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# The Old General Baptists 1811 - 1915 (2)

### (iii) *The Mid-Century Decades* (1850-1868)

UNITARIAN disapproval of the General Baptists increased markedly during the 1850s. From time to time in the Unitarian press complaints and strictures, some unhappily justified, others mere prejudice, rained down upon the Assembly and its churches. Sometimes it was unashamedly a matter of social class — the Revd. W. Turner, contributing to Beard's *Unitarianism Exhibited* in 1846, lamented with obvious reference to the General Baptists how the aggressive missionary spirit of Richard Wright and company had driven away the aristocratic Presbyterian 'families of consequence': 'the new accessions, though numerous, have been chiefly of an inferior grade, both in parity and esteem'<sup>1</sup>. Secondly there was what F. J. Powicke later on taught the Unitarians to regard as their Open Trust myth, that powerful and irregular argument with which they strove in the 1840s to defend their chapels from orthodox assailants. Now the trust deeds of General Baptist chapels were more 'open' i.e. less doctrinally restrictive than any others<sup>2</sup>, yet as had already happened in the case of Smarden and elsewhere and was to happen again, the very openness of the deeds could lead, not as the myth demanded, to an ever-widening theological liberalism. but to a reversion to orthodoxy. This stood the Open Trust argument on its head, and threw doubt on the validity of the Unitarian case, as the Inquirer was not slow to bemoan<sup>3</sup>. Thirdly, however 'open' were the trust deeds of General Baptist chapels, voting strength lay with the small and declining membership of baptised believers: why, eager young Unitarians wanted to know, should these chapels be controlled by dwindling groups of old ladies<sup>4</sup>? Fourthly, especially following the closure of the Academy in 1856, the irrepressible Means had contracted the habit of recruiting raw and inexperienced but enthusiastic young converts and, after the scantiest of training, despatching them to General Baptist pulpits where their youth (some of them were still in their teens), their theology and their tendency to abandon their charges after only a few months scandalized the Unitarians<sup>5</sup>.

Finally the Unitarians failed to see why they should be called upon to subsidise an ailing General Baptist chapel when there was a Unitarian church just around the corner with which it could profitably combine — Portsmouth for example was thus

circumstanced, but was continually appealing to the generosity of the Unitarian public<sup>6</sup>.

Needless to say the General Baptists were not at a loss for answers to all these charges, and adopted a superior tone themselves by way of rejoinder. Did the Unitarians boast of the antiquity of their beliefs — let them remember that 'the General Baptists had Unitarianism before the Presbyterians had'; are they lionising the Hindu reformer Ramohun Roy — they should note that he agrees with the Baptists over the baptismal rite. Are the Unitarians launching Domestic Missions to reach the poor of the cities — then the General Baptists can give them useful advice — 'we speak from some experience of the poor of London'. Do they ever pause to wonder who created the modern Unitarian denomination unless it was the handful of General Baptist missionaries, Wright, Eaton, Aspland, Lyons and Harding who rescued the Old Presbyterian denomination from inevitable extinction? Do the Unitarians boast of the figure of Richard Baxter and the longevity of their Presbyterian heritage? Then they should remember that the General Baptists are more ancient still — 'scarcely any other denomination of the Protestant Dissenters has so much an air of antiquity'; they are 'truly the elder brethren among the Unitarians', the 'primitive Dissenters of this country and the Anabaptists of history . . . long known as the first champions of religious liberty, the earliest and most zealous promoters of free enquiry in religion, and their predecessors bore witness to the truth with their fortunes, their liberties and their lives through the dark and bloody reigns of the Tudors and Stuarts'<sup>7</sup>. The roll-call of churches with their foundation dates was a source of legitimate pride: Bessel's Green (1640), Portsmouth (1640), Dover (1643), Horsham, Biddenden (1648), Chatham (1655), Lewes (1657). Uniquely two churches, Norwich and Canterbury, assembled in buildings which were once religious houses, the former a house of White Friars, the latter of Dominicans. There was certainly no Unitarian equivalent to the Assembly's most prized possession, its elaborate seal, last used in 1864, or of their historic London graveyard, Dead Man's Place, Southwark, which even ante-dated Bunhill Fields<sup>8</sup>.

These controversies, however instructive, were played out against a denominational background of continuing decline on the part of some churches, or progression towards Unitarianism amongst others.

