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The Formation of the General Baptist Missionary Society

THE General Baptist Missionary Society was formed, not without some opposition, at the Boston Association meetings of the New Connexion in June, 1816. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the factors leading to its formation (not arranged in any order of importance) were as follows :

1. The widespread concern and enthusiasm for missions which followed on the formation of the Particular Baptist Missionary Society on 2nd October, 1792, and, in particular, the publication of the *Periodical Accounts* (No. 1 published in 1794)¹ which disseminated news about the work of Carey, Marshman and Ward and other missionaries in India.

2. The educative and propaganda value of the *General Baptist Repository*, under the editorship of Adam Taylor, who was publishing in serial form a detailed "History of the Baptist Mission in India"²

He also allowed the publication in his columns of anonymous letters, signed "P. Derby" (presumably Pike) urging the formation of a General Baptist Missionary Society.

3. The missionary zeal, influence and persistence of John Deodatus Gregory Pike (born 6th April, 1784, died 4th September, 1854), later to be the first Secretary of the G.B.M.S. As early as 1809, although he was then only a very new member of the General Baptist Connexion, he had raised (by means of an anonymous letter to the Chairman) the matter of the formation of a Baptist Missionary Society at the Association meetings held at Quondorn.

4. The compassion and interest aroused by the Serampore fire of 1812, which had led the General Baptist Connexion to launch an appeal on behalf of Serampore, and thereby aroused further concern for missions within the churches connected with the Association.

John Gregory Pike was the eldest of a family of seven sons and three daughters, whose father, Dr. Pike (at one time an Anglican clergyman) was in 1784 minister of a Presbyterian church in Highgate.³

At the age of 18 he went to the Dissenting Academy at Wymondley, which "was open to all Nonconformists and had among its students Unitarians, Independents, Presbyterians and Baptists"⁴ (Wymondley Academy was later to be merged into New College). Pike remained four years in the Academy. Half-way through the course he was baptised. In April, 1805, he made a solemn covenant with God and later after reading Andrew Fuller's *Memoirs of Samuel Pearce* he considered the possibility of volunteering for missionary work. An entry in his journal for 19th May, 1805,

reads : " I have been reading Pearce's Life . . . and why my soul shouldest thou repine if called to go to far distant lands ? Thy God can support thee ; thy Saviour can bless thee."⁵ His mind seems to have turned to Africa as a field of service as an entry for 6th May, 1809, shows : " My mind has today been often engaged on a mission to Africa, and in becoming, if Heaven prolong my days, a missionary to that much injured land."⁶

In 1806 he left Wymondley and for a period taught in Edmon-ton. He desired closer fellowship with Baptists and because he was not very sympathetic with the Calvinism " which ruled in Particular Baptist Churches ",⁷ joined the New Connexion in 1808. In 1809 he attended the Annual Association of the New Connexion at Quorndon, in Leicestershire, and wrote an anonymous letter to the chairman of the Association on the subject of establishing a Mis-sionary Society. According to his own account : " This letter appeared to excite some attention. Mr. Freestone spoke of it in terms of high commendation and Mr. B. Pollard observed that he could almost have sold the coat from his back for the missionary cause, or to that effect. The letter was printed in the *Repository* No. 17."⁸

In 1810 he accepted a call to Brook Street Baptist Church, Derby,⁹ and was to remain there for his whole ministry. Under his energetic leadership the church soon prospered. Although his own church faced financial problems, he continued to urge upon the General Baptists the need for missionary activity.

In 1812 the seemingly disastrous fire destroyed the printing works at Serampore. Joshua Marshman gave an immediate account of it in a letter to Dr. Ryland dated 12th March, 1812. This was received in England on 9th September, 1812¹⁰ and Pike must have received news of this very speedily thereafter for the matter was presented to the General Baptist Conference at Lough-borough on 29th September, 1812, as a case from the church at Derby. It was resolved " that Conference recommend the General Baptist churches to make collections to assist in repairing the melancholy loss at Serampore " and J. G. Pike was instructed to write the appeal letter to the churches.¹¹

