation. Thus early do we find a lay member of the congregation taking an active part in promoting the cause of civil and religious liberty.

In the second half of the century, Newington Green was to nurture a greater champion of freedom whose name was to echo half way round the world!

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CHAPTER IV

"THE AGE OF RICHARD PRICE"

The strength of the congregation has never been in its numbers but in the friendly bond of sympathy which many men and women of outstanding ability have found congenial. The inner life of the church must have been particularly strong in the second half of the 18th century which today represents its golden age. The early unsettled years were now past and the small society enjoyed the great benefit of two Ministries each lasting over twenty-five years; furthermore the next three Ministers were men of the highest distinction with national and even international reputations. The first and greatest of these was Richard Price.

Price came from Tynton, near Bridgend in S. Wales, where he was born in 1723 and where his father, Rev. Rice Price, was minister of a dissenting congregation. As a boy he attended the school of Rev. Samuel Jones of Pentwyn in Carmarthenshire, a dissenting minister who taught him to read widely and think liberally. His father was a stern Calvinist and in time his son came to question the narrow beliefs taught at home. On one occasion the father's displeasure with his son's views, flared up into a fit of anger, when he found young Richard reading a book suspected of spreading heretical opinions and threw it into the fire. It is suggested by Price's nephew, William Morgan, that it was in an effort to remove him from the unsettling influence of Mr. Jones, that his father sent him to Vavasour Griffith's renowned academy at Talgarth at the age of 15. Shortly after this, his father died, followed in less than a year by his mother, and his father's estate passed to the control of his elder brother. It was then that he left Wales and came to London at the suggestion of his uncle, Rev. Samuel Price, making his way largely on foot. With his uncle's encouragement, with whom he made his home, he continued his studies at Mr. Eames' academy at Walthamstow and subsequently entered the dissenting ministry. His early career as a preacher was disappointing, probably due to his taking too much to heart the remarks of Mr. Chandler, with whom he was associated at the Old Jewry Meeting, who rebuked him on the mode of his delivery. However, he was able to continue his theological studies while acting as chaplain and companion to Mr. Streatfield at Stoke Newington. Shortly before the death of his patron, he accepted an invitation to become morning preacher at Newington Green in 1758 and it must be more than a coincidence that it is from this time he began to show his true merit. He appears to have been on the friendliest terms with several of the congregation and it is possible that with their help and encouragement he found greater confidence. All his life he suffered from acute shyness and reserve, which hampered his effectiveness in the pulpit, so that on occasions he despaired and thought

of giving up the Ministry altogether. Nevertheless, he was persuaded to carry on, and in order to express himself more clearly he began to publish his sermons. This led him to study and write seriously upon general religious and philosophic subjects and it must be observed that his first major work was brought out in the year he came to Newington Green. This was an important treatise upon " Morals " which in many ways anticipated the ideas of Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher. The publication of this book brought him into friendly contact with the greatest men of his day including David Hume, who disagreed with him entirely but admired his tolerant reasoning. Later, the eminent American Unitarian Minister, William Ellery Channing, was to say of Price's book, that it " profoundly moulded my philosophy into the form it has always retained ".

Price was more than an abstract philosopher, however; the lofty code of morals he proposed, was for him a way of life and it is not surprising, therefore, that he was greatly loved and had many friends in all walks of life. His most constant friend was Joseph Priestley, who succeeded him in the pulpit at Hackney. Later on he became closely associated with Benjamin Franklin with whom he shared scientific interests, and Theophilus Lindsey, who he respected for his stand for conscience. Many came for his advice, even on one celebrated occasion the Prime Minister, William Pitt; all received his ungrudging help. John Howard, the prison reformer, who lived in Stoke Newington for many years, freely admitted his debt to Price. Often he gave financial help secretly, as when he assisted Mary Wollstonecroft. As a young woman she kept a school at Newington Green for a short while and attended the church at that time. It is believed that Price found the money that enabled her to visit her friend Fanny Blood at Lisbon. Later she earned fame as a pioneer of women's rights.

In common with many philosophers, Price was intensely interested in mathematics and he produced several papers on the Doctrine of Probabilities which, in 1764, resulted in his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. Furthermore, his study of chance caused him to examine the workings of Insurance Companies which were then quite recent institutions, and were causing general dismay by their liability to failure. He quickly saw that the basis upon which life assurance was then calculated was unsound and soon after he proposed better methods in his book " Reversionary Payments ". By this time, he was rightly regarded as an authority upon life assurance and annuities and he was called in by the " Equitable Assurance Company " to advise upon these matters.

His fame had now spread, and in 1769 Aberdeen University conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In the following year he became morning preacher at the Old Gravel Pit Church, Hackney, which was at the time one of the strongest dissenting churches in the country, but he continued as afternoon preacher at Newington Green until 1783. Dr. Price was noted for his unquestionable moral character, his deeply religious life and his

great learning, yet there was nothing forbidding about his manner. He was particularly fond of children, although his own marriage was childless, and Samuel Rogers, the poet, tells how Price was a constant visitor at his home and a great favourite with the younger members of the family. He interested them in his scientific experiments, and in Rogers' words " he would talk and read the Bible to us so wonderfully till he sent us to bed in a frame of mind as heavenly as his own ".

Samuel Rogers was the son of Thomas Rogers who had married Daniel Radford's daughter. In 1767, Thomas Rogers succeeded his father-in-law as Treasurer of the church and, as might be expected, became the leading member of the congregation. He was, as we have seen, a great friend of Price and the two of them journeyed together to Wales on horseback on more than one occasion. Until ill-health overtook him in later life, Price was extremely active, fond of riding and swimming and he regularly visited the Peerless Pool in Clerkenwell.

It was not long before Price observed certain grave defects in the Public Finance of the time, upon which he wrote with his usual vigour. He called for the re-establishment of a Sinking Fund to meet the National Debt and although the matter was controversial his recommendations were eventually accepted. He had been for many years a close personal friend of Lord Shelburne (later Marquis of Lansdowne) and through this friendship, as well as his writings on political economy which were making him known to the world, members of the Government came to consult him on financial matters. Quite naturally his interest in politics deepened so that in 1775 he played a prominent part in the discussion and pamphleteering which accompanied the American War of Independence. His strong feelings for justice and liberty caused him to side with the American colonists and his " Observations on Civil Liberty " which he wrote at this time, can still be read and appreciated. The newly created United States Congress was grateful for his help and invited him, in 1778, to become financial adviser to the American government, but he felt unable to accept this honour because of the wish of his wife, who was in poor health.

