

London Strict Baptist Association, 1846-1853.

IN his *Baptists of London*, Dr. Whitley humorously remarks that "in 1851 there was the Great Exhibition of London Baptists in three groups of Particulars, two groups of Generals, and most outside every group. It seemed to some a hopeless situation." Hopeless it was, for, even had the Churches been ready for a forward movement, this disintegration would have effectively prevented the carrying out of any scheme inspired by a big vision. Of the five Associations thus pilloried by Dr. Whitley one survives, the Berks and West London Association, founded 1825, now the Berks Baptist Association. Little is known concerning the others, and practically nothing has been written. The minute book of one of the Particulars has recently been presented to the Baptist Historical Society, and the modest story of the *London Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches*, which survived from 1846 to 1853, can now be told.

The formation of the Association was proposed at a meeting of several ministers and one layman, held at Joseph Rothery's house, 71, Aldermanbury, on Friday, April 3rd, 1846, at half-past-three precisely. The layman, James Oliver, a deacon of Trinity Street, Borough, issued the circular calling the meeting "to consider the propriety of adopting immediate measures for the better organisation of the Strict Baptist Churches in London," which at that time had no organisation. The ministers who attended were William Williams of Grafton Street; Philip Dickerson of Little Alie Street; Joseph Rothery of Buttesland Street, Hoxton; G. H. Orchard of Southwood Lane, Highgate; Hugh Killen of Cumberland Street, Shoreditch; William Ward of Enon, Stratford; James Woodard of Ilford; George Wyard of Soho Chapel, Oxford Street; Charles Box of Enon, Woolwich; Christopher Woollacott of Little Wild Street; E. R. Hammond of Great Smith Street, Westminster; and William Norton, the Editor of the Baptist Tract Society publications. Five other ministers were invited: William Blackwell Bowes of Blandford Street; Daniel Curtis of Homerton Row; Robert William Overbury of Eagle Street; John Peacock of Spencer Place; and John Cox of Shacklewell; but they and their churches held aloof.

After a long explanatory address by the layman, and words of approval by all the ministers, it was unanimously resolved to recommend the following plan to the Churches:

That it is desirable to form an Association of Strict Baptist Ministers and Churches in and about London.

- I. That Ministers and Churches in and about London, holding the following sentiments, be eligible, on application, for admission to the Association :—
 1. Three equal persons in the Godhead.
 2. Eternal and personal election unto salvation.
 3. The fall of all mankind in Adam; their guilt and condemnation; together with their entire and universal depravity, by which they are utterly alienated from God, and are unable, in and of themselves, to turn to Him.
 4. Particular Redemption.
 5. Justification by grace, through faith, by the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 6. Regeneration and sanctification by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the truth.
 7. The absolute necessity of a holy life, as the fruit of faith and the evidence of regeneration.
 8. The final perseverance of the saints.
 9. The resurrection of the dead and the final judgment.
 10. The everlasting punishment of the wicked, and the everlasting happiness of the righteous.
 11. The duty of preaching the gospel to every creature.
 12. The necessity of immersion on a profession of faith, in order to church fellowship, and admission to the Lord's table.

And that any Minister or Church departing from these sentiments be no longer considered as connected with this Association.

- II. That the Association shall specially seek to extend the Redeemer's kingdom by opening new places of worship, and assisting infant causes, either by providing the services of preaching brethren and missionaries, or by granting pecuniary aid.
- III. That each church appoint annually any two brethren, whose views and practice harmonise with those of the Association, to form, with the ministers, a committee for conducting its affairs.
- IV. That the Association hold a meeting quarterly or oftener, at the places of worship of the several Churches so associated, in succession; tea at five; a familiar discussion

at six, among the brethren, on a subject or text proposed by the brother presiding; and a public service at seven o'clock, when a lecture shall be delivered by one of the associated ministers. The committee to meet on these occasions at three, for business.