Continuing business incompetence and failing vitality conspired to produce the death of a number of churches in the '50s and '60s. 'Our mismanagement', said someone at the 1877 Assembly, 'has been about perfect. Endowments misused, properties allowed to fall into other hands, trustees dying with no new ones appointed, and expensive actions taken to Chancery

and now a chapel lost to the body which had an excellent trust deed drawn up — but never signed. And', he added ruefully, 'this is not in Wales'. The Kent Association met for the last time in 1856. Ramsgate was virtually extinct, though not legally so till 1884, Nutfield died in 1851 as did Swansea when its lease ran out in 1858, the Yorkshire churches had all disappeared by 1860, Lutton closed in 1865 and Biddenden chapel fell down in 1868. The Assembly's list of 'properties in trust' lengthened ominously<sup>9</sup>.

Elsewhere and particularly in Kent Unitarian sentiments were now pronounced. One or two congregations to avoid the charge of sectarianism had even gone to the length of making their Sunday Schools completely 'secular'. Ditchling's Assembly membership was now only nominal, at Horsham where Unitarian influence had long prevailed, the baptistery was last used in 1849, and members admitted thereafter merely by the vote of the church<sup>70</sup>; at Godalming the baptistery, long abandoned, was used by Percy Blakewell, pastor from 1862-5, for storing potatoes, Canterbury was now apparently in favour of non-Baptist pastors, of a markedly intellectual cast: J. B. Barton, a Cambridge man and ex-Anglican ordinand, Dr. Thomas Cromwell F.S.A., Dr. Cyril A. Greene. The Southern General Baptist Association, as if in response to these trends, opened its doors powerful Southern Unitarian Association and perished two to Unitarians and abandoned its distinctive Baptist position in 1843: it had no *raison d' être* in view of the existence of the years later.

These trends naturally concerned Mr. Means, as did the increasing hold which the advanced thought of Martineau or Theodore Parker now enjoyed within the Unitarian body. At successive Assembly meetings, while not disguising his dislike of Priestleyanism, he declared that the new anti-supernaturalism would dethrone Christ altogether. What was needed was a revival of the religion of the soul (a phrase of Martineau's used, oddly enough, with an intent the exact opposite of what Martineau had in mind) and of the authority of Christ, without which baptism was a mockery. 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly', Means now concluded his annual Assembly discourse. How much the denomination now sympathized with his conservatism was however a moot point. There was his personal following of young men, some brought up in the New Connexion, his own congregation at Worship Street and the allied church which after several removals from its Trinity Place days worshipped after 1864 in East Surrey Grove, Peckham. Both these churches showed their support for Means by a lively display of their Christocentricity at each Assembly meeting: 'Him, the Sent of God, Lord and Master, Saviour and Redeemer, Mediator and Intercessor' was Worship Street's regular outpouring. John

Marten, elder of Peckham, desired a 'divine Saviour to show me the way to my future home', and also 'to steer the good ship' of the General Baptists against the winds of 'the new philosophy'<sup>1</sup>. No doubt too support would come from the ageing Samuel Martin of Trowbridge, now by far the largest church in the denomination and rebuilt in 1857 in Gothic style<sup>2</sup>. Portsmouth too, now the second largest church, could be expected to take the same side.

The conservatives won a considerable victory at the Assembly of 1862 when a new introductory note to the printed Proceedings was authorized, defining the Assembly's beliefs as Believer's Baptism, and General Redemption<sup>3</sup>. Some of the churches, it is stated, almost as an afterthought, take the further designation Unitarian and most of them do in fact hold the doctrine of the Divine Unity, but this is neither a qualification nor disqualification for communion with the Assembly.

Five years later Means was emboldened to reopen his anti-Unitarian campaign, though his methods were this time dishonourable. The General Baptists were now on very friendly terms with the Christian denomination of America, one of whose ministers, the Revd. D. W. Moore, visited the Assembly in 1867. On his return to America and doubtless inspired by Means, he launched a furious assault against English Unitarianism which occasioned deep offence. 'The nidus of all this defamation', wrote a correspondent to the *Inquirer*, 'is not to be found in the wilds of Michigan but in the neighbourhood of Shoreditch'. Means did not disguise the fact that it was so: a bitter exchange of letters ensued which, as he wanted and boasted, left relations between the Unitarians and General Baptists at their very worst. 'Let me say,' Means himself wrote to the *Inquirer*, 'that those of us who would willingly see our body less connected with the Unitarians must feel deeply obliged to you for your able and zealous co-operation'<sup>4</sup>.