In 1783 Price finally left Newington Green after a connection of over twenty-five years. During that time he had raised himself to the heights of world renown without ever neglecting the needs of his small congregation. His influence upon the church was immense and it appears to have dominated the life of the meeting house until well into the 19th century. He was an avowed Arian—that is, he denied the doctrine of the Trinity but still retained certain beliefs regarding the supernatural nature of Jesus and the importance of miracles, and although his theology was based entirely upon his study of the Bible, it represented a great advance in those days. It can be assumed that the congregation held much the same views and possibly envisaged the widening of religious ideas, for in the earliest Trust Deed which has survived dated 1761, the fund, now grown to £500, was to be used to maintain the chapel

for " . . . the worship of God to be carried on therein as a majority of the persons usually resorting to such place . . . shall think fit and direct ".

After leaving Newington Green, Price associated himself with the great acclamation which greeted the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. The violence and excess which later showed themselves were not at first anticipated, so that most freedom-loving men and women looked upon the event as the dawning of a new age of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Price supported the new cause with eloquent pen and perhaps it was merciful that he did not live to see the tragedy which developed. He died in 1791 and was buried in Bunhill Fields at a service conducted by his friend Dr. Andrew Kippis. He was greatly mourned in Britain, America and France where the National Assembly stood to his memory and the " Quartier Richard Price " at Nantes was named in his honour. He had many titles to fame but perhaps the greatest was given him by the Duc de Rochefoucald—" the Apostle of Liberty ".

CHAPTER V

" NEW CAUSES FOR OLD "

When Price gave up taking the morning service in 1770, his place was taken by Thomas Amory who remained until his death four years later. Dr. Amory was greatly respected for his learning and for many years he had conducted an Academy in his home town of Taunton. As a preacher, he seems to have suffered from a weak voice and a tendency to speak over the heads of his hearers, nevertheless he became widely known through the large number of pamphlets he wrote. In an age without cheap newspapers and other means of communication, it was the tract and pamphlet which formed public opinion and created the conditions necessary for democracy. Although these writings do not arouse much interest today, they made their contribution to the thought of their time. It is not surprising to learn that Amory was a zealous champion of the dissenters and attempted to have the Toleration Act widened in order to give Nonconformists full civil rights. In religious matters he was, of course, liberal, but perhaps not so advanced in his views as Dr. Price. He died suddenly in 1774 and was buried in Bunhill Fields. For a few years there was no appointed preacher for the morning service but the position was filled in 1778 when the third worthy Minister of this period came to Newington Green. He was Joseph Towers, who remained until 1799. Like Price and Amory he was anxious for reform, but the gradual growth of freedom which had marked the century received a sharp setback in the last decade, from which Towers was to meet disappointment and even danger.

He was a man of great charm and good conversation, so that he found no difficulty in mixing in the best society of the day. Before his call to Newington Green to assist Dr. Price, he had had rather an unusual career. Born the son of a poor bookseller, he was apprenticed to the trade of printer. He had received very little formal education but his fondness for books soon gave him a wide learning, and his master, Robert Goadby of Sherbourne, encouraged his studies. He married well and after an unsuccessful venture in the book-selling business, he entered the ministry when nearly forty years of age, without any formal training. Like Price and Amory, he wrote voluminously on many subjects but although active in agitating for political reform, his chief interest was biography. He assisted Andrew Kippis, the well-known Arian Minister, in writing many articles for the " Biographia Brittanica ", a forerunner of the Dictionary of National Biography. In 1779 his considerable attainments were recognised by Edinburgh University which conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Laws.

Towers was intensely active for greater political freedom and four years after coming to Newington Green he was elected Secre-

tary of the " Society for Constitutional Information ". This was a highly respectable club which sought to widen the basis of government which was then in the hands of a very few people. The outbreak of the French Revolution, however, caused the authorities to suppress all movements for reform in such a way that there was actual persecution of many liberal minded persons. Towers himself was arrested in 1794 but was released after questioning, on the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The cause of political and religious liberty, for which Price, Amory and Towers did so much, received a heavy blow at this time and it says much for the tolerant leadership of these men that Britain did not follow France along the path of anarchy. After Price left, Towers conducted both services at the church for a few years, until James Lindsay came as afternoon preacher in 1788. Lindsay was a Scot by birth and remained at Newington Green for seventeen years. During most of that time he kept a small school, maintaining a long tradition, for since Charles Morton came in 1667 there can have been few years when there was no educational establishment at Newington Green. After the famous Academies of Morton and Gale, several of the early Ministers conducted schools and during the middle of the 18th century the " esteemed moral and political writer " James Burgh, who was a member of the congregation, maintained an Academy for nineteen years while Mary Wollstonecroft's school has already been mentioned.

On the death of Dr. Towers in 1799 the morning services were taken by John Kentish. Kentish had been educated at the Hackney College, which during its brief existence was closely associated with the church. Two of the founders in 1785 were Dr. Price, who was a tutor for some time, and Thomas Rogers, who was Chairman of the Governors. On the teaching staff were such men as Joseph Priestley, Gilbert Wakefield, Andrew Kippis and Thomas Belsham —as a contemporary put it: " As things went in England in 1793, Hackney College was a better Studium Generale than either Oxford or Cambridge at the same time." Unfortunately, the College failed after ten years and it is interesting to note that for a short time its equipment was stored at Newington Green. Kentish left in 1802 and after continuing for a brief period at Hackney, he took charge of the New Meeting, Birmingham, where he distinguished himself as a great Biblical and Oriental scholar. As the Dictionary of National Biography describes him: " Kentish was a man of great personal dignity, and his weight of character, extensive learning and ample fortune munificently adminstered, secured for him a consideration rarely accorded to a nonconformist minister . . . In politics an old whig, he was in religion a unitarian of the most conservative type, holding closely to the miraculous basis of revelation. His sermons were remarkable for beauty of style."

When Kentish left, the afternoon service continued to be taken by James Lindsay and Rochemont Barbauld was appointed as morning preacher. Barbauld was of Huguenot descent and it is reported that his grandfather had escaped from France after the

revocation of the Edict of Nantes, by hiding in a wine cask. He was educated at Warrington Academy where he met and married Anna Laetitia Aikin, the attractive and gifted daughter of Dr. John Aikin, the classical tutor. In her Memoir of her husband, Mrs. Barbauld says: " His reasoning powers were acute and he argued with great clearness . . . He gave the most liberal latitude to free inquiry, and could bear to hear those truths attacked which he steadfastly believed; the more *because* he steadfastly believed them." Unfortunately he was subject to fits of insanity which resulted in his taking his own life in 1808.

The Barbaulds came to Stoke Newington from Hampstead to be near Mrs. Barbauld's brother, John Aitkin, both Mrs. Barbauld and her brother were distinguished writers; Mrs. Barbauld wrote poetry and books for children whilst her brother engaged in journalism and biography, notably writing a life of John Howard. Wordsworth had a great admiration for Mrs. Barbauld whom he considered to be the best poetess of the day, and even Dr. Samuel Johnson spoke highly of her. She remained with the congregation until her death in 1825 and constituted a strong link with the past, for in early life she had been the intimate friend of such stalwarts as Joseph Priestley and William Enfield.

