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The Venerable John Stanger of Bessels Green

I

THE COURSE of events and the changes, which the historian must often set down in summary fashion and in broad generalisations, can be better understood if they are exhibited in connection with the life stories of individuals.

During the long reign of George III, for example, profound changes came over the face of England. What G. M. Trevelyan describes as "Dr. Johnson's England" became "Cobbett's England", a very different place. A series of revolutions—industrial, agricultural and political—changed the general patterns of society. The balance of power in international affairs was altered by the Seven Years War, the War of American Independence and then the series of wars against Napoleon. The Evangelical Revival reached its climax, with many indirect as well as direct effects upon the outlook and position of the various ecclesiastical bodies. There was a general quickening of religious interest and zeal, and movements had their rise which prepared the way for the influential position occupied by the Churches in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Even if one's attention is confined to the Baptist denomination, the reign of George III appears of special importance, for it was a period of notable but complex developments, affecting both the Baptist groups which had emerged in the seventeenth century. The General Baptists, traditionally Arminian in theology, were much affected by the contemporary trend in certain intellectual and religious circles towards Unitarianism, but in their midst the strongly evangelical New Connexion had its rise. The Particular Baptists, who preferred Calvinism, often of a very rigid kind, shared in the general renewal of religious interest and gave birth to the first of modern missionary societies and then to a national-wide union which drew together ministers, churches and the regional association of churches, which had long been a characteristic feature of their life. The relations between the two groups of Baptists are not easy to disentangle. They can be more clearly understood, if they are set forth in local and personal terms.

The life of John Stanger provides admirable and probably unique material for this purpose. Born in the middle of the reign of George II, Stanger lived on until early in the reign of George IV. He was eight years old when George III came to the throne and sixty-eight when the mad old king at last passed away. Brought up among the General Baptists and in a family succession which stretched back to the days of persecution under the Clarendon Code, he was present at the meeting at which the New Connexion was formed, but shortly

afterwards threw in his lot with the Particular Baptists. He shared in the ordination of William Carey in 1787. Twenty-five years later, he attended and took public part in the gathering at which the formation of the Baptist Union was decided on. For fifty-seven years he was minister in the village of Bessels Green in Kent and was responsible for starting a number of new causes in the county. Though his publications were few, they included protests against the views of Elhanan Winchester and William Vidler, well known Universalists. That Stanger was not a man of outstanding gifts and that he finds no place in the history books of the period—not even in the Baptist ones—makes him the more valuable for our immediate purpose. Few of the rank and file were in personal touch with so many of the leading denominational figures of the day or shared in so many of the decisive denominational gatherings of the period. The stage on which he played his part was a small one, but by following his somewhat chequered career we can better appreciate what was going on and why things developed as they did. Some of the stranger episodes in which he was involved throw considerable light on the conditions of the time. Part of the story Stanger himself set down in an autobiographical fragment which was edited and published the year after his death.¹ Checked and supplemented from a number of other sources, Stanger's life provides an illuminating introduction to the changes that came in the Baptist denomination during the reign of George III.

II

Stanger was born in 1742 in Moulton, a village which lies four miles north-east of Northampton, to the left of the road leading to Kettering. Walpole was then Prime Minister and Alexander Pope the leading literary figure of the day. Isaac Watts was still alive, though in seclusion with the Abney family. Samuel Johnson, then in his thirties, was finding it difficult to eke out a livelihood in London. The momentous significance of John Wesley's conversion, which had occurred in 1738, was not yet apparent. But in those days news from the metropolis can rarely, or only slowly, have reached rural Northamptonshire.

Stanger's father farmed at Moulton, as his father had done before him. For three generations the family had been pillars of the General Baptists in the Midlands. John Stanger's great-grandfather had been carpenter, farmer and preacher at Harringworth, a village in the north of the county, near the Rutland border. He had frequently suffered for his Nonconformity in the days of active persecution. On more than one occasion his goods were confiscated, but when warrants were issued for the seizure of his cattle, he would drive them across the Welland river into the neighbouring county, assisted no doubt by his four stalwart sons.

By the closing decades of the seventeenth century a considerable community of General Baptists had come into existence in North-

amptomshire. Two of their "Messengers" (that is, preachers with a commission "to oversee the churches in divers places"),² Benjamin Morley and Francis Stanley, came from a church at Ravensthorpe in West Northants. John Stanger's grandfather, William Stanger, born in 1669, became himself a Messenger towards the end of his life. After farming in various places in the county, he had established himself in Moulton and was chosen pastor of the little Baptist church there. His wife came of another well known Baptist family, the Staughtons. Her father, John Staughton, had been a preacher at Blisworth and had suffered imprisonment in Northampton gaol for his religious convictions.

William Stanger belonged to the group of General Baptists, who opposed the contemporary trend away from the older credal and confessional statements of the seventeenth century. The General Baptist Assembly divided on this issue and for some years the churches of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire held an assembly on their own. They wished to continue an explicit avowal of their trinitarian faith, even if it could not be formulated solely in scriptural terms. In other respects as well, they were among the "conservatives" of their day, being particularly troubled about churches which had "fallen into ye way of singing Psalms of David, or other mens composures with tuneable Notes, and a Mixed Multitude".³ Controversies over congregational singing afflicted the General Baptists for several decades after the other wing of the denomination, the Particulars, had followed the lead given by Benjamin Keach. The worship which took place in William Stanger's farmhouse in Moulton must have been of a very simple kind, shared in only by those recognised as the faithful. The two sections of the General Baptist Assembly came together again in 1731 and united meetings were held at the White's Alley church in London. William Stanger and his brother Matthew were both present. Two years later, however, after a meeting at Bucky Mill of the Baptists of both the Moulton and the Ravenssthorpe areas, a letter was sent to the General Assembly meeting in London at Whitsun, which again raised the questions of a clear doctrinal statement regarding the Trinity and the matter of congregational singing.⁴ Satisfied apparently with the irenic answer that was given, William Stanger attended the Assembly held in the Glasshouse Yard church in London in 1735.⁵

Five years later William Stanger died and his eldest son, Thomas, entered into possession of the Moulton farm. There in 1742 the latter's son, John, was born. Upright in all his ways, Thomas Stanger was a strict disciplinarian. The farm servants were in danger of dismissal if they used profane language or failed to attend some place of worship. Getting a livelihood was not easy at that time, even if one had 140 or 150 acres of land to work. "The family must all labour nearly the same as the poorest", said John Stanger, recalling his earliest years. "If they could bring things round comfortably at the year's end; if a few of them could save ten or twenty pounds; if they

could wear a better coat, keep a little better home, and live more independent than their poorest neighbours, it was all they expected".⁶ The farmer's wife did her own spinning to make clothes for the family. The boys worked on the farm from the age of nine or ten. The girls were taught to spin and to help in other ways. When young John was about eight years old, his father began to preach and shortly afterwards was ordained as pastor of the Moulton church. The congregation had evidently increased. Worship no longer took place in the farmhouse, but in a schoolroom. In 1750, largely through Thomas Stanger's personal exertions, a simple meeting-house was built.