A year later Means capitalized on his success; a new periodical, the *General Baptist Messenger*, was launched to stress the body's distinctive witness<sup>5</sup> and, as a crowning triumph, the New Connexion for its forthcoming annual conference at Derby agreed to receive a friendly delegation consisting of the two Messengers of the old body and to send two delegates to the Worship Street Assembly in return. The time, as even Means recognized, was 'not yet ripe' for a formal reunion, but the common involvement of 'the two parts of the General Baptist body' on the Trust of the General Baptist Fund and the Pierce John Trust<sup>6</sup> and the growth of 'a wider and more comprehensive spirit' within the New Connexion would bring about a fruitful intercourse which in turn would 'transfuse into our hearts the piety and zeal, the earnest religious spirit which has so marked the New Connexion, and so revive our dying

churches'<sup>17</sup>. In all this Means knew quite clearly what he was doing: the sluggish General Baptist body, the surprised and alarmed Unitarians, and the New Connexion which later regretted the hastiness of its response to his blandishments, probably did not. Almost single-handed Means had wrought a minor ecclesiastical revolution.

(iv) *The Approach To The New Connexion* (1869-1889.)

In 1869 and 1870 there was again an exchange of delegates between the two Connexions, and Means felt most gratified that even in Kent and Sussex where Unitarianism was strongest, one of his protégés, J. F. Kennard, pastor at Billingshurst from 1866 to 74, was not only baptizing new members to his own church, but enthusiastically reviving Baptist principles and practices in neighbouring churches as well<sup>18</sup>. In 1870 therefore, the year when on account of old age he resigned the secretaryship of the Assembly, Means was emboldened to propose that the Assembly Committee work out a scheme for a closer union with the New Connexion. 'We have failed to find the truth', the old warrior confessed—the Assembly should search through its seventeenth century Confessions, and ask itself which body was now more loyal to General Baptist principles, the New or the Old Connexion? In the country at large he would be glad to see the New Connexion absorb the scattered Old Connexion chapels; in the South East this plan would obviously work to the advantage of the few New Connexion churches to be found there, and enable the Old to reclaim 'those of our churches whose rationalistic tendencies have led them away from us'<sup>19</sup>. Before the following year's Assembly met however the Unitarian element in the old body sounded the feelings of five leading churches, Godalming, Horsham, Deptford, Portsmouth and Saffron Walden, and urged them to resist Means' proposal with counter-resolutions of their own. When the Assembly met, it was clear that opinion was divided not into two schools but into three: the three churches, Peckham, Worship Street and Billingshurst which stood by Means; Godalming, Horsham, Deptford and Saffron Walden which stressed their Unitarianism and objected to association with 'creed-bound churches'<sup>20</sup>, and a group led by Martin and Marten and including the Portsmouth, Nottage, Dover and Trowbridge churches who, while ardently Baptist and welcoming the approach to the New Connexion, were less than sanguine on the desirability of organic union and wanted the Assembly to be a common forum where General Baptists of both traditions could meet informally and work for a closer understanding. The 1872 Assembly was very noisy with the Committee giving an official reply to the Godalming, Horsham, Saffron Walden and Deptford churches<sup>21</sup>, and the latter moving to the attack by proposing that the Assembly make grants to churches not

having a Baptist minister, and that non-Baptist representatives be admitted to the Assembly.

The argument raged for the next three years, but in 1875 a new turn of events was provided by the New Connexion. Here, there had always, save in the one year 1871, been a sizable minority which had objected to the exchange of delegates with the old body, while even liberal opinion was not reconciled to Means' proposals for formal union<sup>22</sup>. Accordingly at the 1875 New Connexion Association meeting at Wisbeach, a hostile demonstration occurred against the visiting delegates which left them humiliated and depressed. Relations appeared to have broken down, and became even worse the following year when the case of the surviving General Baptist property at Honiton was referred to the Charity Commissioners, and a tripartite dispute between Unitarians and Old and New Connexionists broke out and lasted five years<sup>23</sup>.

For the next few years therefore Means proceeded with greater circumspection. In 1877 he rallied opinion with a powerful address on anti-supernaturalism in modern Unitarianism, a copy of which the Assembly authorized, should be sent to every Unitarian minister in the country! His personal friendship with Clifford deepened; to such an extent that Clifford himself preached the annual Assembly sermon in 1878. The Assembly in the later 70s seemed determined to go ahead, regardless of the existence of larger denominations: 'we are not going to oblige those Christian friends', the circular letter of 1877 declared, 'who are waiting to inter (decently, as they say) our remains, who squabble over our funeral habiliments and contend among themselves for our estate'<sup>24</sup>. This renewed self-confidence was based on a certain degree of evangelistic success: the number of baptisms was increasing, Long Sutton church was reopened in 1877, the beautiful old chapel at Rushall near Trowbridge in 1879, and Northiam in 1880. Impressed by all this, two New Connexion ministers were in 1878 induced to accept pastorates in the Old Connexion, the Revd. W. Harvey Smith at Worship Street and the Rev. G. M. Stuppell at Headcorn<sup>25</sup>. Means found the last months of his life (he died in February 1879) considerably lightened by the encouraging direction in which events seemed to be moving.