By the turn of the century many of Price's congregation had passed away. Thomas Rogers died in 1793 and although his son Samuel Rogers retained his connection throughout his long life, becoming a Trustee, he soon moved away to the fashionable district of St. James', where he reached fame as much by knowing the famous as by writing poetry. Nevertheless, the small congregation was still distinguished in the early years of the 19th century. Apart from the talented Aikin family, there were great Unitarian names such as Chamberlain, Kinder and Martineau amongst the subscribers. Furthermore, it is likely that James Mill attended the church for a short time while living at Newington Green, bringing with him his infant son, John Stuart Mill.

Shortly before Rochemont Barbauld died, Thomas Rees came as morning preacher but in 1808 he took over both services until he left five years later. Subsequently he became the first Minister of Stamford Street church and was held in high regard as the leading authority on the history of Unitarianism. He was also one of the first to draw attention to the Unitarian Church in Transylvania and to make contact with that movement. The friendly exchanges which developed were a source of strength and encouragement to the churches in both lands and are maintained to this day. Rees was yet another Minister to be honoured by a Scottish University, for he received the degree of Doctor of Laws from Glasgow in 1819. (It was not until more than fifty years later that dissenters could be awarded degrees by the ancient English Universities.)

When James Gilchrist came as Minister in 1813 the afternoon service was discontinued. In the same year an Act of Parliament was passed which was of great interest to the congregation. The

Act of Toleration in 1690 had given relief to dissenters but it did not extend to those who denied the Trinity, and although the harsh laws against Unitarians were not put into effect, the threat remained until the Trinity Act of 1813. Legal recognition did not prosper the cause of the church, however, which at this time began to decline. Gilchrist remained for fifteen years but towards the end of his ministry his opinions changed and he wrote a pamphlet entitled " Unitarianism Abandoned ". Naturally this caused great embarrassment to the members, as by this time the congregation, led by the Treasurer, Charles Kinder, was strongly Unitarian and quite out of sympathy with its Minister, who refused to resign. After a long dispute, however, he left, and from this period it has been a rule of the church that the Minister should be re-elected annually. This rather unusual procedure is now used as an opportunity for the congregation to express its appreciation of the work of its Minister.

The ten years following 1828 witnessed the lowest ebb in the fortunes of the congregation; four Ministers succeeded one another rapidly and in 1832 the number of subscribers fell to nine. No doubt the controversies that arose during the ministry of James Gilchrist weakened the life of the church but a deeper cause of this decline was the spirit which looked back rather than forward. The influence of Price and Towers still dominated the meeting-house although the times had changed and the ideals for which they stood were now almost accomplished. New causes and fresh ideals were needed to revitalise the church and, fortunately, they were forthcoming.

Newington Green itself had changed a great deal since the chapel was built and by the time Queen Victoria came to the throne it was a thriving and expanding suburb. This change reflected itself in the congregation of the chapel; although the old families remained, men with a more modern outlook were taking an interest in the cause. One result of the growth of industrialisation in England was the increasing number of people condemned to live in extreme poverty and degradation. The misery of the poor awakened a social conscience among many thinking people and induced in them a sense of responsibility for relieving the apalling conditions in which these people lived. In Stoke Newington many of the larger houses had become slum tenements and this fact must have influenced the growth of the new dedication to social service which made itself felt among the congregation. It is difficult to say exactly when this new feeling appeared, although it gained force rapidly after 1838 when Thomas Cromwell became Minister. The changes must have been silently working before this time, however, and it is possible that they began with the coming of Samuel Sharpe to the church in 1828.

Samuel Sharpe was the nephew of Samuel Rogers and so maintained the ancient link of his family with the church, although he had had an Anglican upbringing. Soon after joining he became Treasurer and for over thirty years retained his connection with

Newington Green. He is perhaps best remembered as an authority on the history of Egypt, an expert in ancient languages and Translator of the Bible, yet in his busy life he had many other interests. He kept his manner of living well below his means, in order that he might assist the two causes he loved best and for which he worked tirelessly—Education and Unitarianism. As a young man he taught poor children before beginning work each day at his bank and in later life, when a wealthy man, he donated many thousands of pounds for educational purposes. His efforts on behalf of liberal religion resulted in his election as Chairman of the British and Foreign Unitarian Society for the year 1870 and throughout his long life he industriously promoted the interests of " Christianity in its simplest and most intelligible form ".

CHAPTER VI

"THE IDEAL OF SERVICE"

If the second half of the 18th century was the golden age, then the middle of the 19th century was certainly the silver age of the church, for it was a period of intense congregational activity. From about 1840 onward, a new sense of social responsibility pervaded the old meeting-house and for the first time the church as a body became instrumental in putting religious ideals into practice. Until this time, the Puritan tradition of personal effort, had tended to leave the practical side of Christianity in the hands of each member, but times had changed and it was no longer possible for individuals to undertake the great tasks of political and social reform nor to mitigate the appalling evils and distress, which the Industrial Revolution had brought in its wake.

The leading figure in this new departure was Thomas Cromwell, Minister from 1838 to 1864. He was a remarkable man of great intellectual ability and high literary and antiquarian accomplishments. Like many Ministers, both before and after his time, he combined his charge with other employment and for over thirty years was Clerk to the Paving Commissioners of Clerkenwell. Despite his very busy life, he found time to devote an enormous amount of energy to church activities and undertook greater responsibilities than any Minister hitherto.

As he had come to Unitarianism from the Church of England, Cromwell had a preference for a liturgical service and soon after his appointment he expressed the wish that it should be used at Newington Green. The congregation agreed and the Prayer Book compiled by Theophilus Lindsey of Essex Street Church was adopted and with periodic revisions was in use for the Morning Service right up to 1938.

We have very little knowledge of the form of the early services but from the comments of Mrs. Barbauld and others, they appear to have been very plain with the emphasis on rather long prayers and sermons. In 1840 the service probably differed very little from that of a hundred years before, and at this time the hymn book compiled by Doctor Andrew Kippis, the great friend of Price and Towers, was still in use. This was now replaced by James Martineau's early Hymn Book and the musical part of the services was further stimulated by the introduction of an organ presented by the Treasurer, George Bracher.