III

No doubt John owed much to his father, but it was probably his mother who more deeply and permanently influenced him. Sarah Stanger was clearly a woman whose character combined strength of conviction with a wide charity. Well versed in the Bible, she loved to read other books as well, or, when too busy, to have them read to her by her children. She disliked religious controversy and had "a relish for savoury experimental preaching . . . whoever was the preacher; and earnestly wished to see the people of God more united in brotherly love". She "would think all to be right who maintained the more essential and important matters, and yet all of them wrong so far as they laid stress on the lesser points".⁷ In later years, after the death of her husband, it was Sarah Stanger's resolution and influence which kept the Moulton Baptists together, "when their different views and altercations were tending to dissolve the church, or shut up the meeting-house".⁸ It was she who was probably responsible for the fact that, as a small boy of four or five, young John had the experience, which he never forgot, of hearing the famous Philip Doddridge, of Northampton, preach.

In 1758 Thomas Stanger gave up the Moulton farm and took a somewhat larger one, two miles away, at Holcott. He continued as pastor of the Moulton church and in 1761, 1765 and 1767 journeyed to London to the General Baptist Assembly. Farming conditions had improved and he was in more comfortable circumstances. But on a Sunday in May 1768, after preaching first at Long Buckby and then at Ravensthorpe, he was taken ill and ten days later passed away, at the very time the General Assembly was meeting in London and when—as must later be told—his son, John, was in special need of his help and advice.

The ten years from 1758 to 1768 had been varied and important ones for John Stanger. When his father left Moulton for Holcott, John, then a youth of nearly sixteen, had been sent to Oadby in Leicestershire to learn the craft of stocking-making. Twelve miles away, at Earl Shilton, there was a General Baptist church. The young preacher there, Richard Green, took an interest in the lad and their contacts led to the latter's making an open profession of his faith. In June 1759, John Stanger was baptised in Leicester, joining

the church there, not that at Earl Shilton. Writing of the baptism, many years afterwards, he said: "I have at times since been almost ready to conclude that I then had only a form of godliness, and that I was ignorant of the true grace of God. At other times, I have been willing to think that it was the dawning of the morning, and the day of small things, and that I should be very ungrateful to the Lord, not to consider it the beginning of His good work in me".⁹ At harvest time John returned home to Holcott to help his father. While there in 1760, another significant event took place. He became friendly with a girl nearly two years younger than he was, Mary Smith by name, later to become his wife. The following year, still working as a stocking-weaver, he moved from his lodgings in Oadby to Earl Shilton. Richard Green had become his brother-in-law. For the next three-and-a-half years, John Stanger lived in the Earl Shilton manse and had the daily companionship of his sister and her husband.¹⁰

He was passing through a period of intellectual and religious uncertainty, very similar to that which was experienced about the same time by another Midland stocking-weaver, eight years his senior, Abraham Booth, of Kirby Woodhouse in Nottinghamshire, later destined to be one of the most famous London Baptist preachers. The causes of their dissatisfaction were the same, as well as its ultimate consequence as far as their denominational allegiance was concerned. Both were troubled by the decline in the General Baptist churches which they knew. Both were impressed with the practical strength of Calvinism. "I was led to consider the state of religion among those with whom I stood connected", said John Stanger, "and could not help concluding that there was an evident deficiency in regard to the vital power and influence of religion, and practical godliness; while in the little I knew of the Calvinists, whom I had always considered erroneous, I observed such things as were a contrast to what appeared in the General Baptists, in regard to heart religion and the power of godliness".¹¹ Study of the Bible and a reading of the second volume of James Hervey's *Dialogues of Theron and Aspasia* finally led him, as he puts it, from dependence on self-righteousness to trust in Christ alone and to an acceptance of the free sovereign grace of God as set forth in the New Testament. Rector of Weston Favell and Collingtree from 1752 until his death in 1758, Hervey was one of the earliest Anglican evangelicals. A member of the Holy Club, while an undergraduate in Oxford, he was later in controversy with Wesley because of his Calvinism. Weston Favell lies within three miles of Moulton. As a boy Stanger must often have heard Hervey spoken of.

A decisive change in Stanger's religious opinions came only gradually. He could not fail to recognise the genuine piety of many of those among whom he had been brought up. He shared his mother's view that one might be saved, though unable to make up one's mind about the issues which divided Arminians and Calvinists. He was clear that "being born again and vitally united to Christ, was the great criterion

of being in a state of salvation". Nevertheless, he came in the end to the view that "the doctrine of particular election and redemption" was "in the main agreeable to the Word of God".¹² A dozen years later, in Cambridgeshire, young Andrew Fuller, brought up among the hyper-Calvinists and approaching the problem of his own salvation from the other side of the theological divide, made his way painfully to a somewhat similar mediating position, based on a personal decision to trust Christ.

Stanger's pilgrimage was aided by contact with John Collett Ryland, the vigorous minister of the Particular Baptist church meeting in College Lane, Northampton. His friend, Mary Smith, had recently joined this church, of which her father was an honoured member. Mr. Smith did not approve of his daughter's attachment to young Stanger on the ground of the latter's inferior social position and because of his connexion with the General Baptists. Mary sought the help of her pastor and he invited John to call on him. Ryland's advice was that the youth go to London and try to better himself. He offered to introduce John to a friend in the metropolis. So, in the spring of 1765, after settling up his affairs in Earl Shilton and visiting his father at Holcott, the young man made his way to London. He was then twenty-two years of age.