The deaths of Means and of other veterans, H. E. Howse in 1876, Martin in 1878, Marten in 1881, meant that the control of affairs was now in the hands of younger men. Some of these took a middle-of-the-road position, in particular T. B. W. Briggs, messenger in place of Martin, W. Parry of Nottage and J. Felstead of Trowbridge. Others were more definitely Unitarian, J. A. Briggs, pastor at Dover and later at Northiam, J. J. Marten at Bessel's Green, and J. Ellis at Portsmouth<sup>26</sup>. But the mantle of Means had fallen upon one family, the Marchants of Peckham

chapel, and four individuals, all of whom were prepared to play a prominent part in denominational life: Harvey Smith, Means' successor in the Worship Street pastorate, C. A. Hoddinott, for a time pastor at Headcorn and Chichester, a businessman of independent means, J. C. Brinkworth of Saffron Walden, secretary of the Assembly from 1882 to 1896 and one of its most dedicated servants, and the distinguished Henry Solly.

What possessed Solly at the age of 70 suddenly, now that his career as an advanced radical reformer was over<sup>27</sup> to interest himself in a body with which he had previously had only the loosest connection, is far from clear. Perhaps it is only explicable on the assumptions that believer's baptism in which this distinguished Unitarian had always been a secret believer (he had been privately baptized by Means in 1858) now in his old age had begun to assume greater significance in his thinking, and that he was rapidly despairing of the modern type of Unitarianism whose excessive rationalism he deplored. Whatever the explanation, he was clearly in the right frame of mind to accede to T. W. Briggs' suggestion that he should join the Committee of the Assembly in 1881. Solly's unexpected advent was of the greatest moment to the hard-pressed body. Here was one of the most distinguished exponents of the Social Gospel, that confused blending of evangelical earnestness and liberal theology, that synthesis of reason and romance for which the Old General Baptists (if not the whole of Nonconformity) had been searching for half a century. He brought with him moreover a close friendship with Dawson Burns, Clifford and Walter Dyson of the New Connexion, contacts with which were now almost certain to be resumed<sup>28</sup>.

The direction in which events were to move in the 80s was made clear at the Assembly of 1882 where it was voted that Solly's eloquent appeal for believer's baptism be printed and distributed free throughout the denomination. It was also reported that at the opening of the new Bethnal Green Church whither Worship Street had now removed, only New Connexion leaders, Clifford, Burns and Goadby and evangelicals of the old body were present — Unitarians were not represented at all. The following year delegates were once again exchanged with the New Connexion Assembly, Smith, Brinkworth and Solly representing the Old body; Smith's evangelistic and social work at Bethnal Green was resulting in monthly baptismal services: Chatham and Portsmouth, it was hoped, were reclaimed for the old faith by the appointment there of two young Baptist pastors. In 1884 Brinkworth, as 'a labourer in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' focussed the Assembly's attention once again on Bethnal Green, where vigorous open-air evangelism had led to the appointment of a 'missionary to outcast London',



and an increased membership over the past year of 82 (44 by baptism). Plans were laid for the reopening of the closed chapels at Cranbrook and Chichester and elsewhere under the auspices of a new 'Home Missionary Society'. The 1885 Assembly heard how Brinkworth and Solly on behalf of the Society had baptized the nucleus of a new church at Chichester and a new young pastor for Portsmouth, how Bethnal Green had opened two mission halls, and Peckham also had welcomed a new Baptist minister, the Revd. W. Glanville from Newport, I.O.W. 'The walls of our ancient sanctuaries', declared Brinkworth excitedly, 'shall again be vocal with the praises of God, and the Angels of Heaven shall rejoice over human souls that are being saved therein'.

Undogmatic evangelicalism and the social gospel were again the keynotes of the next two Assemblies in 1886 and 87. Peckham, having launched a rescue and evangelistic campaign in this very poor part of London, with an appeal in the *Daily News*, reported considerable success. Glanville himself wrote the annual circular letter on 'Conversion'. 'Have we', he asked the churches, 'tried to pluck souls as brands from the burning?' 'Be set', declared Brinkworth, 'for the defence of the Gospel, and give ourselves wholly to the saving of men'. The 1887 Assembly was taken up entirely with spirited discourses on believer's baptism from Clifford and Harvey Smith; the Revd. Alexander Gordon, reported the *Inquirer*, was the only Unitarian present<sup>29</sup>. The year 1888 marked the climax of this new phase of evangelistic fervour and the pursuit of social righteousness, while Brinkworth rejoiced that more and more the Old and New Connexions were in harmony 'on our simple, sole two articles, universal redemption and believer's baptism'. There was much hilarity over Dr. Martineau's 'reorganization scheme' for the Unitarian body, the latest of a series of 'Presbyterianising' endeavours, and the resultant National Conference was dubbed by Brinkworth as 'an assembly of United splits'<sup>30</sup>.