It was also in 1840 that the Sunday School was organised by Mrs. Reid, an active church member who was warmly encouraged and assisted by Samuel Sharpe and Andrew Pritchard. The object of the school was primarily to educate the poor children of the neighbourhood, although a Children's Church was conducted on Sunday mornings. Later, it was possible to hold classes during the week and to form a library and savings club. The numbers on the register were surprisingly large, but attendance was often poor, as children were employed in the brickfields and as outworkers for the clothing industry. Work being seasonal, there was often much distress in the winter months and the practice began of visiting the children's homes. Soon a Domestic Mission Society was established, with the object of "Religious and Moral Improvement of the Poor of the Vicinity, with the amelioration as far as possible, of their social condition". The resources of the congregation were not great and relief could be given only in extreme cases, so the efforts of the Home Visitors were largely confined to advising the impoverished families how best to help themselves. As earnings were variable, savings schemes played a great part in the work and advice was also given on cheap and nutritious foods, cleanliness in the home, and the care of babies. The Reports of the Society present a startling picture of conditions just over a hundred years ago in the overcrowded slums of the borough, especially between Newington Green and Dalston, where smallpox and cholera were commonplace and chronic malnutrition was general.

The Sunday School improved its facilities and, under the supervision of Mrs. Reid helped by the Misses Emily and Matilda Sharpe, much useful work was done. It was further strengthened in 1854, when Frederick William Turner joined the staff and became Superintendent. He held this office for 42 years but continued his keen interest in the schools and their activities for a period of nearly seventy-five years! A few years later a small cottage behind the church was rented to provide the school with more room and in 1860 a regular day school was started. This was conducted by Miss Caroline Wilkinson until she was forced to resign for health reasons shortly before education was made a national responsibility in 1870, and as the need had passed the day school was closed. The maintenance of this school for ten years, however, represents a very worthy achievement.

The keen interest shown in the education of the poor had its counterpart in the efforts for self improvement amongst the congregation. In 1842, a Mutual Instruction Society was formed and although it did not survive long, it was succeeded almost immediately by the Newington Green Conversation Society. The membership of this Society was restricted to sixteen and as many of these were men and women of ability, the meetings maintained a very high level of debate. Although Thomas Cromwell, who had in 1842 been honoured with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, was the first President, the principal figure in the Society's proceedings was Andrew Pritchard. He was also the leading member of the congregation and was Treasurer from 1850 to 1873, during which time the annual subscriptions to the church almost doubled. He and his family were tireless in their support of the church and were especially anxious to make its cause more widely known. At the same time, he earned distinction by his valuable scientific work in connection with the design and use of the microscope and later

by his study of microscopic organisms. He was a friend of Michael Faraday and well acquainted with the current advances in science. For him, science and religion were one. He considered that scientific research must result in deeper awareness of religious truth, whilst the pursuit of religious truth can only be undertaken in the open minded spirit of scientific enquiry.

The congregation had many worthy members in addition to Andrew Pritchard, all of whom played an active part in its life. Men like Thomas Young, a solicitor, who first saw the possibilities and undertook the development of Clacton-on-Sea; William Titford, remembered for his great generosity in gifts of food, clothing and money for the work of the Domestic Mission Society and Sunday School; William Sharpe who, like his brother Samuel, worked selflessly for the cause of education; Henry Moore, who had been the first and for a short while the only official of London University at its foundation; Pishey Thompson, a notable figure who spent many years in the United States and wrote several books upon historical and topographical subjects. There were many others, each distinguished in his own field, yet each finding the time and energy to serve the church well.

For a few years Dr. W. B. Carpenter, father of the Rev. John Estlin and the Rev Russell Lant Carpenter, was a member of the congregation and it is regretted he did not remain longer before moving to Hampstead. As the life of the church grew stronger, its affairs became more complex and it was Dr. Carpenter who, in 1847, suggested the formation of a Committee. Prior to this, church business had been decided at meetings of all the subscribers whilst the Treasurer was responsible for the routine management. From very early days there had been a Clerk to the Congregation as in all Presbyterian churches who, in addition to leading the singing, also supervised the cleaning of the meeting-house and, when necessary, arranged for supply preachers. Gradually his duties became small and the office was discontinued in 1842, four years after the appointment of Thomas Cromwell.

Changes in the form of worship, church management and other activities were accompanied by alterations to the old building for by the middle of the century the original fabric was in need of extensive repair. Accordingly, between 1840 and 1850, the meeting-house was overhauled and at the same time changes were made to the front elevation, gas was laid on and the gallery erected. Meanwhile the first memorial tablets, to Mrs. Barbauld and Doctor Price, were erected inside the building. Before further works were undertaken, however, it was felt necessary to gain security of tenure by acquiring the freehold of the property, which was done in 1858; the Copyhold interest having been purchased in 1790. Following this step the building was completely renovated and enlarged in 1860 by forming the apse in the wall behind the pulpit. The exterior assumed its present appearance by the use of stucco rendering and the erection of the large pediment at the front. Perhaps the meeting-house lost a great deal of charm by these alterations

but the old structure was considerably decayed and it would have been too costly to restore it to its original form. The interior of the chapel, however, still retained its essential simplicity despite the removal of the centre group of box pews, and did not suffer the fate of many churches which were " improved " about this time.

The enterprising congregation was not backward in making its views known in political matters and almost yearly during this period a petition was presented to Parliament dealing with some important question of the day. It will not be wondered at, that many of these dealt with religious liberty. In 1844, a petition was lodged supporting the Dissenting Chapels Bill which was needed to allow Unitarian congregations to retain their ancient trusts. This Bill was passed and a few years later the congregation showed their sympathy for others still penalised for their religious beliefs for in 1847, a petition was made urging the removal of civil disabilities from Jews. Petitions were also submitted to allow dissenters to enter Oxford and Cambridge Universities and for the revision of the Authorised Version of the Bible; objects which were eventually secured. These and many other matters were supported by this small but energetic community. The traditions established many years before were continued and applied to a new age and the old ideals of religious freedom were enlarged to embrace the principle that all men should be liberated from the chains of poverty and oppression in order to serve God with full human dignity.

After a long and strenuous ministry Thomas Cromwell resigned his charge in 1864 and was succeeded by W. S. Barringer, who died tragically four years later. After another short ministry, James David Hirst Smythe came to Newington Green from the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, in 1872. This gifted man remained nine years during which he was concerned to explain and teach the philosophical and historical background of Christianity, by holding classes under the auspices of Manchester New College for the study of theology and kindred subjects. These were well attended and several members sat examinations and were awarded diplomas. These men and women were liberal in all their views but in their dedication to self improvement, the service of mankind and the glory of God, they showed a zeal which could not be surpassed.

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CHAPTER VII

"THE LIGHTS GO OUT"

The last part of Queen Victoria's "happy and glorious" reign was marked by a sense of achievement and of optimism. This mood was also reflected by the small meeting-house at Newington Green where the sacrifice and effort made earlier in the century now bore fruit in a flourishing church life. During this period, the size of the congregation grew to a peak of well over four-score members, the majority of whom were active in its cause. As time passed new members took the place of old, but a strong family tradition kept the community united. Andrew Pritchard died in 1882 but his position as leader of the congregation was filled by his daughter Marian and her brother Ion. At this time four families, themselves closely connected by intermarriage, dominated the affairs of the church and comprised no less than four-fifths of the total subscribers. These were the Pritchards, at one time numbering over twenty members; the Titfords, the Turners and the Youngs.