- V. That there be an annual meeting in October, for reading letters from the churches in association, reporting the progress of the work of God during the year, and for mutual exhortation and encouragement.
- VI. That each church in association be expected to make an annual contribution, for the objects contemplated and to defray necessary expenses.
- VII. That the committee be empowered to make bye laws for their own government, but that no alteration of the above rules be made without the concurrence of a majority of the churches in association.

At the next meeting, held at Cumberland Street Chapel on 17th April, 1846, four churches, Trinity Street, Little Alie Street, Grafton Street, and Stratford, and eleven ministers, Dickerson, Killen, Williams, Woollacott, Wyard, Orchard, Ward, Hammond, Rothery, Box and Benjamin Lewis of Trinity Street, who had "communicated their approbation of and adhesion to the proposed plan, were formed into the new Association." A sub-committee of four was appointed to draw up by-laws, and, a month later, at Little Wild Street, they produced an elaborate set of fifteen. The most interesting of these by-laws provided that a treasurer and two secretaries (one to be a minister) should be appointed annually; that the public meetings should be held monthly; that care should be taken that no minister or place should receive a second appointment until all in association had had their turn; and (evidently fearing the staying powers of some of their oratorical brethren) that those who took part in the after-tea discussion should be limited to ten minutes each, and that the evening lecture timed for seven o'clock should "close as nearly as possible by a quarter-to-nine." At this meeting, William Norton and two churches, Great Smith Street, Westminster, and Little Wild Street, joined the Association.

William Stiles was elected treasurer, and Benjamin Lewis and John Christopher Woollacott joint-secretaries. Stiles and Woollacott were messengers from Little Wild Street. The secretaries remained in office throughout; but, for various reasons, which did not include the weight of the financial responsibility, for while the annual income rarely exceeded £20 there was always a balance in hand, the treasurers changed frequently. Stiles, being unable to attend the meetings, resigned in December,

1846, when he was succeeded by Kevan, a messenger from Cumberland Street. This church had joined in the preceding October, but two years later it withdrew, and Kevan's membership of the Association therefore ceased. James Oliver was appointed in his stead, and held office for twelve months, when he was succeeded by William Bowser,¹ a messenger from Stratford, who managed to survive to the end.

The first public meeting was held at Little Wild Street on 16th June, 1846. The presence of William Chappell, Secretary of the Kent and Sussex New Association of Baptist Churches, gave pleasure, for he brought a letter stating that his Association felt "gratified in hearing of, and do most cordially and unanimously congratulate you on, the formation of an Association founded on the great doctrines of Sovereign and Distinguishing Grace with Strict or Primitive Communion, and do hereby express our united approval of your endeavours for the maintenance and dissemination of the above principles." About sixty took tea together, and at the evening public meeting, Wyard delivered an address on the *Advantages of Union in promoting the cause of Christ*, in which, we are told, "he took occasion to defend the formation and explain the objects of this new association." The Secretary completed the minutes of the day's proceedings by saying that "the attendance was highly encouraging, and the spirit pervading the whole assembly, apparently,

Resembling that above
Where streams of endless pleasures flow
And every heart is love."

On 18th August, 1846, it was resolved that an annual circular letter be issued, and that Lewis should prepare the first on "The Scriptural Constitution of the Christian Church." Two months later, on 20th October, 1846, he read a draft to the committee, "after which he retired, that the meeting unfettered by his presence might express their views thereon." It was resolved "to omit those passages that were open to controversy among ourselves," and, on grounds of expense, to shorten it. The statistics of the seven churches then in fellowship revealed a total membership of 961, with 85 Sunday School teachers and 819 scholars.

The Association made little progress. Romney Street was elected in December, 1847, Phillips Street, Kingsland Road, in April, 1848, and Bridgefield, Wandsworth, in October, 1850, but the majority of the Churches remained outside. Five other

¹ Of Baptist Building Fund fame. For further details see *A Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund*.

ministers joined at various times: Henry John Betts of Romney Street and later of Trinity Street, Thomas Pepper of Kingsland Road, William Ball of Wandsworth, William Harding Bonner of Unicorn Yard (father of the Rev. Carey Bonner), and James Henry Blake, assistant at Trinity Street.