Clifford having put in a plea for 'the Bible and liberality', Solly replied with a poean of praise to the New Connexion: it had progressed because of the truths to which it held; the old body had declined because of the neglect of believer's baptism and its mere memorialist view of the Lord's Supper. Could not 'the breach made in the walls of Jerusalem a century and a half ago' now be healed — 'that mournful secession; was it a final, fatal breach?' Could there not be 'a holy and blessed reunion, of hearts and souls, of churches and pastors, in the Lord?' Let both bodies unite to confront the social and religious needs of a suffering humanity. J. C. Means would have been proud of his pupils: 1888 was their finest hour.

(v) *The Old Connexion In Disarray* (1889-1915).

The second courtship between the Old and New Connexions

ended as abruptly as the first. The latter was now of course immersed in delicate negotiations with the Particular Baptists for the formal union consummated two years later, while the Downgrade crisis had taught Clifford the unwisdom of associating too openly with the heterodox. The theological declension of the Old General Baptists was a minor element in Spurgeon's strictures on contemporary trends in the Baptist churches, but it was never far from the surface and could emerge at awkward moments<sup>31</sup>.

1888 was the last occasion for an exchange of delegates<sup>32</sup>. Suddenly isolated from its evangelical friends, and with Solly now too old to play an active part in its affairs, the old body was unceremoniously thrown back on to its own spiritual resources. These were scarcely sufficient to preserve its independence much longer, or even to safeguard what of evangelicalism remained within it. Brinkworth and Hoddinott turned to the management of the Assembly's Trusts and finances (a fulltime occupation), while Harvey Smith's evangelistic energies were 'broadened' (some would say eclipsed) by his involvement in the affairs of London dockland, and the fight for the docker's tanner<sup>33</sup>. The social gospel alone was to be heard at Assembly meetings, especially from the lips of avowed Unitarians like Mellone of Bessel's Green and E. P. Hall, the former Roman Catholic who now ministered at Trowbridge. Mellone's favourite theme was the indebtedness of modern Christian Socialism to the Anabaptists, Hall's the evil of foreign missions viewed as agencies of political and commercial aggression. Others denounced with much sound and fury a variety of social evils: drink, gambling, low wages, the sweated trades.

This is the background to the extraordinary debate at the annual Assembly of 1890. Harvey Smith, convinced that all Christian men should unite in the face of spiritual and social problems of frightening dimension, and fearful lest the Assembly become merely 'an exclusive religious high school', proposed that its basis be broadened by dropping the sectarian reference to Unitarianism in its constitution and propaganda. This move was not anti-Unitarian (many Unitarians wished similarly for the disappearance of a name which to them was an embarrassment) but in the light of recent trends was bound to be taken by some as a renewed threat of Baptist aggrandizement. W. H. Burgess in opposition to Smith moved therefore that the Assembly should throw open its doors even more widely, drop its lingering Baptist connections, and become a meeting place 'for mutual aid, consultation and discussion of religious and social questions'. What finally emerged was a compromise agreement to dispense with sectarian names altogether and to open the Assembly to all who avowed 'personal faith in, loyalty, trust and obedience to, Jesus Christ'. Shock and dismay was the

reaction of a few members, and the evangelical church at Peckham formally withdrew to preserve its Baptist witness intact<sup>34</sup>. The majority however seemed either satisfied or did not realize the implications of what they had done, which was to cancel two hundred and forty years' history at the stroke of a pen and sentence their body, once the initial impetus of the social gospel began to wane, to slow and painful suicide<sup>35</sup>.

One final effort was made to restore the Assembly to its pristine beliefs. Lt. Col. Richardson, representing the Seventh Day Church at Mill Yard which had rejoined the General Baptists in 1887, moved in 1895 that the Assembly consist only of baptized believers. The motion had only one backer — his wife<sup>36</sup>. Even Brinkworth now spoke of the wisdom of the decision taken in 1890. 'We are first Christians, then Englishmen, then General Baptists'<sup>37</sup>. But the news from the churches was bad: the meeting house at Battle closed after an heroic struggle in 1898<sup>38</sup>; Canterbury nearly did likewise but managed somehow to survive till 1913 when this ancient monastic refectory was sold as 'a promising freehold investment'<sup>39</sup>.