The following six weeks proved a turning-point in the life of John Stanger. Like many another youth from the provinces, he found it difficult to get work in London. Ryland's acquaintance was unable to help him and he turned for aid to one of his father's friends, a Mr. Reine. Though warmly welcomed, it was with the immediate and embarrassing suggestion that he marry the elder daughter of the house, who was to have a dowry of £500. This tempting proposal was put before John's father, Thomas Stanger, when he arrived in London a few days later for the General Baptist Assembly. But John had already made up his mind. "Though I was gratefully impressed with such kindness", he wrote afterwards, "and had I not been otherwise engaged should probably have acceded to the proposal"—the lady appeared, he says, to be "an agreeable young woman"—"yet as my dear friend, Mary Smith, had my warmest affections, I could not on any consideration, of either friendship or fortune, relinquish the object to whom I was so strongly attached".¹³

We do not know what Miss Reine thought of all this. Perhaps it was she who encouraged her father to make his proposal. John Stanger showed discretion and prudence in at once leaving the Reine household, taking the first situation that offered, though it appears to have been of a menial kind. When, a few weeks later, Thomas Stanger was again in London, he was distressed to find his son in such employ. Mr. Reine was again consulted. He seems to have borne John no ill-will and made another suggestion. Why should not so admirable and serious a young man enter the ministry? Perhaps the General Baptist Fund would do something towards his support. John himself had been wondering for some time whether he should not

seek to follow in the footsteps of his forebears. But he had determined to wait until he felt more assured in his beliefs and also better equipped than some of the preachers he had heard in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. He let himself be persuaded at this juncture by his father and Mr. Reine, however, and it was decided that the necessary preliminary steps towards his becoming a minister be taken at once. Father and son left London together, reaching the farm at Holcott early in June.

IV

The first step towards becoming a Baptist minister was the trial of the candidate's gifts by a local church, and its call to him to exercise them publicly. The Sunday after he arrived home, John Stanger, at the suggestion of his father, preached to the Moulton congregation. He later regarded this action as "precipitate", "imprudent" and "unprecedented".¹⁴ Taking as his text "Search the Scriptures" (John 5, v. 39), he spoke, he says, for two hours and then broke off his discourse and arranged to continue it the following Sunday. In spite of the suddenness of his appearance before them, the members of the church approved his trial sermons. It would no doubt have been difficult to refuse permission to preach to a Stanger and the young man could at any rate fill in the time granted to eighteenth century preachers. John himself was aware that he was more evangelical in his sympathies than were most General Baptists, but he felt that they could provide him with a way into the ministry. Accordingly, during the next year, he preached to their congregations in Moulton, Buckby, Ravensthorpe, Spratton, Scaldwell and a number of other villages, while helping his father on the farm. He also did a good deal of reading and spent a few weeks at John Collett Ryland's school in Northampton. There he no doubt first came to know young John Ryland, then a precocious boy of twelve or thirteen.

The next stage in John Stanger's pilgrimage came as a result of a visit to Moulton by Samuel Neal, Elder of the General Baptist Church in Chatham. Neal knew that the church in the Kent hamlet of Bessels Green was seeking an assistant preacher and agreed to recommend Stanger to them. There had been a meeting-house there, seating about a hundred persons, since 1716. To it a dwelling-house had been added in 1725. A burial-ground was laid out and fenced in in 1739, a gallery built in 1749. An invitation to preach at Bessels Green reached John Stanger in May 1766. The Northamptonshire General Baptists appointed him their representative to the General Assembly held at Whitsuntide at the Horsleydown church. So, taking the coach from Northampton on 19th May, he set off on his second visit to London, with Kent as his farther objective. Of those he met and heard at the Assembly, John Knott, minister of the church at Eythorne, impressed him most.¹⁵

John Stanger's subsequent journey to Bessels Green was made on foot, in the company of Richard Burgess, one of the church's repre-

sentatives to the Assembly. Their conversation on religious matters did not reassure the would-be preacher. What he learned of local Baptist affairs probably included the story of how twenty years earlier there had been trouble in the Bessels Green church over the preaching of a sermon on John 3, v. 7, by Michael Bligh, who in 1748 with a dissident group had established a Particular Baptist Church in nearby Sevenoaks.¹⁶ Stanger must have realised that the tension between the General and the Particular Baptists, which he had already experienced in the Midlands, was to be found in Kent also. On arrival in Bessels Green, however, he was cordially welcomed by Deacon John Colgate and, after preaching no fewer than five trial sermons, was invited to settle there. He returned to Holcott for a few weeks to clear up his affairs, but towards the end of July was back in Bessels Green, with lodgings in the house adjoining the chapel, a house occupied at the time by Richard Burgess, senior, father of the young man who had been his companion on the walk from Horsleydown. Stanger was to share the Sunday preaching with the pastor, Samuel Bengel, who had been with the congregation for more than twenty years. To help support himself, Stanger at once started a small day school. Feelings of satisfaction and expectancy no doubt outweighed such misgivings as he had.

V

What subsequently happened was in part caused by circumstances which are always liable to occur in churches of the independent type whose financial resources are limited. But a more important factor was the contrary theological trends of the time. The troubles in Bessels Green were not unique. They were paralleled in many other General Baptist communities in different parts of the country.

At first things promised well. The death of Richard Burgess, senior, enabled Stanger to get possession of the manse, and on the last day of 1766 he was married to Mary Smith. From Thomas Stanger the happy couple received a present of £10, "without any particular solicitation", and from Mary Smith's father £20 and some goods. The latter had become more kindly disposed towards the young Baptist minister. But before many months had passed Stanger discovered that the Bessels Green congregation had invited him to settle among them, not because they approved his religious opinions, but because they anticipated that he would adopt theirs. He had known that they were likely to be Arminians, unsympathetic to Calvinism with its doctrine of election. He had not realised that many of the leaders of the church were Arians and Socinians with views of the person of Christ and of the Trinity very different from his own. But such was the case.

Before long Stanger and Bengel were on occasion preaching directly against one another. Even the rite of baptism became an issue between them. Stanger was under suspicion for not laying sufficient stress on it. "I did not make a submission to it essential to Chris-

tianity", he says; "or rather, did not attribute to baptism that which the Gospel attributes to the work of Christ, which in general they seemed inclined to do".¹⁷ Differences of emphasis on this point have been characteristic of Baptists throughout their history. It is to be noted that, in the eighteenth century, belief in something akin to baptismal regeneration—or at any rate a practical insistence on the rite as essential to church fellowship—could be accompanied by a rationalistic Christology. At this time the Bessels Green church used an open-air baptistery built in 1733 and situated about a hundred yards from the meeting-house.