During this period also he had been in touch with Andrew Fuller. His own account reads : " About 1812 the present Secretary of the Society applied to Mr. Fuller, the venerated secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, to know if that Society would employ as a missionary a person who might be a member of a church belonging to the General Baptists. His answer amounted to a negative."¹² On 7th January, 1813, from Kettering, Fuller wrote to William Ward at Serampore :¹³

" The New Connexion, as they are called, of the General Baptists (that of Mr. Dan Taylor, which includes most of the Lancashire,

Lincolnshire churches and others lower down) have lately taken an interest in the missions. At one of their conferences they resolved to recommend collections in their churches for repairing the loss by fire, and I have received several sums from them. A while ago I also received a letter from a Mr. Pike, the General Baptist minister at Derby, requesting to know whether they could be permitted to send one of their brethren out as a missionary to act in conjunction with ours ; or if not, whether they might not have a native brother, chosen by you, whom they might consider as their missionary, whom they would give £14 a year to support, and to whom they might sometimes write : and from whom receive a letter, you acting as translator between them. This proposal came not from them as a body but merely from the church at Derby.

“To the first I answered I thought there would be an objection as tho’ there were no disputes on the subject wherein we differed at present, yet the measures they proposed might occasion them : and unanimity was of great importance.

“To the second I said there could be no objection, and it would be gratifying to us.

“I consider the business now as settled, having received another letter from Mr. Pike in which he proposed sending me the £14 shortly. I could wish therefore that as suitable a native brother as any of you have should be chosen as theirs, and that a letter be sent to the Rev. Mr. Pike, Derby, giving him name and any other particulars of their missionary, inviting them to send an occasional letter to him, to your care . . . a thing like this may do good in many ways . . .”

In 1813 two letters on the importance of missionary efforts signed “P. Derby” appeared in the *General Baptist Repository*.¹⁴

In the same year at the Conference held at Derby on 28th and 29th September, 1813,¹⁵ a question was proposed from the Friar Lane Church, Leicester : “Ought not the General Baptists to exert themselves as much as they can in establishing though on ever so small a scale a mission of their own ?” The answer was “Yes”. Nothing, however, seems to have been done at this time although “about 1814 and 1815 the Independents formed a Society for the counties of Derby, Nottingham and Leicester auxiliary to the London Missionary Society. The same person (i.e. Pike) again applied to Mr. Fuller suggesting the formation of an auxiliary Baptist Missionary Society, which should include both bodies of Baptists, denominated General and Particular . . . The answer to this proposal was decidedly unfavourable.”¹⁶

It therefore remained for the New Connexion, if it wished, to take its own steps. Pike’s enthusiasm did not wane. A further letter “On the importance of Missionary Exertions”, dated 6th October, 1815, signed by “P. Derby”, appeared in the *General*

Baptist Repository.¹⁷ This letter appealed on behalf of 500 million heathen and recommended both that monthly prayer meetings be held for the extension of Christ's Kingdom and friends of the "perishing heathen" endeavour to form themselves into a missionary society. "They should remember that the Lord despiseth not the day of small things."

It is clear from this letter that some of the major objections to the formation of a missionary society came from those who believed that "We have neither men nor money". "How do you know you have not men?" Pike asked. "The Lord raises up workmen for the job." The letter ends with a moving prayer: "And now, blessed Lord, let me turn from man to Thee; arise Thou God of love, restore Thy ruined work; destroy Satan's empire and erect Thy own and O, stir up our hearts and strengthen our hands for this heavenly war."

At last there began to be some effect from Pike's dogged persistence. The letter, referred to above, was read at a church meeting at Storey Street, Nottingham, and the case from that church was presented to the Leicester and Nottingham Conference meeting at Wimsowold on 4th June, 1816.¹⁸ The Conference was requested to take into consideration the propriety of undertaking foreign missions to some part of the world. After a full discussion it was resolved: "That the subject appears to be of such infinite importance that the conference recommend it to the most serious consideration of the general body at the next association. And that previous to the association a copy of this resolution be sent to every church." Pike was the preacher at the Conference, his text being Gal. 6:14.