Even Smith grew depressed: in 1901 he called himself 'a prophet under a cloud'; his prediction in 1890 that the Assembly was reviving and taking a prominent part in the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth had not been realized. E. P. Hall comforted him — it was good to be ranked 'among the lowly castes of the Christian church'<sup>40</sup>. So enfeebled was the denomination, and so dependent the churches on their stronger Unitarian neighbours that no Assembly at all was adjudged to be necessary between 1902 and 1905. At last they met in considerable discomfort in Smith's Bethnal Green Church (they had to use Baptist hymn books and 'the phraseology jarred somewhat'), to hear from Brinkworth what he engagingly described as his labours both in the matter of law and gospel.

Brinkworth who had resigned the secretaryship of the Assembly in 1896 in favour of Hoddinott had administered its trust and financial affairs with care and success. He had incorporated the Assembly in 1892 and had obtained from the Chancery Court a scheme for the complicated Joseph Davis charity two years previously and another in 1901. But since the Peckham church (where much of the Assembly's funds was invested) had seceded, and since the aged and less experienced Hoddinott had taken over from Brinkworth in 1896, the situation had worsened again. Now, in 1905, Mill Yard had lost its premises and was homeless, the Joseph Davis charity had acquired an unsavoury reputation and the trustees, Clifford included, were summoned to court to disclose whether or not the Mill Yard and Natton causes were in any sense extant. 'The Assembly', wrote Brinkworth to W. H. Burgess, 'has no home'<sup>41</sup>; the funds are sold out and invested in Peckham . . . we are a failure . . .

living on a foreclosed mortgage'<sup>42</sup>.

This note of desperation is henceforth sounded in all the Assembly's proceedings. In 1907 Smith pleaded for a Forward Movement — 'for God's sake, let us try something . . . the New Theology is all very well, but even Mr. Cambell would be earnest in asserting that new living was better'. The General Baptists needed a Methodist-type revival, 'without the hot and red theology'. Nothing of course came of the Forward Movement, and nothing of another proposal of 1907 for a revised constitution beginning'. To serve God in serving Humanity is the essence of true religion . . . The essential tenets for which the Assembly stands and for which it has stood from the beginning are the general and universal love of God for all his children of every age and clime for ever and ever'. No one now even bothered to question whether this was a correct reading of history or not. So the Assembly staggered on, meeting in different places (in 1910 it even met at Chichester and for the first and last time received a civic reception) till in 1914 the incident occurred which brought it to all intents and purposes to an inglorious end.

Suddenly and without warning Mr. Ellis Stone, one of the trustees of Deptford chapel and the Revd. John Bradford, a Baptist minister, began legal proceedings to wrest the church from the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. Deptford was now very poor, was under an unsalaried lay pastor, and was threatened with a compulsory purchase order from the L.C.C. which placed the church and its investments in grave risk. The Unitarians took up its cause vigorously however, and the action was withdrawn. But to avoid a repetition of this type of litigation, Mr. R. M. Montgomery K.C., the Unitarian lawyer, suggested that the Unitarian Association and Baptist Union meet to settle amicably the whole vexed question of the surviving General Baptist chapels and their Trusts<sup>43</sup>. The Charity Commissioners were not sympathetic — Parliament could hardly give its sanction to any proposed scheme till the end of the war. The denominations pressed on however and after several months six representatives, three from each side, produced an agreement on both churches and charities which was scrupulously fair and generally acceptable. By the agreement, signed in 1916, the Pierce John and Joseph Davis trusts were both regulated, and four chapels, Headcorn, Winchmore Hill, Long Sutton and Saffron Walden, were recognized as belonging to the Baptist Union<sup>44</sup>, the rest which appeared in the Essex Hall Year Book for 1915, as Unitarian.

So determined were the contracting parties to carry through this scheme that they agreed they would go ahead, whether Parliamentary sanction were delayed or not<sup>45</sup>. All was settled satisfactorily — except, that is, for the handful of lingering

enthusiasts for the General Baptist Assembly which (perhaps wisely) was only consulted by the other two parties as an afterthought, when negotiations were well under way. For them the long-dreaded event and final degradation had at last arrived — the habiliments and estate of the dying body were divided up while it was still technically alive. The General Baptist Assembly now meets, for legal purposes only, as a rather picturesque appendage to the annual Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