By 1880 the congregation had become the focus of a group of thriving organisations centred on the church. The chief of these was the Sunday School which grew as fast as teachers and accommodation could be found to meet its needs. There had always been great overcrowding but this was eased in 1887, when the new schoolhouse was built which has been of enormous benefit ever since. The erection of the schoolhouse was made possible by the purchase of the land by Marian Pritchard and the generosity of the congregation who raised the money for the building within a year or two. At its height the school numbered nearly 200 children, and was so well conducted that it was regarded as the best in its group by the London Sunday School Society.

Many younger members of the congregation assisted in the Sunday School but, increasingly, elder scholars helped also as teachers and so entered into the tradition of the church. Soon these young teachers and elder scholars of the Sunday School became an important part of the church's life and, with a view to meeting their needs, evening services were commenced in 1883. At first they were conducted in the winter months only and were always simpler and less formal than the morning services, at which the liturgy was used. So for many years two congregations existed side by side, each with a different character and somewhat different manner of worship, but sharing their ideals of a free religious faith. As time passed, the congregations mingled but as social changes took place in the neighbourhood, the element of the evening congregation grew stronger until after many years the morning service ceased altogether.

The Sunday School itself encouraged the growth of several other institutions. Space does not permit a detailed survey, but suffice

it to mention that out of the Sunday School's work grew up Young Men's and Young Women's Societies, a Provident Society, Savings Bank, and Library. In addition, Evening and Bible Classes were held, a Band of Hope and Temperance Society formed, a Mother's Meeting and Working Society organised to support local charities, and even Cricket and Cycling Clubs were established. At the same time the older congregation was active in founding associations largely concerned with self improvement and philanthropic work. The distinguished Conversation Society, which had ceased in 1865, was revived in 1883 as the Conversation and Field Society, adding summer excursions to the winter programme of talks and discussions. For the serious consideration of religion, a Society for Mutual Theological Study was organised, which continued the work of the Rev. Hirst-Smythe. Some of these institutions lasted many years, while others had only a brief existence, yet they all point to a tremendous energy issuing out of the inner life of the church.

Much of the credit for this enormous expansion is due to William Wooding, the Minister who served the church during twenty-five fruitful years, from 1881 until 1906. Before coming to Newington Green he had been a Congregational Minister who felt compelled to resign due to doubts on matters of orthodox belief, and had entered the teaching profession as a master at the City of London School. Soon afterwards he agreed to become morning preacher at Newington Green on a temporary basis, since at first he did not wish to break his connection with the Congregational body. In a short while, however, his views became fully Unitarian and he settled down to a long and useful ministry. He was always most warmly regarded by the members of the congregation while he, for his part, was unsparing in his efforts on their behalf. It had been upon his initiative that the evening services were commenced and very quickly he revised the morning Service Book to bring it more closely in accord with the beliefs of the congregation. He also revived the Communion Service, which had been discontinued many years before.

This reawakened interest in the conduct of worship drew attention to the musical part of the services which had become rather poor. The newly published Essex Hall Hymnal was adopted in 1891 and just over ten years later the present organ was installed, largely due to the munificence of Ion Pritchard. The old organ had been situated in the gallery but the new instrument was too heavy for such a position and was placed in the apse. Unfortunately this meant that Dr. Price's pulpit had to be removed and in its place the present platform and reading desk were installed; thus, by the early years of this century the old chapel had assumed its present appearance.

The vigour which characterised domestic church affairs was just as strong in matters of wider interest. Although the old struggle for political and religious freedom was now past, the congregation did not lose any opportunity to express its ideals in practice and close attention was paid to education, social welfare, women's suf-

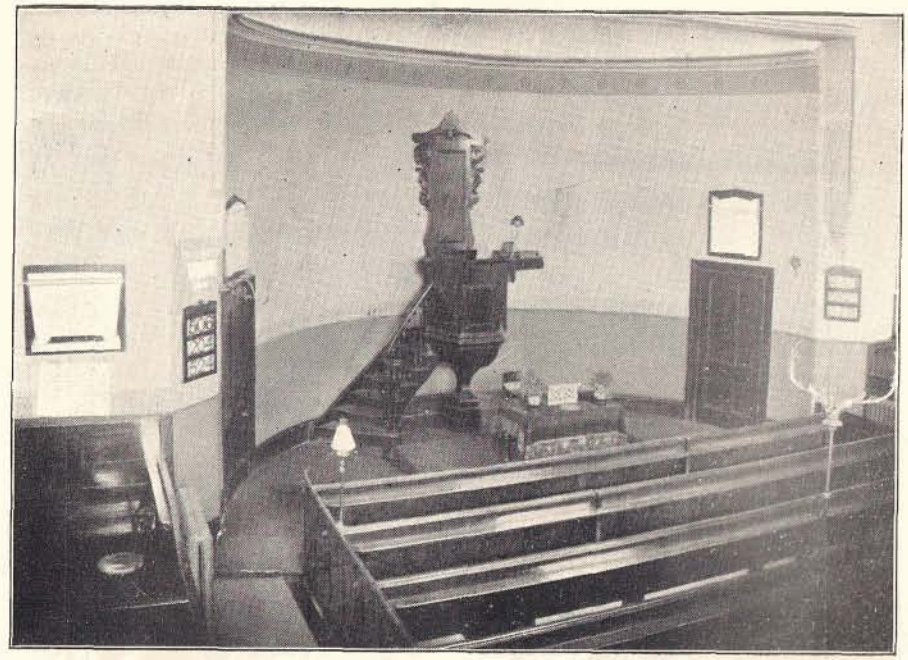
frage and other issues of the day. Nevertheless, the main concern at this time was the cause of Liberal Religion, which was beginning to gain unity and strength in the country. There had always been a tendency for those churches which had discarded the fetters of imposed authority in religion, to be jealous of their independence, and for many years the loose national organisation of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was a source of weakness in the denomination. We have, indeed, reason to be grateful to such people as Samuel Sharpe, and Marian and Ion Pritchard, whose firm but tolerant wisdom helped to consolidate the union of these churches which was essential to secure their place in the modern world.