Until the close of 1852, meetings were held bi-monthly. Their appeal varied considerably. High-water mark in attendance was reached at the annual meetings at Little Alie Street in October, 1848, when 136 were present at the tea between the afternoon and evening engagements. Usually the attendance was less than half this number, and it was found difficult to maintain the early interest. Moreover, as we shall see, theological suspicions arose. The complete list of the meetings follows, and a comparison of the subjects of the sermons with, say, the last volume of the *Christian World Pulpit* would reveal how far the general preaching of to-day is removed from that of these Strict Baptists.

DATE.	PLACE.	PREACHER.	SUBJECT.
1846			
June 16	Wild Street	G. Wyard	Advantages of Union in promoting cause of Christ.
Aug. 18	Trinity Street	P. Dickerson	Doctrine of Justification.
Oct. 20	Grafton Street	W. Norton & J. Rothery	First General Meeting—Lewis presided.
Dec. 15	Cumberland Street	C. Woollacott	The Love of God.
1847			
Feb. 16	Alie Street	H. Killen	Adoption.
April 20	Trinity Street	C. Box	Sanctification.
June 15	Stratford	B. Lewis	Doctrine of the Resurrection as set forth in the Ordinance of Baptism.
Aug. 17	Wild Street	J. Rothery	Ministry of the Spirit.
Oct. 19	Cumberland Street	C. Woollacott & G. Wyard	Second General Meeting—Dickerson presided.
Dec. 20	Alie Street	W. Norton	The Manifestation of the Spirit's Presence.
1848			
Feb. 15	Trinity Street	E. R. Hammond	Final Perseverance of the Saints.
April 18	Romney Street	W. Ward	Discipline in the Churches.
June 20	Phillips Street, Kingsland Road	H. J. Betts	Distinction and harmony between the work of the Spirit and the work of Christ.
Aug. 15	Stratford	T. Pepper	Brotherly love an evidence of Christian character.
Oct. 17	Little Alie Street	J. Rothery & H. J. Betts	Third General Meeting—Dickerson presided.

DATE.	PLACE.	PREACHER.	SUBJECT.
1848			
Dec. 19	Little Wild Street	J. Woodard	The Character of Apostolic Preaching.
1849			
Feb. 20	Trinity Street	W. H. Bonner	Doctrine of Christian Duty.
April 17	Phillips Street	W. Ball	Divine Sovereignty, as displayed in Salvation.
June 19	Romney Street	B. Lewis	The Presence of the Spirit, the life of the Churches.
Aug. 21	Stratford	P. Dickerson	Communion with God, the secret of Soul and church prosperity.
Oct. 16	Trinity Street	P. Dickerson & W. H. Bonner	Fourth General Meeting—C. Woollacott presided.
1850			
Jan. 15	Wild Street	H. J. Betts	The Suretyship of Christ.
Feb. 19	Alie Street	C. Woollacott	Outpouring of the Spirit.
April 16	Phillips Street	W. Ward	The Prophetic Character of Christ.
June 18	Trinity Street	J. Rothery	The Intercession of Christ.
Aug. 20	Romney Street	W. Ball	Doctrine of Election.
Oct. 15	Romney Street	T. Pepper and H. J. Betts	Fifth General Meeting—Lewis presided.
Dec. 17	Wild Street	P. Dickerson	Apostolical Succession.
1851			
Feb. 18	Alie Street	W. H. Bonner	Authority of Scriptures.
April 15	Phillips Street	B. Lewis	Termination of Sacrifices in Christ's one offering.
June 17	Wandsworth	T. Pepper	Priestly Assumptions—contrary to the Christian system.
Aug. 19	Trinity Street	W. H. Bonner	The Kingly Character of Christ.
Oct. 21	Wild Street	J. Oliver & W. Ball	Sixth General Meeting—Betts presided.
Dec. 16	Romney Street	H. J. Blake	The Faith of God's Elect.
1852			
Feb. 17	Alie Street	C. Woollacott	Zion's Converts.
April 20	Stratford	P. Dickerson	The Signs which precede the Latter day.
June 15	Wandsworth	W. Ward	Distinction and harmony of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations.
Aug. 24	Trinity Street	W. Ball	Particular Redemption.
Oct. 19	Alie Street	W. H. Bonner	Seventh General Meeting—Dickerson presided.
Dec. 21	Wild Street	P. Dickerson	Jer: 15c. 19v.