There was another matter on which Stanger found himself in difficulties. His wife had been a member of the College Lane church, Northampton, where the Lord's Table was open to Paedobaptists as well as Baptists. It was, of course, a Particular Baptist church. Stanger hoped that the Bessels Green church would admit his wife to what was then called "occasional communion". This the members refused to do, Samuel Bengé rejecting the suggestion with anger. The question of "terms of communion" was beginning once more to agitate many Baptist churches. It had caused controversy between John Bunyan and William Kiffin in the seventeenth century. A few years later it was to become a sharply divisive issue, with Robert Hall championing "free", "open" or "catholic" communion against Abraham Booth, Joseph Kinghorn and others. Once more it should be noted that the Bessels Green General Baptists, in spite of their Socinian sympathies, took the strict line.

Faced with these difficulties, John Stanger was willing to withdraw from the position of assistant preacher, but only if requested to do so by a vote of the church. He had commended himself, however, to a majority of the members, though not to Samuel Bengé and the deacons. Tension was soon acute. A special church meeting was called for 5th November, 1767, and two General Baptist "Messengers" were invited to attend—William Evershed, of Horsham, and Daniel Dobell, of Cranbrook. The former was called to the chair and, when it became clear that only six members supported Bengé, while fourteen were for Stanger, he urged the two parties to compose their differences and bear with one another. But Daniel Dobell and most of the General Baptist ministers of Kent and Sussex were unwilling to leave things as they were and appealed to the General Assembly. Here Stanger could hope for little sympathy. The very day the Assembly met, his father passed away at the farm at Holcott. Whether the subsequent developments would have been different had Thomas Stanger lived to advise and mediate, we cannot tell.

In Bessels Green things soon went from bad to worse. Knowing that they had the support of the leaders of the General Assembly, Samuel Bengé and his friends called a further church meeting in August 1768, of which little notice was given. At this meeting, a majority of those present—though only eleven in number—decided to dismiss John Stanger from the ministry of the church with effect

from the following Christmas. A further church meeting was fixed for December. It was apparently hoped that by that time a majority of the total membership of the church would agree that Stanger must go. In the meantime, perhaps to avoid unseemly incidents, no Communion service was to be held and proposals were made for a gift of money to the young man, if he would withdraw peaceably. But differences within churches of the independent type are rarely easily resolved. Stanger's supporters questioned the right of those they claimed were a minority to dismiss him. They felt themselves wrongly deprived of the Lord's Supper and in January 1769 persuaded John Brittain, of the church meeting in Church Lane, Stepney, to come down to Bessels Green and preside over the ordinance at a service in the meeting-house. This meant that there were in effect two separate churches using the one building. Stanger's party proposed that this be formally recognised. If they had the meeting-house on Sunday mornings, Benge's party could use it in the afternoons. "This", says Stanger, "we judged reasonable, especially as it was well known that the ancestors of my friends were at the chief expense in building the place and that neither the other party nor their ancestors had contributed anything considerable towards it".¹⁸ It was a sorry situation and not one likely to result in peace.

Stanger's opponents declared that he was trying to oust Mr. Benge; that he was a Calvinist; that he wanted to introduce congregational singing; and that he favoured "catholic communion". Though he approved both singing and open communion, Stanger denied any attempt to introduce these practices into the Bessels Green church. He also denied any desire to displace Samuel Benge. He and his friends wished to be regarded as a separate church. They claimed the right to use the meeting-house. But a further church meeting held by Benge's group in March 1769 confirmed Stanger's dismissal by a rather larger vote. The latter's friends thought it politic to worship for a time in a private house about half a mile from Bessels Green.

The Minutes of the General Assembly which met at Horsleydown in May 1769, contain the following paragraph:—

"The letter from Bessels Green being read and also the letter from the party that divided from them, after much debate we are of opinion that it would be most for the peace and good of the cause of our blessed Lord and his Church if our Brother Stanger would voluntarily withdraw himself as it may in the end be more for the peace and comfort of his own mind, rather than to stay and uphold divisions and contentions which we do not see likely to be otherwise put an end to."¹⁹

Samuel Benge and Richard Burgess were among those present at the Assembly as representatives of Bessels Green. There is no indication that Stanger himself was there, but John Brittain, Daniel Dobell, William Evershed and Samuel Neal attended, and the last three of them signed the Minutes. Stanger's group were in no mood to surrender and could clearly count on some influential support. John

Brittain and William Summers—the latter belonging to one of the General Baptist churches in Southwark—were willing to administer communion to them. In September 1769, accompanied by Robert French, of Coggeshall, Essex, they presided over a service in the meeting-house at which Stanger was formally ordained as pastor with the laying on of hands. Two deacons were also “ordained”. Unfortunately the proceedings were anything but orderly. Stanger’s opponents attended in force and tried to hold some sort of Church Meeting while the ordination service was in progress. “Without regard to what we were employed in”, wrote Stanger, “they continued through the greater part of the work, talking to one another, moving about, walking out and in, protesting against our proceedings, and sometimes joining in a loud clamour”.²⁰ The spectacle must have been an unedifying one, but Stanger could say afterwards: “Notwithstanding this great interruption, I found the Lord’s presence with me; I was strengthened and carried above all I met with; and I believe my friends in general, as well as myself, found it a comfortable day”.²¹

A few days later, on 3rd October 1769, there was a meeting of the General Baptists of East Kent at Canterbury. John Colgate raised the matter of the Bessels Green dispute. The record is cautiously phrased:

“The case of Bessels Green too difficult to determine for want of being more particularly acquainted with the whole affair. But we think a minority have no right to choose an Elder. With relation to the affair of Messengers visiting or writing without being called to it, in answer to which we think a Messenger have a right to advise or counsel anywhere or any when to give advice and counsel in any religious affairs”.²²

As John Knott, of Eythorne, signed this Minute and later showed himself sympathetic towards John Stanger, we may assume that the allusion to the rights of a Messenger is a reference to the action of Brittain in ordaining Stanger.