Perhaps the finest representative of this generation was Marian Pritchard, who can properly be regarded as one of the leaders of modern Unitarianism. Apart from her great services to Newington Green, she was known throughout our churches for her interest in young people and the Sunday Schools. There are still many who remember her as " Aunt Amy ", under which name she edited the magazine " Young Days ", and who still recall the Oxford Summer Schools which she founded with her brother Ion for the training of Sunday School teachers. Much of her good work was done out of the limelight and went unrecorded, but one of her ventures, " Winifred House ", a convalescent home for sick children, is still in being. There were, too, many others who laboured selflessly in the same cause as Marian Pritchard, whilst holding high positions in the legal and medical professions as well as in commerce.

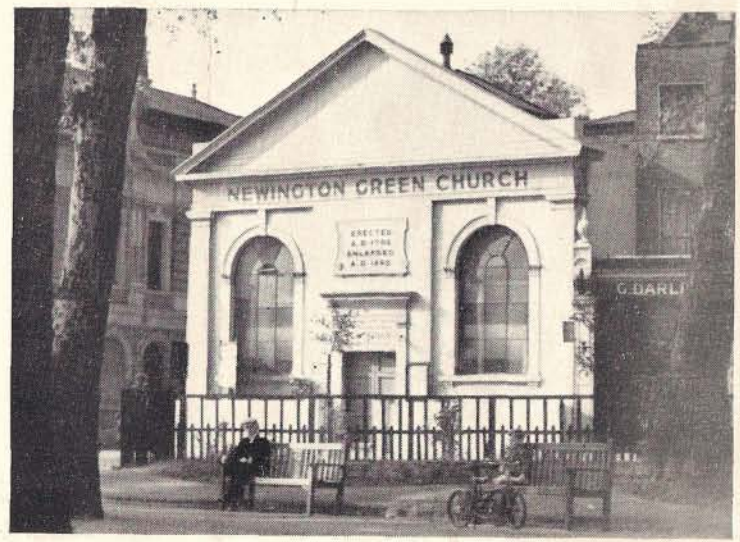
In many ways, the church reached its high-water mark in 1908, the year of the Bicentenary celebrations. Unfortunately these had to be postponed due to the tragic death of Marian Pritchard on the very eve of the anniversary meetings, since she had taken the chief part in the preparations. After 200 years the church seemed to be in a stronger position than ever before yet ironically the causes of decline were already present. The most tragic of these was a dissension which appeared within the congregation itself.

When William Wooding was compelled to retire from the ministry in 1906, through failing health, he suggested that his place might be filled by his colleague, Dr. F. W. G. Foat, who was also on the staff of the City of London School and College. In due course he was accepted and commenced his duties in the following year. He had considerable ability and great force of character with which he gave strong support to the New Theology movement of the Rev. R. J. Campbell and the " League of Progressive Thought and Service ". The message of the " Social Gospel " was, however, controversial, with its obvious political implications and unhappily in a short while, a large minority of the congregation became dissatisfied with his preaching. After a few years of strain, the difficult situation was resolved by Dr. Foat's accepting a call to Richmond Free Christian Church, but not without first weakening the congregation.

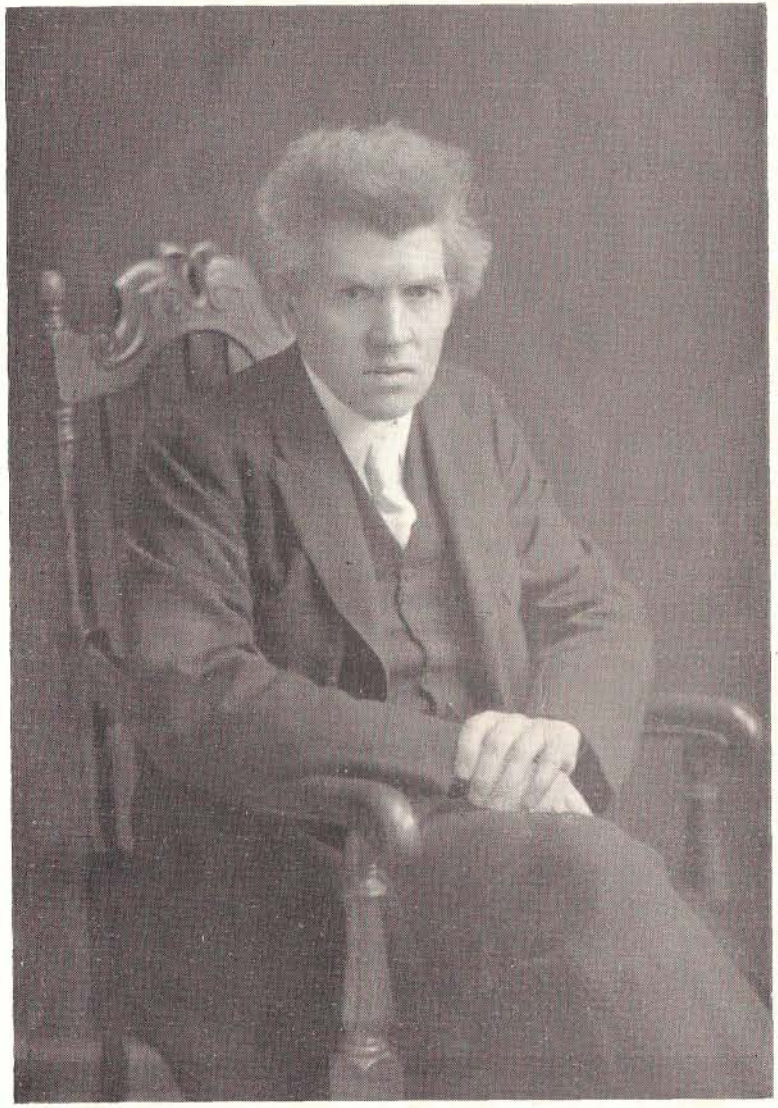
In addition, other factors were draining the congregation of its



The Interior after the alterations of 1860, showing the apse.



Exterior—1954. Photo : Cyril Castle



John Lionel Tayler, M.R.C.S.
Minister 1910—1923.

former strength. By 1910, the ancient Meeting House stood in a busy London square through which the tramcars and omnibuses clattered, and already the wealthier residents of Stoke Newington and Islington were moving away to the quieter suburbs. From a tranquil village with its wealthy merchant families, and a prosperous suburb with its middle-class intelligentsia, Newington Green was now losing its individuality and becoming part of the "great wen" and from this last change the church suffered grievously. More and more of the loyal and useful members of the congregation were moving away, leaving a small remnant of the older families supported by newer members who had entered the church by way of the Sunday School. As yet there was no great loss in numbers but much of the valuable heartwood had been eaten away.

It was just at this time that Newington Green was fortunate to secure one of its finest Ministers, Dr. Lionel Tayler. He came from an old and distinguished Unitarian family and served the church during the difficult period from 1910 to 1923. In the tradition of our Ministers he combined his office with another career. After an early training in the medical profession at St. Thomas's Hospital, he became a University Extension Lecturer in Biology and Sociology. The power and originality of his mind really deserved far greater success than he actually achieved, nevertheless he earned a justifiable reputation through his work and writings. He was highly appreciated by his congregation who found in his deep sincerity and intellectual honesty a man of rare quality.