The second rule spoke of opening new places of worship and assisting infant causes, but the Association was too feeble to do much. It gave small financial help to Stratford and King Street, Camden Town, and drew up a set of seven "by-laws for the regulation of the various matters connected with *Preaching Stations* established by this Association." A preaching station in Union Row, Kingsland Road, was opened on the 17th December, 1847, but the report concerning it in the following April was "highly discouraging." A year later, 17th April, 1849, it was the subject of the following interesting resolution: Union Row. It having been intimated that the Ordinance of the *Lord's Supper* had been administered by Mr. Orchard sent by Mr. Pepper to preach at Union Row, it was moved by Br. Woollacott, seconded by Br. Woodard and *Resolved*, That Br. Pepper be requested to desire Mr. Orchard to desist from so doing in future, it being the deliberate opinion of this Committee that, *to break bread* among the people, even altho' limited to baptized believers, unless they have been first organised and formed into a distinct Church is *highly inconsistent and unscriptural*.

Another preaching station was opened at Kingsland, near Balls Pond Road, on 22nd September, 1850, and preachers were sent to King Street, Camden Town, during 1850/51. The three stations were on a very small scale.

Once only did the Association take action on any matter outside its own theological interests. That was on the 18th June, 1850, when it was decided to send a "Petition to the King of Sweden praying his Majesty to grant Religious freedom to our brethren the Baptists now exposed to persecution and banishment on account of their Religion." But these brethren who claimed religious liberty for Baptists in Sweden, were unable to grant liberty of thought and action to their own fellowship in London. They suspected that some of their colleagues held "the sentiment commonly known as *duty faith*," while they were shocked by the report that Rothery "had administered the Lord's supper to an open communion church at Islington." Rifts developed, and, co-incidentally, a few Strict churches which had remained outside the Association discussed the question of an Association for themselves. The outcome was that early in 1849 eleven churches united to form "The New Association of Particular Baptists in London," and among the eleven were Woolwich, Ilford and Oxford Street, with their ministers Box, Woodard and Wyard, and Cumberland Street. Box, on being challenged by his former colleagues to state the differences which existed between them, replied generally "that he believed it to be our duty to preach the gospel to every creature—to warn the ungodly—but *he did*

not believe it was the duty of every creature to believe with the faith of God's elect, but most of the brethren in the Association, he said, did so believe and so say," a statement which his former associates firmly repudiated.

Two years later, the new Association changed its title to "The Association of Baptists holding Particular Redemption and Practising Strict Communion." This called forth a fraternal letter from the old Association objecting to this "invidious change" which implied that the old Association did not hold the doctrine of Particular Redemption and practise Strict Communion. "Why by such a title lead the ignorant and uninformed to surmise that such views were not common to us both. The longer we live the more cause we find to mourn over the separation of brethren and for reasons which mock our examination: that mere trifles should have led to the formation of a new Association. . . ." The outcome of a friendly reply was the holding of a joint meeting of the two Associations at Little Alie Street on Tuesday, 9th November, 1852, when twenty-six ministers and messengers were present. It was then resolved, *inter alia*, "That notwithstanding some slight differences in the Constitutions of the two Associations, this meeting considers it is not only desirable but also quite *practicable* to unite the Associations, and recommend that immediate steps be taken for that purpose." A committee of seven was appointed to draw up rules and regulations for the united Association. Thirteen were adopted at a meeting at Union Chapel, Cumberland Street, Shoreditch, on Tuesday, 18th January, 1853, but three only interest us.