## NOTES

1. J. R. Beard, *Unitarianism Exhibited*, (1846), 104. For similar criticisms earlier in the century see T. Belsham, *Memoir of Lindsey*, 1812, 308-9; *Evangelical Magazine*, 1807, 68.
2. T.U.H.S., Vol. 23, 187 has an account of the Lewes and Ditchling chapel trust deeds.
3. See for example *Inquirer*, 22nd September, 1888.
4. In fact denominational statistics first printed in 1843 show that the percentage of baptised communicants (68%) tended during the next twenty years to increase at the expense of the non-baptised (32%). But communicants bear no relationship to total attendances or to membership. The latter was dropping rapidly, and was by 1866 down to 400, two thirds of which figure is provided by four churches: Trowbridge (86), Wick, Nottage and Dover. The number of Sunday School scholars was then just over 600.
5. These complaints grew very loud in the 60s, especially when one of these callow young pastors was detected in a fraud — see *Proceedings*, 1866.
6. The tone of the Portsmouth appeal also offended: it used such phrases as 'for Christ's sake let nothing prevent you doing all you can for us'; 'in the name of our dear Redeemer', 'help us to labour in this vineyard of God's dear Son'.
7. John Marten in G.B.A., Vol. 3 89; G.B.A., Vol. 2, 197f; G.B.A., Vol. 1, 128; *Proceedings*, 1866 G.B.A., Vol. 3, 155; *Proceedings*, 1832; *Portsmouth General Baptist Chapel Appeal*, 1855 (Unitarian College Manchester Mss C<sup>24</sup>).
8. There was of course an inevitable tendency to exaggerate these claims: few really believed that Ditchling had a minute book going back to 1556, though Horsfield in his *History of Sussex* (1835) affirms that it did. The old age of the denomination could be an embarrassment. 'There is no novelty to attract: all is old, all wears the appearance of other times' — G.B.A., Vol. 1, 123.
9. In 1866 the list read: Brentford, Cuckfield, Lewes, Nutfield, Swansea, Tunbridge Wells, Wingham, Yalding.
10. T.B.H.S., Vol. 4, 181. See also E. Kensett, *History of the Free Christian Church, Horsham*, (1921).
11. *Proceedings*, 1875.
12. Martin who had been sent out to the West Country as a Unitarian missionary by Richard Wright, never after his settlement at Trowbridge, preached Unitarianism. An Arian, he proclaimed a simple evangelicalism. This and his zeal for good works in the town drew a very large congregation of working-class folk

to the Conigre chapel.

13. It is however added that 'this does not imply General Salvation; or as it is so often called Universal Restoration'. Means had always rejected this doctrine: nevertheless his rebuttal of universalism in view of the honoured place of Vidler in General Baptist circles is an even more surprising triumph than his partial victory over Unitarianism.
14. *Inquirer* 5th October, 1867.
15. This little quarterly journal was given up in 1870. I have never seen it mentioned in any list of periodicals. A few issues have survived in the library of the Unitarian College at Manchester.
16. These trusts from which both the Old and New Connexions benefitted and on which both were represented undoubtedly led to contacts which issued in the formal exchanges of 1868. On the General Baptist Fund for assisting Ministers and Students founded in 1726, Means, the Revd. J. Briggs, elder of Headcorn and treasurer, and the Revd. W. H. Black as secretary met the more liberal leaders of the New Connexion. It is noticeable that many New Connexionists who as students received help from the Fund, Clifford among them, were most keen for closer fellowship between the two bodies.
17. *Proceedings*, 1868.
18. *T.U.H.S.* Vol. 9, 167f. Kennard was more evangelical than Means himself. In the Assembly's circular letter which he wrote in 1872, he attacked 'that dangerous abstraction called liberal Christianity' — *Proceedings*, 1872.
19. *Proceedings*, 1870.
20. Even here there was a difference of emphasis. Godalming and Horsham whose ministers, being non-Baptists, could not attend the Assembly, and which found difficulty in obtaining suitable baptized delegates were more aggressively Unitarian than the rest.
21. The gist of the reply was that the Assembly was historically an orthodox body prepared to tolerate unorthodox Christologies, not a common meeting ground for heretics of all descriptions, with the orthodox permitted to attend, if they so wished.
22. See for example *General Baptist Magazine*, 1873, 190, 286, 439.
23. Judgement was eventually given in favour of the New Connexion, though the Old was to be represented on the revived Trust. This solution might have been satisfactory but for the bitterness engendered en route — *Proceedings*, 1881.
24. *Proceedings*, 1877.
25. Stuppell left after two years, but was succeeded by another New Connexion minister, the Revd. J. A. Andrews, and he in turn in 1888 by another, J. J. Watmough. Evening attendances in 1879 were quite respectable: Billingshurst 40, Canterbury 22, Dover 90, Headcorn 120, Peckham 40, Worship Street 300, Portsmouth 100, Trowbridge 350, Nottage 100.
26. Briggs was succeeded at Bessel's Green by W. E. Mellone, father of the distinguished Unitarian scholar. Ellis who was also for a year messenger of the Assembly left the body after a grave scandal in 1883.
27. Solly is one of their Victorian radical sons of whom the Free Churches can be unreservedly proud: he would seem the closest Nonconformist equivalent to Canon Barnett.
28. H. Solly, *These Eighty Years* (1893), Vol. 1, 323f; Vol. 2, 147-150, 531f.
29. *Proceedings*, 1882-1887; *Inquirer* 28th May, 1887. Gordon, it should be noted, never allowed himself to be called a Unitarian,