The shadow of war which passed over Europe in 1914 quickly had its effect on the church. Soon many of the young men of the congregation and Sunday School disappeared to serve in the Forces and several had lost their lives before the terrible slaughter ended. During the war years the institutions connected with the church devoted themselves to collecting and preparing medical necessities and comforts for the troops. Dr. Lionel Tayler himself visited France, giving lectures to the troops; and, as in every other part of the national life, the war effort became paramount. The chief responsibility of a church, however, is to keep alive and nourish the highest ideals possible to the human heart and mind. There is no doubt that this trust was kept, but by 1919 the world had lost too much to find faith easy, and very many of those who went away never came back to their pews.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE PRESENT DAY"

Of the hundred or more men of the Church and Sunday School who served in the Forces during the 1914-1918 War, no less than fifteen gave their lives. There was, however, a far greater loss to the vitality of the church, caused by the doubt and disillusionment felt by so many at the horror and waste of war. All churches suffered by the general collapse of faith but perhaps the liberal Christian body suffered most of all, for its ideals of human dignity and perfectability seemed unreal in a world tortured by war and its aftermath. It was not surprising, therefore, that the congregation at Newington Green had shrunk considerably by 1920. Nevertheless, this reverse was faced as a challenge and vigorous attempts were made to interest the neighbourhood in the work of the church. Meetings were held for ex-servicemen and their families in order to explain the vital relevance of liberal religion to modern life, but despite the efforts and ability of Dr. Lionel Tayler and other members of the congregation, very little was achieved.

Although there was keen disappointment at this turn of events, the church was partly compensated in having a brilliant and sincere Minister who was able to see beyond the difficulties of the time and to declare a message of hope in the divine purpose. The intellectual and spiritual power with which he urged a return to faith in God and man, so that the wheel of moral development might turn again, establishes him as one of the great Ministers at Newington Green. In addition to his services, his talks and lectures gave great help to his congregation, who loved and respected him. It was, therefore, with sorrow that they were forced to bid him goodbye in 1923 when he was obliged to leave London on account of his wife's health. He moved to Lincoln where he became Minister of the Unitarian Church, but he left behind many grateful friends, some of whom formed the "Tayler Fellowship" in honour of his work for adult education.

The task of finding a successor was not easy, but in the interim the Rev. R. Travers Herford, who was then Dr. Williams' Librarian, offered to fill the position. He was gratefully welcomed and remained for over a year. Mr. Herford was a distinguished Hebrew scholar and in 1933 gave the Essex Hall Lecture, his subject being "Some Ancient Safeguards of Civilisation".

A permanent Minister was found in 1926, when Mr. Harold Gordon was invited to the pulpit. He had been trained for the nonconformist ministry, but after serving in the war he entered the teaching profession. His coming to Newington Green continued a tradition which has remained almost unbroken for nearly a century, namely, that our Ministers have been professionally connected with education. He was a young man with considerable energy and an interest in children which was a source of encouragement to the Sunday School and the youth organisations including the Scout Troop, which he helped to form.

As the war receded there was a gradual return to normality and a slight increase in the size of the congregation. Unfortunately, however, the gains were soon more than cancelled by the loss of old and valued members, either by death or by removal from the district. In 1928, the venerable Mr. F. W. Turner died at the age of ninety-five, having served the church and the Sunday School faithfully since he joined in 1854. Shortly after his death his family, also loyal workers, moved to Bournemouth. The following year saw the passing of Ion Pritchard whose life, in the words of his obituary "was intimately wrapped up in the welfare of Newington Green Church, its Minister and its Congregation". His loss was also a blow to the Unitarian body as a whole; after retiring from business in middle age, he was for twenty years Honorary Secretary to the Sunday School Association and was a close friend and helper of such men as W. G. Tarrant, Alfred Hall, J. Arthur Pearson and John C. Ballantyne. Within two or three years others also departed; Mr. Howard Young and his family moved to Bedford and the active Miss Edith Titford died, so that within the space of five years almost all the older church leaders were gone and the great names of Pritchard, Turner, Titford and Young were vanishing.

The loss of the old stalwarts might have been tragic; in fact in 1930 it was whispered that the church could not survive. Social changes had drawn away the generous and energetic support of the professional middle class, upon which it had previously relied, and now the church faced a difficult situation. Its hope lay in the fact that there had always been a wide sharing of responsibility, so that in times past younger men and women had been trained to undertake the burden of conducting its affairs. This was very important, for other matters apart, the salary which could be offered to the Minister justified his conduct of Sunday worship only, the other activities of the church being the responsibility of the members. In practice, however, the Minister has always gladly undertaken the leadership in church affairs with the full and active support of the congregation.

Nor were the men who were raised up any less devoted than their predecessors. In particular, Alfred Thomas Davis should be mentioned. He served as Secretary from 1924 to 1935 and succeeded Roger Cromwell Pritchard as Treasurer in 1938, carrying out his duties most conscientiously and never losing an opportunity to promote the wellbeing of the church, whether by suggesting improvements to the religious services, helping the connected institutions or by making its cause more widely known. He was in a good position to do this for he played a distinguished part in the affairs of the Borough of Stoke Newington as Councillor and Alderman. In his earnest work he was joined by his family who have maintained their loyal link with the church to this day.

Helped by the efforts of many friends, the church slowly revived

and in 1938 a strong impetus was felt when Mr. Ernest Green came as Lay Pastor. He was a headmaster and had previously served the Unitarian Churches at Forest Gate and Southend. His tremendous enthusiasm and lively manner were a source of new vigour and he and his family entered quickly into the life and work of the congregation. Mr. Green took rather more control than previous Ministers had done and under his leadership the church prospered until war broke out in 1939. It had been necessary to discontinue the morning service early in 1938, due to lack of support, but in other respects this year was marked by the most encouraging signs. The number of children in the Sunday School doubled and four new enterprises were started, two of which, the Women's League and the Literary Society, still flourish. The other two were a Men's Club, and a Temperance Society with nearly a hundred members.

The outbreak of the Second World War severely curtailed all activities, and came as a tragic misfortune just when there was every promise of better things. Almost at once the Sunday School and Youth Clubs had to close as children were evacuated from London. All evening meetings were hampered by the " blackout " and by travel restrictions and during the winter months services had to be held in the afternoon. Furthermore, many active members of the congregation were scattered, some to serve in H.M. Forces, and only a small group was left to keep the lamp burning. Before long, however, the Sunday School and Young People's League were re-established and although not large in numbers, they signified a determination to carry on. Moreover it was the church's proud record that Sunday worship was held every week, even after the Meeting House was badly damaged by the blast of a nearby landmine. While repairs were being carried out services were held in the Schoolhouse.