- I. That this Association be known as "The Association of Baptists holding the doctrine of Particular Redemption, and maintaining Strict Communion, in London and its vicinity:" such vicinity to embrace a circuit of twelve miles from the General Post Office.
- II. That the Association be composed of such accredited churches and pastors as maintain the following important principles of faith and practice :
 1. Three equal persons in the Godhead.
 2. Eternal, personal, and unconditional election.
 3. The fall of all mankind in Adam, their guilt and condemnation, and their entire alienation from God by wicked works.
 4. The essential Deity and sinless humanity of Jesus Christ.

5. Particular redemption, or the substitutionary work of Christ on behalf of the elect only.
6. Free justification, by the righteousness of Christ imputed; realised by faith, through the Spirit.
7. The Divinity and distinct personality of the Holy Ghost.
8. Regeneration and sanctification by the direct and sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit: and the perseverance of the saints unto eternal life.
9. The absolute necessity of practical obedience to the declared will of Christ, the Head of the Church, as the fruit of faith and evidence of regeneration.
10. The resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust: the final judgment: the everlasting happiness of the just and everlasting punishment of the unjust.
11. The divine authority and sole sufficiency of the sacred Scriptures, which reveal the will of God to man, and contain all that is necessary for faith and obedience: also the obligation for all to whom they come to reverence them as the word of God, and regulate their conduct by them.
12. That, while the gospel is to be preached to every creature, irrespective of class and condition, spiritual and saving faith is the gift of God.
13. The necessity of immersion in water, on a profession of faith in Christ, in order to church-fellowship, and admission to the supper of the Lord.
14. The congregational order and independence of the churches.

III. That the objects of this Association be—the promotion of brotherly union and fraternal intercourse; the defence and dissemination of the truth; opening suitable places for preaching the gospel in destitute neighbourhoods; helping forward the formation of churches; and endeavouring to advance the Redeemer's kingdom in the world.

The marriage was not a success: the parties were in death-throes almost before the close of the honeymoon. Recondite points of theology did not prove the best preparation for "the promotion of brotherly union and fraternal intercourse," and within a year or two the Association passed peacefully away.

Little remains to be said. The Association's vision was limited : it felt hardly any concern or responsibility for the struggling masses of London. It failed to obtain the support of the majority of the churches of its own doctrinal standards, some holding aloof even when their ministers joined. In the course of seven years, ten churches only united in the fellowship, and the denominational influence of these churches was small. Taking them in the order in which they joined :

TRINITY STREET (No. 61 in the *Baptists of London*) existed in Trinity Street from 1835 to 1877, and during the period of which we are writing, its membership was in the neighbourhood of 150, with 200 scholars. The chapel building still stands and is used as a cinema.

LITTLE ALIE STREET (No. 52 in the *Baptists of London*) for over thirty years was ministered to by the saintly William Shenston. It had been in existence nearly one hundred years when the Association was formed, its membership was nearly 400, and it was by far the strongest associated church. Philip Dickerson was then the minister, and he became the Association's leading spirit. He was born at Newbourne, Suffolk, on the 29th January, 1795. In his 'teens he preached in cottages, and after ministries at Newbourne, Beccles and Rattlesden, was, in 1831, called to be Shenston's co-pastor. The following year he joined the Baptist Board, and, in 1833, succeeded Shenston as sole pastor, retaining the position until 1870, when, on his retirement, he was elected a deacon. A high Calvinist, he was nevertheless a faithful gospel preacher who exercised a gracious and successful ministry. His autobiography was published in the *Gospel Herald*, January, 1880—August, 1881. He died on 22nd October, 1882, aged eighty-seven. Twenty years later the lease of the chapel expired, and the building has since been converted into a synagogue.