The Lincolnshire Conference meeting at Wisbech on 6th June, 1816 (and again the sermon was on Gal. 6:14, but this time the preacher was Mr. Everard), agreed to present a case to the ensuing association to consider whether something should be done in favour of foreign missions. In appointing a meeting to facilitate missionary exertions it concluded that in present circumstances it would be more prudent to assist Particular Baptist Missions.¹⁹

The subject was brought up at the 46th Annual Association Meetings at Boston on 25th-28th June, 1816, as a case from the Midland Conference. These meetings were under the chairmanship of the much respected Dan Taylor, the founder of the General Baptist Connexion. Forty-five representatives were present. They must have been in good heart for the membership of the New Connexion churches was 6,624. In the last year there had been 580 baptisms, and there had been an increase in membership of 329.

After considerable deliberation it was resolved "That this association heartily approves of a foreign General Baptist Mission and recommends it to the friends of the measure to form themselves

immediately into a society for the prosecution of this important object".²⁰

Encouraged by this resolution several meetings were held in the intervals of the business of the association which were well attended and the General Baptist Missionary Society was formed. In a letter dated 2nd July, 1816, Pike gives the following brief account of this important event :

"If the part I took in the missionary business was of any service this (viz., reaching Boston earlier than he expected) appeared providential, as that business quite unexpectedly to me came forward the next morning. When it was brought forward J.T., though he professed to approve of it, was by one sweeping motion for setting it all aside. I immediately moved a very opposite proposition and was warmly supported. After some discussion the first proposition was negatived, having, as far as I noticed not above four or five notes in its favour. A motion in favour of the establishment of a mission was then brought forward and an almost unanimous vote passed recommending such a measure."²¹

The first Committee of the General Baptist Missionary Society was composed as follows : "All ministers of subscribing churches, together with John Ashwell, Esq., and Messrs. F. Boot, James Smith, Joseph Saunders, Thos. Bennett of Nottingham, John Heard of London, Thos. Small of Boston, Wm. Stranger Jnr. of Fleet, Butters of Spalding, Ewen of Tydd, Rd. Clarke of Wisbech, Jerrom of Diseworth, John Pegg of Melbourn, Ashdowne of Louth, Stranger of Tydd, J. Nicholson of Halifax, W. Ingham of Heptonstall Slack, Joseph Ewen of March, Cotterell of Birmingham, George Wilkies of Derby, Joseph Claypon, Esq., and Joseph Smith of Boston, Massey of Ibstock, Javis Miller of Loughborough, White of Cotes, J. Bennett of Hoton Mills, Wm. Stevenson of Wimeswold, John Gamble of Quorndon, Fred Deacon of Leicester, Bakewell Snr. and John Dunncliffe of Castle Donnington, West of Ilkiston, Adam Taylor of London, Newberry of Hugglescote, Thos. Green and John Noble of Boston, Rd. Everard of Spalding, Hulse of Hinckley, John Taylor of Duffield, with Mr. Pike of Derby to act as secretary, and Mr. Robert Seals of Nottingham as Treasurer."²²

The duty of this committee was "to diffuse information on the subject, to solicit subscriptions and donations, preparatory to the ulterior objects of the Society and to watch these leadings of Providence which may direct the scene of future operations and point out men suited to the work".

A small tract was drawn up for publication urging the importance of missions in general and calling for support of the new society. This was adopted at a Committee meeting held at Nottingham 22nd August, 1816, 5,000 copies being printed.

On 24th June, 1817, the first annual meeting of the Society was held. It seems that little had been accomplished in the meanwhile. But Pike was becoming impatient : " It appeared evident that the Society was greatly in want of an active Committee—the cause continued to languish, little was done. At length one of the Committee (Mr. Parkinson) and the Secretary ' resolved on sending out a circular which called for those disposed in earnest to favour this infant cause ' to a meeting at the General Baptist Chapel, Loughborough."²³ At this meeting the following resolutions were adopted.

" That a quarterly paper containing general missionary information and in particular respecting our infant society be published ; not to exceed eight pages, but alternately to be eight and four pages. . . .

" That the secretary and committee obtain information respecting Malabar and the island of Borneo.

" That the Society write to Mr. Peggs to obtain his views on missionary work.

" That young men sent out as missionaries should receive a previous education and that the committee were desirous of engaging some young men as soon as practicable."