The shortage of Ministers available to serve the London churches affected Newington Green when Mr. Green also took charge of the Ilford church, and it became necessary to find visiting preachers for alternate Sundays. This difficulty proved to be a blessing in disguise, for more than one member of the congregation found the ability to declare our free religious faith from the pulpit. The war years were some of the most challenging in the history of the church, yet the loyalty and selfless devotion shown by the congregation make them among the most honoured. The tireless work of Mr. Green in the care of the church was singularly recognised in 1946 when he was accorded full Ministerial status by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. It was, therefore, a sad occasion when he made his farewell in the following year to take the combined charge of the churches at Leicester (Narborough Road) and Loughborough.

Since 1947 the congregation has profited by the Ministry of John Reece Walker who for some years previously had been a frequent visiting preacher. Like Mr. Green, he became Lay Pastor while still a headmaster and received the same honour of Ministerial status from the General Assembly soon after his retirement in 1953. During the past eleven years Mr. Reece Walker has served the church with great energy despite a painful disability and is warmly loved by the congregation who respect his sincere and thoughtful preaching, attractively tinged with a pleasant humour. He is also known in the wider field for his efforts to promote better understanding between people of differing races and creeds and on several occasions the church has been filled with men and women of various faiths worshipping God together, not infrequently in the presence of the Mayor of Stoke Newington and members of the Borough Council. It would be true to say that Mr. Reece Walker has made a remarkable contribution to the cause of good relations between Christians and Jews in North London and the congregation, which is affiliated to the World Congress of Faiths, has given him wholehearted support in his good work.

The long tradition of supplying leaders within the Unitarian body is still loyally maintained and within recent years several members of the congregation have accepted office in the National and Regional organisations of the Sunday School, Young People's League and the Women's League. Shortly after the end of the war two members rapidly succeeded one another as National Presidents of the Unitarian Young People's League; Mr. R. E. Fenner, now Chairman of the Church Committee and Miss Margaret Smith, who is now the wife of the Rev. A. P. Hewett, Minister of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, Canada. Even though, like many churches, Newington Green has become used to smaller congregations than in former years, the spirit of enterprise and service has not diminished.

This spirit shows itself in many ways, not least in the quiet conduct of the church's affairs. Almost every member of this congregation plays his or her part in this work and it would be difficult to single out anyone for special mention, were it not for the devoted record of Mr. R. H. Smith and his family. Mr. Smith has long been associated with Newington Green and first took responsibility in its affairs over fifty years ago. After four years as Secretary, he succeeded Mr. Alfred Davis as Treasurer in 1942, since when he has been largely responsible for the day to day management of the chapel. During the war years and in the absence of younger men, the work was very difficult, especially when the building was damaged by enemy action, and it is probable that few people will ever know the multitude of ways in which he has cared for the church. The spirit of the early great Treasurers, Matthew Raper, Daniel Radford, and Thomas Rogers lives on today.

For the small band of men and women who erected the meeting-house in 1708 the future was uncertain, nor could they have forseen that their work would still flourish in 1958. The prospect now before us is equally uncertain, yet we share the faith of our forefathers, that God will guide our work so long as we shall serve Him " in Spirit and in Truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him ".

The End.

APPENDIX I

NEWINGTON GREEN UNITARIAN CHURCH

List of Ministers since the building of the original Meeting House in 1708

JOHN RUSSELL		1704–1714	
*RICHARD BISCOE, M.A.		1716–1727	(C)
— PATERSON		1729–1732	(C)
ROBERT WHITHEAR		1732–1736	
THOMAS LOVEDER		1736–1738	(C) (L)
RICHARD HARRISON, M.A.		1738	(L)
*HUGH WORTHINGTON, M.A.		1739–1742	(L)
ISRAEL LEWIS		1742–1745	(L)
— SMITH		174 –1748	
JOHN HOYLE		1748–1757	(L)
*RICHARD PRICE, D.D., F.R.S.	(Afternoon)	1758–1783	
*THOMAS AMORY, LL.D.	(Morning)	1770–1774	
*JOSEPH TOWERS, LL.D.	(Morning)	1778–1799	
— GILLEBRAND, D.D.	(Afternoon)	1787	
JAMES LINDSAY, D.D.	(Afternoon)	1788–1805	
*JOHN KENTISH	(Morning)	1799–1802	
*ROCHEMONT BARBAULD	(Morning)	1802–1808	
WILLIAM JOHNSTON	(Afternoon)	1806	
*THOMAS REES, LL.D.		1807–1813	
JAMES GILCHRIST		1813–1827	
NATHANIEL PHILLIPS, D.D.		1828	
JOHN HOWARD RYLAND		1829–1832	
SAMUEL WOOD, B.A.		1832–1836	
EDWIN CHAPMAN		1836–1838	
*THOMAS CROMWELL, Ph.D.		1838–1864	
WILLIAM SALMON BARRINGER		1864–1868	
JAMES KAY APPLEBEE		1868–1872	
JAMES DAVID HIRST-SMYTH		1872–1881	
WILLIAM WOODING, B.A.		1881–1906	
FRANK W. G. FOAT, D.Litt.		1907–1909	
JOHN LIONEL TAYLER, M.R.C.S.		1910–1923	
ROBERT TRAVERS HERFORD, B.A.		1923–1925	(L)
HAROLD GORDON		1926–1936	
ERNEST GEORGE GREEN, B.A.		1938–1947	
JOHN REECE WALKER		1947–	

(C) Conformed to the Church of England.
(L) Librarian at Dr. Williams Library.
* Mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography.

APPENDIX II

It is impossible to list here all the sources consulted in compiling this record of Newington Green Church. However, in order to assist any who may wish to know more about the history of our church, a list of the principal references is given below.

(i) **Manuscript Records** in the charge of the Church Trustees:—

Various Deeds from 1693 onwards dealing with the Meeting House.

" Matthew Raper's Paper "—an account of the Meeting House written about 1744.

Treasurer's account books from 1748.

Minute books from 1805.

(ii) **Printed Records:**

Andrew Kippis—" The Meeting House at Newington Green ", Appendix III, Bibliotecha Topographica Brittanica, Vol IX, pp. 49, 50. 1783.

Anon.—" The Early History of Newington Green Congregation ", Christian Reformer, January 1861.

P. W. Clayden—" Samuel Sharpe " 1883

P. W. Clayden—" Samuel Rogers " 1887

Marian Pritchard—" Newington Green Church—A Bi-Centenary Souvenir " 1908.

Roland Thomas—" Richard Price " 1924.

J. Lionel Tayler—" A Little Corner of London—Newington Green " 1925.