- and attended the Assembly partly out of historical interest, partly because he liked fellowship with groups of liberal Christians who like himself repudiated the Unitarian name.
30. The *Inquirer* took great exception to this, and in turn poured scorn on the General Baptists: 'corporate suicide is the best thing for them'. An official rejoinder was sent to the *Inquirer* but not published—see *Inquirer* 21st July, 22nd September, 1888.
  31. See Spurgeon's comments in *The Christian World*, April 1877, and *The Sword and Trowel*, September, 1888. It could even be argued that the Downgrade Controversy began with two articles by R. Shindler in *The Sword and Trowel* for 1887 on the lapse of eighteenth century Non-conformist Arminianism into Socinianism and Unitarianism. Spurgeon's attitude to Arminianism deserves study in this narrow historical context as well as from the broad theological perspective adopted by I. Murray in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (1966).
  32. It was also the last occasion when the Old Assembly's *Proceedings* appeared in printed form.
  33. *Christian Life* 21st September, 1889.
  34. Surrey Grove, Peckham, the most historic Baptist church in London, did not long survive its voluntary exile: it was defunct by 1897.
  35. *Christian Life*, 4th October, 1890; 3rd October, 1891; 8th October, 1892; W. H. Burgess Mss in Unitarian College, Manchester.
  36. *Christian Life*, 5th October, 1895. The Seventh Day Church left the Assembly again in 1902.
  37. *Christian Life*, 10th October, 1896.
  38. T.U.H.S., Vol. 4, 64.
  39. *Christian Life*, 30th December 1905 says that Canterbury chapel formerly belonged to the General Baptists: it had a baptistery 'where the poor creatures were once dipped all over and nearly frozen to death'.
  40. *Christian Life*, 21st September, 1901.
  41. This presumably was so because Bethnal Green Road had been sold and the congregation had not yet moved to new premises in Winchmore Hill. One of the tragic results of this delay was a dispersal of the Assembly's records which Brinkworth had housed carefully in an iron safe at the former church.
  42. Burgess Mss D<sup>6</sup>; *Inquirer*, 25th February, 1905.
  43. *British and Foreign Unitarian Association Annual Report*, June 1914.
  44. Of these four churches. Headcorn, as we have seen, had been orthodox and under the guidance of New Connexion pastors since 1878; Winchmore Hill was from its own choice and from its previous history at Bethnal Green Road undeniably Baptist; Saffron Walden had recovered its Baptist character when Brinkworth moved there from Shepton Mallet in 1875, expressed it in the new chapel trust drawn up in 1893, and reaffirmed it when the Revd. A. Hewlett, a Baptist, was appointed to succeed Brinkworth who had died in 1914. Long Sutton, now very weak, since its reopening in 1877 had had a succession of Baptist pastors: John Howard 1876-87, W. J. Pond 1887-1907 and Harvey Smith of Bethnal Green who had succeeded him. Even so, Long Sutton was more theologically advanced than the other three—Pond left to go to a Unitarian church and the people looked to the Unitarians for financial support. A difficult case was Conigre chapel, Trowbridge where, as late as 1908, 30 baptisms were reported. But this cause was painfully

isolated from the other Baptist churches in the town and preferred association with the Unitarians.

45. E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union, A Short History* (1959), 182.

IAN SELLERS.

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*The Duke Street Story.* Harry Young. London. Lakeland. 1970. 127pp. 50p.

Lovers of Verdi and Wagner often find Gilbert and Sullivan less than satisfying. By the same token, those who savour serious history will find this paperback disappointing. They will know that *the* story of our Church in Richmond has yet to be written. The many friends of the Church, however, must have welcomed this record of the past, told with such evident gratitude for all that the Church and recent ministers have meant to the author.

The deficiencies are there. The author is a preacher (now, indeed, minister in nearby Kingston) and unfortunately uses a preacher's style throughout. Occasionally he is the polemicist, as when he shows his feelings on Christian bazaars (p.31). There are errors of substance. 1862 is not the earliest date for Baptist work in Richmond (p.16). Over 130 years earlier Thomas Flood was pastor to a Particular Baptist Church there. Beyond argument, Alan Redpath's ministry is the turning point in the Duke Street story, and it is fitting that three chapters out of ten should be devoted to the years 1940-43. Yet only two of the remaining seven chapters do not mention his name and such dominance did not, for one reader, enhance greatness. In spite of these criticisms, however, Harry Young must be congratulated. He saw, what he makes plain, that here is a story worth telling, and did not spare himself in giving it to us.

DOUGLAS C. SPARKES.