Samuel Benge’s party, however, turned again to the two local General Baptist Messengers, William Evershed and Daniel Dobell, who had visited Bessels Green two years earlier. Admittedly one of the functions of their office was to settle disputes. They were present at a Church Meeting in Bessels Green the month after Stanger’s ordination. The young man was still occupying the manse adjoining the meeting-house. At the close of the Church Meeting, which lasted five hours, he was called in and told that, not only had he been excluded from membership of the church, but it had been decided he must vacate the house. Stanger says that he and his friends still desired some kind of compromise by which meeting-house and manse might be shared, but that their opponents refused any such settlement. The other General Baptist churches in East Kent suggested that the matter be referred to arbitration. To this Stanger was disposed to agree, but Benge, knowing full well that those within easy reach were likely to side with him, insisted that only Messengers could act as

arbitrators. There was, therefore, again deadlock. When the Kent General Baptist Association met at Headcorn in May 1770, it was recorded that, "Whereas a charge by Mr. Stanger and others have been brought against Brother Daniel Dobell for sowing discord among the people at Bessels Green and in his office being overbearing as a Messenger, it is the opinion of this Association that the charge is not supported".²³ But the Minute was not signed by John Knott and three representatives who had come with him from Eythorne.

Benge's supporters then instituted legal proceedings for the possession of the Bessels Green property. In these circumstances, Stanger and his friends at last deemed it right, as well as politic, to withdraw. Fortunately a wealthy well-wisher in the neighbourhood came to their assistance and offered them a piece of ground on which to erect a meeting-house of their own. Work was put in hand at once, and on 23rd December 1770 the new building was opened for public worship. Standing on the south-west corner of the Green, surrounded by a small graveyard, the chapel is still in regular use, little altered after the passage of nearly two centuries.

VI

These sorry disputes must be set against the background of the general decline of the General Baptist community during the middle decades of the eighteenth century and of the controversies which frequently caused division in the General Assembly. Wider issues than the merely local or personal were involved in the happenings at Bessels Green, and the years 1769 and 1770 were of decisive importance in other places besides Kent.

Dan Taylor had emerged as the vigorous leader of a new group of churches in the Midlands, which were far more evangelical in sympathy than the majority of the older churches. He had been influenced by the Methodist movement. In June 1770 the General Baptist Assembly was faced with the secession of a number of churches, including those ministered to by John Brittain, William Summers and Robert French, the three ministers who had shared in John Stanger's ordination. The day following the Assembly, a meeting was held in John Brittain's church in Stepney and what became known as the New Connexion of General Baptists was formed "with a design to revive experimental religion, or primitive Christianity in faith and practice". The Six Articles of Religion, which were drawn up and signed, were not intended, it was said, "to embrace all the doctrines which the Scripture contains, or which a minister might believe and teach; but more especially they meant to exhibit some essential doctrines in which they differ from the Arian and Socinian Baptists; who, without a just claim, have retained the name of 'General Baptists' when they have renounced the doctrines of that denomination".²⁴

Though he made no allusion to the fact in his autobiography, John Stanger, then in his twenty-eighth year, was at the historic meeting in Church Lane, Stepney, when the New Connexion was formed. So,

in addition to Brittain, Summers and French, was John Knott, of Eythorne, whom Stanger had heard with approval when he attended the General Assembly in 1766. Knott had more than once shown sympathy with the young man during his difficulties at Bessels Green. Dan Taylor was appointed chairman of the meeting and, the formation of a New Connexion having been decided upon, Stanger and his church signified their adhesion to it. But the troubles at Bessels Green were not yet over, and it was soon clear that Stanger's personal sympathies were directed more towards the Particular Baptists with their Calvinistic theology.

The building of the second meeting-house in the closing months of 1770 brought relief in certain directions, but it caused new embarrassments in others. Stanger's Bessels Green friends were able to subscribe only a fifth of the estimated cost of the building. The actual cost proved to be twice that of the estimates. The money that could be raised towards Stanger's support was quite inadequate for his daily needs. His school had declined and he had now children of his own to provide for. The whole family had to face years of acute hardship. By the end of 1774 the situation was so desperate that Stanger offered his resignation to the church. The members urged him to continue with them, however, and friends at a distance advised him to stay where he was, aware, perhaps, that his rather anomalous position might make it impossible for him to secure an invitation to another pastorate. It happened that the proprietor of one of the shops in the village was giving up business and Stanger was persuaded to take over the stock in the hope that this would provide him with a better livelihood.

"It would be a miracle", said the editor of Stanger's memoirs, "a fact in complete contravention of the laws of nature, if a good minister proved a successful tradesman".²⁵ Whether or not this be true, the experiment in Stanger's case was anything but a success. Within a year or so, he was seriously in debt and was being pressed by his creditors. Then, in April 1776, he suffered a further serious blow. After giving birth to her sixth child, his wife, Mary, passed away. He had been deeply attached to her and his situation in the ensuing months, with six motherless children to care for, was pitiful in the extreme. He found his trials almost too much for his faith. "His anxieties followed him into the study, when he escaped from the shop or the schoolroom; and haunted him in the pulpit when secular pursuits did not prevent him from entering it".²⁶

On more than one occasion John Knott's church at Eythorne came to the rescue of Stanger and his family with timely gifts. Fortunately also he had become personally acquainted with Abraham Booth, now one of the leading ministers in London, and through him received small grants from the Particular Baptist Fund. Dr. Samuel Stennett, of the Little Wild Street church, also assisted him. But, in addition to providing for his family, Stanger had to undertake some personal responsibility for the interest on the meeting-house debt. This debt

still stood at £600. Stanger had, therefore, in the fashion of the time, to make a number of begging journeys. In 1778, partly in order to make it possible for him to be away from home, he married again. His second wife must have been a courageous and admirable woman, but as in due course she bore him six more children, his family responsibilities did not diminish.