GRAFTON STREET (No. 98, but see also Nos. 43 and 64) was of little importance. Its origin is best told in the story of its minister, William Williams, who was born at Holyhead in 1773, and, after residence in Birmingham, moved to London, where he was baptised by John Keeble of Blandford Street in 1811. "His desires for the ministry not being encouraged by the church, he commenced preaching in his own home, and ultimately built on his premises a small chapel, which he called Achor. Five persons here united themselves in church fellowship, and he was ordained over them in 1814. Urged by the increase of the congregation, the church rented a larger chapel in Dudley-court, Soho, and afterwards (in 1816) purchased the lease of one still larger in Grafton Street. Here Mr. Williams [having in

1819 joined the Baptist Board] laboured till his death, which took place on the 27th January, 1847, in his seventy-fourth year." Shortly after, Grafton Street, then having a membership of seventy-five, united with GREAT SMITH STREET, Westminster (No. 204), under Hammond, but the amalgamated churches had difficulty in finding a suitable home. The next year Hammond left for the country, and, later, the church settled at Princes Row.

STRATFORD (No. 169) was a new cause of under forty members, struggling with financial and other difficulties, during the lifetime of the Association. It still exists at West Ham Lane, and is of some strength. It is now in fellowship with the Metropolitan Strict Baptist Association (founded 1871).

LITTLE WILD STREET (No. 40) had a fascinating history. It was told in full in the *Baptist Quarterly* when the building was closed and the church dispersed (Vol. V., No. 6). It had a membership in 1846 of 145.

CUMBERLAND STREET (No. 170) is of importance only because, in a complicated way elucidated by Dr. Whitley in the *Baptists of London*, it was a predecessor of Shoreditch Tabernacle.

PHILLIPS STREET (No. 224) was quite small, and survived a few years only.

ROMNEY STREET (No. 104), which had never been of much strength, sold its site a few years ago, and is now located in Horseferry Road. It is in membership with the London Baptist Association.

WANDSWORTH, BRIDGEFIELD (No. 122), which likewise has been of modest proportions, is now situated at West Hill, and in membership with the Metropolitan Association.

The ministers were faithful, God-fearing men, jealous for the honour and glory of the Church of Christ. Doctrinally they were narrow, but they knew where they stood, and the ground beneath their feet was firm. They claimed scriptural authority and justification for their strict Baptist beliefs, and, therefore, were not tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. On the question of their relationship to the general body of Baptists they disagreed. Some were exclusive: others, and these included leaders like Betts, Bonner and Woollacott, were willing to co-operate with all who loved their Lord. George Wyard may be selected as typical. He was born at Milton, Kent, in 1803, and, after a pastorate at Over, Cambs., settled at Soho Chapel, Oxford Street, in May, 1842 (No. 67). He

remained for fifteen years, and later held pastorates at New Cross, Tring, Blandford Street and Borough Green. In 1852 he wrote the Annual Letter for the London New Association on *The Privileges and Obligations of Church Membership*. Other publications were *Pastoral Letters*, addressed to his people at Soho in 1849, 1851 and 1859; *Reflections for every day in the year*, 1866; and *Original Poems*, 1869. He died on the 2nd December, 1873, by which time his son, named after him, had served Irthlingborough, Reading and Shrewsbury, and another son was at Swaffham, his third pastorate. The Soho Church, after moving to Shaftesbury Avenue, migrated to North Finchley, where, in splendid isolation, it holds aloof from all Associations.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.

FEOCK CHURCH BOOK.

This church book, of which a study appears on the next page, raises one or two points familiar enough to students, but evidently not familiar to many justices and to church secretaries. No licence is needed to open a place of worship; nor has one ever been needed except in the brief experiment of Charles II. What has been needed since 1689 is that the people who intend to conduct worship in a house, a barn, a chapel erected expressly for the purpose, a public hall like Exeter Hall or a Town Hall, shall signify their intention at Quarter Sessions or to the proper officer of the bishop; their certificates *must* be registered, the magistrates or the registrar having no power to refuse, and a copy of the registration must be given to the people who certify if they desire one. Secondly, as the book in question contains registers of births, it ought to have been sent to Somerset House in 1837, so that the records would be in public official custody. Even now, it would be wise to consider whether the Registrar General has not a claim on the book. In many cases a copy of entries was made and retained locally, while the original went to safe keeping. A wider question arises as to the wisdom of starting causes of the sort shown, without consulting Baptist churches in the neighbourhood; this is now even more important than then.