The publication of quarterly papers was an important and influential step. Of the first No. 1, 2,000 were printed ; of No. 2, 1,500 ; of No. 3, 2,000 ; of No. 4, 2,000 ; of No. 5, 5,000.

The infant society began to arouse the interest of the New Connexion but the Society still lacked missionaries and a field of labour. The third annual report mentioned " the Venerable Missionary Ward has recently arrived in this country, from whom your secretary expects much valuable information on that subject "²⁴ At this stage W. Bampton and J. Peggs offered to the Society. On 15th May, 1821, Bampton was " set apart as a missionary at Loughborough ". William Ward, of Serampore, gave the address. The chapel was crowded.²⁵ On 19th May Peggs was set apart as missionary at Wisbech.

It was decided that they should choose one of the following fields of labour : " Assam, the Punjaub, Central Hindustan, or one of the great eastern islands which may be as yet unoccupied."²⁶ They and their wives sailed together with William Ward and Mrs. Hannah Marshman on 28th May, 1821, in the *Abberton*. " The secretary (Pike) and a number of friends to the Mission accompanied the party on board the vessel ; there they found Mr. Ward and his friends who were to be their companions of voyage. All retired to the dining cabin, prayer was offered by Mr. Ward and Mr. Pike and an affected parting took place."²⁷ They arrived at Serampore on 15th November, 1821. After consultation with Carey Orissa became their field of labour.²⁸

NOTES

¹ *Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Mission*, Vol. I (1792 to 1799), 1800, B.M.S. Archives.

² *General Baptist Repository*, Vol. IV, p. 137ff, Vol. V, p. 136ff, p. 257ff.

³ *The First Generation*, E. A. Payne, p. 133ff.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵ Journal quoted in *The Memoirs and Remains of the Late Rev. J. G. Pike*, edited by his sons, John Baxter and James Carey Pike, 1855, p. 21.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁷ Payne, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁸ *The Baptist Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 1, p. 270ff. Article "The Origin of the General Baptist Missionary Society", which is composed of quotations from an account of the origin of the G.B.M.S. written by Pike for the Minute Book of the G.B.M.S.

⁹ For a brief history of this church see *The Quest*, April, 1959, p. 12ff. Article "St. Mary's Church, Derby", by Graham W. Hughes.

¹⁰ *General Baptist Repository*, Vol. V, p. 22.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 26ff.

¹² *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. I, p. 271.

¹³ Bound volume of Correspondence: A. Fuller to Carey, Marshman, Ward, etc.; 1794-1815, p. 551ff. (B.M.S. Archives).

¹⁴ *General Baptist Repository*, Vol. V, p. 157ff and p. 259ff.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 223.

¹⁶ *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. I, p. 270ff.

¹⁷ *General Baptist Repository*, Vol. VII, p. 72ff.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 182ff.

²⁰ *General Baptist Minutes* (Printed), Vol. II, p. 16. Baptist Union Library.

²¹ *The Memoirs and Remains of the Late J. G. Pike*, p. 113.

²² *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. I, p. 271-272.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 273.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 275.

²⁵ *Condensed History of the General Baptists of the New Connexion*, by J. H. Wood, p. 321.

²⁶ *B.M.S. Centenary Volume*, p. 242.

²⁷ *Condensed History of the General Baptists of the New Connexion*, p. 321ff.

²⁸ Notes:—See *B.M.S. Centenary Volume* for an account of the work of the General Baptist Mission until its union with the Particular Baptist Missionary Society which was ratified on 30th June, 1891.

See *Missionary Herald*, 1966, p. 67ff, p. 86ff, p. 106ff, and p. 118ff; articles "The Acts of the Holy Spirit in Orissa", by K. F. Weller, for an account of the development of the work in Orissa since 1821.

G. P. R. PROSSER

Colonel John Hutchinson. In the *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, vol. LXIX, 1965, pp. 79-87 there is an article by Dr. Christopher Hill, "Colonel John Hutchinson, 1615-1664: A Tercentenary Tribute". Hutchinson became a Baptist in 1647, following his wife, Lucy. Dr. Hill looks at him in three roles; as Puritan, as republican, and as husband.