His first begging tour was in Northamptonshire and neighbouring counties in the autumn of 1778. In little more than a month he covered five hundred miles, half of them on foot, but although visiting places where he was known and his name must have counted for something, he secured only £29 14s. 4d., after meeting his expenses. In 1779, when he travelled four hundred miles, his gross receipts are said to have been only £13 18s. 6d. In 1780, on a journey of more than eight hundred miles which occupied two months, he cleared only £9 17s. 6d. A visit to London was more encouraging. It yielded £63, but it occupied more than three months. Stanger might have hoped for some help from the funds of the rapidly growing New Connexion, but it is clear that he was in a somewhat anomalous position theologically and therefore from the point of view of denominational allegiance. The south of England churches which had joined the New Connexion on its formation never functioned together satisfactorily in the manner intended. Stanger was suspected, moreover, of Calvinism. But he could not hope to be *persona grata* with all Abraham Booth's friends so long as he remained among the General Baptists. Not until 1781, when the death of his mother brought him certain legacies, was Stanger's financial position free from serious embarrassment. The change in his fortunes proved a turning point in his life, and at the same time his little school began to revive again.²⁷

VII

Stanger was nearly forty years of age. He had faced some gruelling experiences. "But", says the editor of his memoirs, "when his embarrassments were removed, he shook himself like Samson, and applied to the work of an evangelist".²⁸ The most active and successful period of his ministerial life was about to begin. He had already, in 1779, opened a place of worship at Brasted, two miles away from Bessels Green, and preached there regularly until a church was formed and a resident minister secured. In 1785 he commenced services in Peshurst, seven miles away, and in 1787 at Westerham.

The year 1787 was a specially memorable one. After her husband's death Stanger's mother had steadfastly shepherded the little church in Moulton. When she was no longer there, it soon became enfeebled and rent. At length the meeting-house, which was in a very dilapidated condition, was closed. But in March 1785 a young man named William Carey moved into the village with his family, hoping to start a school there, while following his trade as a shoemaker. Eighteen months earlier he had been baptised by John Ryland in the river Nene at Northampton. Carey was a Particular Baptist, already known

to several of the leaders of the Northampton Association of Particular Baptist churches, but those in Moulton who remembered Sarah Stanger's relish for "savory experimental preaching" must have been predisposed to welcome him. Regular Baptist services were resumed and before long Carey was asked to undertake the pastorate of the Moulton church. He was being sought after elsewhere, but the growing congregations made him decide to stay in Moulton.

Carey and Stanger were already in correspondence, at the instance apparently of the latter. In a letter written from Moulton on 13th February 1787, Carey approves the suggestion of the older man that they should be free and open with one another. He emphasises the responsibilities attaching to the minister, so far as personal character is concerned and the close study of the Bible. "Pray for me", he wrote, "and God help me to pray for you". At the end of the letter he was able to tell Stanger that he had been invited to become the pastor of the Moulton church.

"I have not the least objection, except for fears about temporal supplies. Yet, after prayer to God, and advising with neighbouring ministers, I am disposed to trust these things in the hand of God, who has helped me hitherto; and have accordingly signified my assent to the church. Probably an ordination may take place in the spring, of which I will give you intelligence. Your sister Rogers has just been at Moulton. Your relations are well; (except your brother Robinson's family, which has long been afflicted). They would join in love did they know of my writing".²⁹

The ordination took place not in the spring but on 1st August 1787. Stanger was duly invited and in his diary thus described his experiences:

"I set off on a journey into Northamptonshire on July 30, having received a letter of invitation from Mr. Carey. I reached Moulton on the 31st. The meeting-house, which had been built in 1750, was pulled down and a new one erected. 1st August being the day for opening the new place and for ordaining their young minister, Mr. Carey, a large congregation attended. I prayed, with laying on of hands. I rejoiced in the prosperity of the cause, as it was the spot where I preached my first sermon and where my father laboured for twenty years".³⁰

John Ryland, of Northampton, John Sutcliff, of Olney, and Andrew Fuller, of Kettering, took the leading parts in the day's services. Stanger was thus brought into contact with the three chief figures in the Northampton Association, those destined to join with Carey a few years later in the formation of the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Heathen.

Stanger no doubt returned to Kent with his evangelistic zeal quickened and with an increased desire for closer fellowship with the Calvinistic wing of the denomination. As already noted, the southern section of the New Connexion of General Baptists had never func-

tioned satisfactorily. The Eythorne church had already in 1785 thrown in its lot with the Particular Baptists.

The Kent and Sussex Association of churches which maintained the doctrine of "particular redemption" then consisted of five churches in Kent and five in Sussex. In 1790 when the Association met in Tenterden for its annual gathering, Stanger asked that the Bessels Green church be received into membership. It was agreed "that the said church be requested to send a letter to the associated churches, at their next meeting, declaring explicitly their faith and order".³¹ Perhaps it was this move which encouraged Stanger to venture into print. He had, in 1785, published a sermon on *Free Access to God by a Mediator* (sold at 6d.). In 1790 there appeared from his pen *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration considered as unscriptural* (price 2d.). The following year he issued *A Short View of the Doctrine of the Trinity, as stated in the Scriptures: in a letter to a friend*, a booklet of twenty pages.

The 1790 publication was obviously linked with a controversy which, beginning locally, spread much more widely. Among the churches in membership with the Kent and Sussex Association was that at Battle. Its minister, William Vidler, who was sixteen years younger than John Stanger, supplemented his stipend by keeping a bookshop. He had become interested in the views of Elhanan Winchester, an American, then ministering to a church in London. Winchester was a universalist and before long Vidler became his eager disciple.

At the 1791 meeting of the Kent and Sussex Association, held at Rye, William Vidler was chosen as Moderator. The letter from Bessels Green was considered and the church was received into membership. The following year—when the Association met at Bright-helmston (now more familiarly known as Brighton)—the church at Chatham, of which John Knott, the son of Stanger's friend, was pastor, was also received into the Association and during the proceedings Stanger himself preached one of the sermons. Vidler was named as a possible preacher for the next year, 1793, but during the intervening months his open avowal of universalism brought him under suspicion. The Battle church, when the matter came before it, supported its minister by 153 votes to 15, but when the Association met in June in Chatham this action was condemned. The Minute runs: "The church at Battle having avowed the error of Universal Restoration, it was agreed that the said church should be separated from this Association, which was accordingly done". The record continues as follows: "A letter from fifteen persons announcing that they had withdrawn from the church at Battle was read, declaring their disbelief of the Universal Restoration of Devils and men from Hell, and desiring advice and help of the associated churches. Agreed that the Messengers do represent this case to their respective churches".³² Vidler is said to have been himself present on this occasion and to have stood in the deacons' pew, while Joseph Middleton, of Lewes,

denounced him as a dangerous heretic.³³ Within a few months he was to be found as colleague and then successor of Elhanan Winchester in London, and after engaging in literary warfare with Andrew Fuller, avowed himself a Unitarian.

When John Stanger attended the 1794 meeting of the Association at Sandhurst, he had with him his eldest son, Thomas. The young man must have been gratified to hear his father named as the writer of the next Circular Letter to the associated churches. The 1795 gathering was at Handcross. Stanger had not only to read his letter answering the question: What are the best evidences of the Grace of God in a believer's heart? but also to act as the "scribe" of the proceedings. A further evidence of the growing esteem in which he was held came in 1796 when the Association met at the Bessels Green church. When he read to the company the second chapter of I Thessalonians, he had surely in mind his first attendance at a meeting of the General Baptist Assembly thirty years earlier and the controversies and hardships of his first years in Kent.

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know . . . we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. . . . But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts".³⁴

Almost every word of the chapter must have seemed a transcript from his own experience.

Stanger was still energetically pursuing his evangelistic work in the countryside around Bessels Green. At the 1796 meeting he proposed to the Association that "a Committee be formed to take into consideration whether anything can be done to assist each other in preaching the gospel in the villages".³⁵ This was agreed to and Stanger and two others were appointed for the purpose. That same year he opened a place for preaching at Eynsford, some seven miles from Bessels Green. Here, it is said, "he encountered much riotous opposition, but was well repaid for his perseverance and self-denial".³⁶ In 1802 he was able to share in the formation of an independent church and the settlement there as pastor of John Rogers.³⁷

There was a good deal of contention and difficulty within the churches of the Kent and Sussex Association in the following years. It matched the general disaffection resulting from the unpopularity of the war with France. The Baptist churches in membership with the Association still numbered only a dozen. But Stanger pressed on with his own work. In 1797 he began regular preaching in Downe, in 1798 at Tatsfield and at Crocken Hill. In 1800 he was again Moderator of the Association. In 1802 he began to preach at Ightham, in 1804 at Ide Hill, in 1805 at Borough Green, and in 1806 at Seal. He was then in his sixties, but showed no diminution of zeal. "A list made out in the year 1817 shows that he had at that time preached in the villages surrounding Bessels Green 1,877 sermons, and had travelled

in order to do so, about 15,000 miles".³⁸ Yet he was not an outstanding preacher or speaker. The editor of Stanger's memoirs admits candidly that "a little more compression in his style, and animation in his delivery, would probably have increased his acceptance, and thus augmented his usefulness".³⁹

VIII

The Association Circular Letter for 1803 was again from Stanger's pen. In 1822, when nearly eighty years of age, he was to write yet another. By then he had shared in a further notable development in Baptist life, the formation of the General Meeting of the Particular Baptist Denomination, out of which grew the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

It was John Rippon and Joseph Ivimey, pastors of the churches at Carter Lane, Southwark, and Eagle Street, Holborn, respectively, who in 1812 summoned a meeting "to take into consideration the proposed measure for an annual general association of the Particular Baptist churches".⁴⁰ Sixty ministers met in the Carter Lane vestry on Thursday, 25th June 1812, and gave in their names as supporters of the project. The largest single group, apart from those of the metropolis, came from Kent. It included John Stanger, from Bessels Green, John Knott from Chatham, John Rogers from Eynsford, and the pastors of the churches at Lennan Heath, Crayford, Sevenoaks, Eythorne, Margate, Reigate and Woolwich. Andrew Fuller, John Ryland and John Sutcliff, who had been with Stanger at Carey's ordination twenty-five years earlier, were at the Carter Lane meeting. When the business resolutions had been passed, an address was given by James Hinton, of Oxford. Then John Stanger was called on to offer prayer. He was one of the seniors present, and, whether or not all the company realised it, probably gathered up in his own person more of the Baptist history of the previous seven decades than any other who was there.

Stanger was present at the first Assembly of the new Union in June 1813. He attended again in 1814. Whether he got to any of the subsequent annual gatherings is not clear. He was now an old man, still anxious—like his mother—to see both sides of a question, to base himself on Scripture, and hesitant to commit himself too completely to any one theological system or party.

"Whether I am esteemed as a sound Calvinist, or whether I am rejected as a rotten heretic, it does not essentially affect me", he wrote. "The approbation of my God, and the testimony of my conscience, the presence of my Saviour, and the enjoyment of his truth; the assistance of his spirit, and success in his work, will be to me more than a cloud of witnesses showering their applauses upon me".⁴¹

But it was among the Particular Baptists that he had come to find the most satisfying fellowship. He believed that "the gospel is appointed to be published to the world",⁴² and must have followed with sympathy the growing work of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Neither his own name, nor that of the Bessels Green church, appears, however, in the lists of early contributors to the Society. It is perhaps significant that Fuller appears never to have thought it politic or worthwhile to journey into Kent on behalf of the Mission. In 1802 and 1803 there were Stangers among the subscribers to the Society, perhaps John's children. He himself can never have had much of this world's goods. Indeed, as late as 1813, he made another begging journey to London, since the debt on the Bessels Green meeting-house was not yet cleared.

In the last years of his life the Bessels Green Sunday School became one of Stanger's special concerns. Started in 1807, it helped to quicken the life of the church, which had been languishing somewhat. Stanger was able to persuade some of the better known Baptist leaders to visit Bessels Green to preach special sermons in aid of the school, in the fashion of the time. Among the visitors were Joseph Hughes, of the Bible Society, Joseph Ivimey, George Pritchard, James Hoby and Stanger's boyhood acquaintance, John Ryland. "My latter days have been my best days",⁴⁸ wrote John Stanger. One who was a child at the time found his preaching, however, "heavy and dull in the extreme" and noted that even older people were not infrequently overcome by drowsiness.

In those closing years his family proved a considerable comfort to him. His six sons and six daughters all remained alive and he had no fewer than forty-four grandchildren. At least two of his daughters had gone with their husbands to seek a livelihood across the Atlantic. Another of his daughters, Elizabeth, had married a miller, William Higgs, and their descendants remained for several generations actively associated with Baptist churches.

For Stanger the end came quickly. In 1822 not long after his eightieth birthday, he went to spend Christmas in Maidstone with one of his sons. Though growingly infirm, he was able to preach in the King Street chapel. The following spring he suffered a slight stroke, but was able a few days afterwards to preach to his own people in Bessels Green, while sitting in the table pew. In the afternoon he presided at the Lord's Supper. He knew that the end was near and passed away peacefully early the following Sunday morning, 13th April 1823. He was buried beneath the floor of the meeting-house in which for more than fifty years he had ministered. Over the door the members placed a tablet with an elaborate inscription recording the service of their "venerable pastor".

Born in the middle of the reign of George II and living on to see George IV on the throne, Stanger had witnessed the industrial and agricultural revolutions which made inevitable changes in government and society. These came, a few years after his death, with the passing of the Great Reform Bill and the Municipal Corporations Act. In his lifetime there had occurred the revolt of the American colonies, the French Revolution and the long drawn out war against Napoleon. When Stanger was a boy, Watts and Doddridge were still alive, while Whitfield and the Wesleys had only recently passed through

the religious experiences which made them the leaders of the Evangelical Revival. When he died, Rowland Hill and Robert Hall were among the most famous preachers. The general religious scene had been transformed. Stanger had played no part in these changes. But his life had also spanned a notable period in Baptist history, and though he was not a man of outstanding personality or gifts, he had been present on some important occasions—at the establishment of the New Connexion of the General Baptists, at the ordination of William Carey and at the formation of the Baptist Union. Perhaps of more significance in the long run had been his steadfastness in adversity and the evangelistic zeal which resulted in a score or more of new Baptist preaching centres in Kent. His personal story epitomised the experiences of the denomination and of an epoch.

NOTES

¹ William Groser, *Memoirs of Mr. John Stanger, late Pastor of a Baptist Church at Bessels Green, Kent* (1824).

² See J. F. V. Nicholson, "The office of 'Messenger' amongst British Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries", *Baptist Quarterly*, XVII (1957-8), pp. 206-25.

³ *Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptist Churches in England*, ed. W. T. Whitley (1910), II, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-19.

⁵ This Assembly had before it a letter from the Harringsworth Church, signed by Matthew Stanger and others, asking for help with the cost of the new meeting-house they had to build at Morcott.

⁶ *Memoirs*, pp. 23-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ Cf. Adam Taylor, *History of the General Baptists* (1818), II, p. 162: "An infirm old man, of the name of Green, who lived at East Shilton, then enjoyed the property as a nominal Elder and preached five or six times a year to the few who chose to hear him". The reference is to 1782.

¹¹ *Memoirs*, p. 44. Abraham Booth, born 1734, was leader of the Kirby Woodhouse General Baptist Church from 1760. A few years later he embraced Calvinism. His sermons, which make up *The Reign of Grace*, were published in 1768 on the advice of Henry Venn, Vicar of Huddersfield, and a few months later Booth was invited to the Baptist Church in Little Prescott Street, London. See *Baptist Quarterly*, XXVI (1975-6), pp. 28-42.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵ For some details of John Knott, who died in 1780, see W. T. Whitley, "Early days at Eythorne", *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, III (1912-13), pp. 47f.

¹⁶ "Mr. Bligh's meeting at Sevenoaks" sought help from the Baptist Board in 1767 (*Trans. B.H.S.*, VI (1918-19), p. 82; Joseph Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists* (1830), IV, pp. 513-14). The trouble began in 1746. The first meeting-house in Sevenoaks was built in 1754 and that autumn Bligh was ordained. A larger meeting-house, 30 by 20 feet, was erected in 1776. Bligh died in 1794. A third meeting-house was built in 1815.

¹⁷ *Memoirs*, p. 68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁹ *Minutes*, II, p. 138.

²⁰ *Memoirs*, p. 87.

²¹ *Idem.*

²² See Walter H. Burgess, "Eythorne and the Kent General Baptist Asso-

ciation", *Trans. B.H.S.*, VI (1918-19), p. 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁴ James Taylor (1774-1845), nephew of Dan Taylor. Quoted in J. H. Wood, *A Condensed History of the General Baptists of the New Connexion* (1847), p. 178.

²⁵ *Memoirs*, pp. 102-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁷ In the Minutes of the monthly Conference held by the ministers and officers of the Baptist churches in Leicestershire, which formed the nucleus of the New Connexion, there is a perplexing entry under 9th Oct., 1781: "Mr. Stanger from Moulton attended Conference and desires to join in our Connection. Advised to be taken into consideration" (*Trans. B.H.S.*, V (1916-17), p. 121). If this was John Stanger he had perhaps been back in Moulton because of his mother's death, and was concerned about the future of the church there. But the reference may be to some other member of the family.

²⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 117.

²⁹ This letter was preserved by one of Stanger's grandsons and was printed in full in the *Baptist Reporter*, July 1844, and again in John Taylor's *Biographical and Literary Notices of William Carey, D.D.* (1886), pp. 79-81.

³⁰ Quoted by S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (1934 edn.), p. 51.

³¹ *Baptist Annual Register*, I (1790-3), pp. 51-2.

³² *Ibid.*, II (1794-7), p. 33.

³³ See F. W. Butt-Thompson, "William Vidler", *Baptist Quarterly*, XVII (1957-8), p. 6.

³⁴ *I Thessalonians 2*, vv. 1-3.

³⁵ *Baptist Annual Register*, II (1794-7), p. 494.

³⁶ *Memoirs*, p. 125. Stanger was again the "scribe" when the Association met in Ashford in June 1801 and preached from Philippians 1, v. 27 (*Baptist Annual Register*, IV (1801-2), pp. 811-12).

³⁷ John Rogers, of Walworth, was ordained there 29th July, 1802. Stanger "asked the usual questions", his son, described as "itinerant for West Kent", gave out the hymns and Dr. Jenkins (Walworth), Mr. Upton (London) and Mr. Knott (Chatham) shared in the service.

³⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁰ See E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: a short history* (1959), ch. 1.

⁴¹ *Memoirs*, p. 133.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

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Baptist Records

WEST MIDLAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

(Records in the Association Office, 12 Cherry Street, Birmingham)
 "Midland Association": assembly minutes 1850-84; committee minutes 1855-93.

Gloucestershire Association of Baptist Churches minutes 1849-68, 1870-85.

Shropshire Baptist Association minutes 1830-1912.

Warwickshire General Baptist Conference minutes 1844-88.

West Midland Baptist Association: annual meetings 1912-13; general committee and assemblies minutes 1894-1943; executive minutes 1935-43; finance sub-committee 1897-1916; other sub-committees 1897-1923, 1930- ; Forward Movement minutes from 1936; War