

of truth we bring to its common good, that I venture to apply to our Baptist testimony the words which Wellington wrote of the maintenance of his position at Torres Vedras, on which the issues of the Peninsular War and the ultimate overthrow of Napoleon depended: "I conceive that the honour and interest of our country require that we should hold our ground here as long as possible; and please God, I will maintain it as long as I can."

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The Late Midland College.

Historical Section.

IT seems desirable, since this institution has come to an end, that some record of its beginning, its progress and its service to our denomination, should be preserved. In the first number of *The Baptist Quarterly* Dr. Whitley has reminded us that whilst the Bristol (Ministerial) Education Society was first in the field to provide for Baptist needs, it was followed by a General Baptist Education Society which "was gravely affected in its theology by the general Arian drift" of the eighteenth century, and did not long survive. But it had a rival in the New Connexion "Academy," which under different names and in different locations, continued its useful work until 1920—a period of 123 years. The "General Baptist College" was therefore the third Baptist College to come into existence.

I. ORIGIN AND PURPOSE.

The term "Academy" is significant. It was used of all good schools, whether kept by ministers or by ladies. At one time or another it was descriptive of such colleges as Horton (now Rawdon) and Hoxton (now Hackney). The modest designation was due to the fact that it was not possible at first to do more than place a few students under the care of some trusted and competent minister for training, and often the arrangement wore the aspect of a higher boarding-school.

Soon after Rev. Dan Taylor had founded the New Connexion of General Baptists in 1770, he became concerned about the better equipment of its ministers. "Men of culture and ability were rare in the ministry and an educated pastorate was slighted." At the annual meeting of the G. B. Association in 1797, it was resolved to provide an Academy, and Mr.

Taylor was urged to become the head of it. He feared that he might be called to the position when he pleaded, year after year, for action to be taken. There was a general opinion that he was best qualified for the work and he did not want it to be thought that he was trying to "set up and signalize himself." Though nearly sixty years of age, Mr. Taylor put wonderful energy into the new undertaking and had for the first student, his own nephew, James Taylor, whose life closed at Hinckley. The first home of the college was in London.

The question of location arose repeatedly in the history of the College, and as early as 1812, Mr. Taylor was requested to leave his metropolitan pastorate and remove into the midland counties where most of the General Baptist Churches were situated. But as he was seventy-five years of age, it was agreed that he had better retire from the college than risk all that the proposed change might involve. During the fifteen years he had served the Academy, he was not only diligent in his pastoral work, but very devoted in his visitation of churches throughout the connexion. He died in 1816 and was buried in Bunhill Fields.

Rev. J. H. Wood, in his *History of the General Baptists*, shows how early the idea of the college took root in Dan Taylor's mind. In 1779 he wrote on "A plan for assisting young men in their studies for the ministry," and added:—"The design has annually obtained credit and reputation since it was first begun by a poor blind brother in Wadsworth (now Birchcliffe) Church and myself." As the churches increased in number, the necessity for such an institution became more apparent, and the foundation of a fund for the purpose was laid by the contribution in 1797 of twenty-five donations amounting to £174 17s. 6d. and the promises of eight subscribers totalling £16 per annum. From the opening of the Academy at Mile End in January, 1798, to the time of Mr. Taylor's resignation in 1811, nineteen students, gathered from Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Wales, came under instruction.

2. SUBSEQUENT LOCATIONS.

It has been shown how it was only for the sake of retaining Mr. Taylor's services that the Academy remained fifteen years in London at the beginning of its history. Apparently, a similar reason operated in the removal of it to Wisbech. For there, Rev. Joseph Jarrom was pastor of the church now worshipping in Ely Place, and he was regarded as well qualified to train candidates for the ministry. During the twenty-three years of his tutorship, thirty-seven of them became ministers

or missionaries. One of the most eminent was Rev. John Buckley, D.D., at the head of the Orissa Mission, India. His appreciation of the work done at Wisbech and subsequently, is apparent from a letter he wrote in 1858, in which the following occurs:—"Take the last fourteen years and how stand the facts? Are not some of our most important pulpits filled, and worthily filled too, by ministers that have left the institution within that period? Have the Home Mission stations which some of them have occupied, decayed and become extinct under their ministry, or exhibited a vitality and increase before unknown? Have the discourses preached for the last six years before the association indicated that piety, talent and energy were departing from us? I devoutly bless God for many of our young ministers and pray that they may be long spared to make full use of their ministry. I believe that we never had no large an amount of sanctified ability and earnestness in the ministry among us as at the present time, and I rejoice to entertain this conviction."

In 1825 an "Education Society" was formed by representatives from several of the Midland General Baptist Churches "to afford such instruction to brethren apparently gifted with ministerial talents as shall tend to qualify them to become more useful preachers of the Everlasting Gospel." Rev. Thomas Stevenson, minister of Baxter Gate Church, Loughborough, was appointed tutor, assisted by his son, Rev. John Stevenson, M.A. Here again, it is shown by the choice of Loughborough that first consideration was given to the question of tutorship. So when this "Society" was merged into the Wisbech Academy in 1838, the Midland town was preferred for the work of the united Institution (known as "the Academy of the Connexion"), and Thomas Stevenson was retained as tutor until 1841. During the sixteen years of his office thirty-five students passed under his tuition.

From this time it seems to have become necessary to determine the location of the academy apart from the pastoral sphere of any minister who might take charge of it. In succession to his father, Rev. John Stevenson, M.A., of Borough Road Church, London, was appointed tutor and he stipulated that the academy should be in London. He started with ten students, but was compelled by ill-health to resign in the following year. Meanwhile, however, the following conflicting resolutions were passed at successive committee meetings, and they seem to indicate that Mr. Stevenson's resignation brought divided counsels to an end for the time being:—

December 8, 1841. "That the Committee is gratified with Rev. John Stevenson's acceptance of the Tutorship of

the Academy; but as our brother cannot see his way clear to leave the [Borough Road] Church where God has been pleased so abundantly to bless his labours, we do not feel empowered to remove the Institution from the Midland District without the sanction of the Association."

May 17, 1842. "That considering the importance of having the Academy in the Midland District we recommend our esteemed friend Rev. John Stevenson, M.A., to re-consider the subject, and trust that he will see his way clear to accede to the wishes of the Committee; but if he cannot do this, we recommend the Association to take such steps as will secure its permanent settlement in the Midland District."

July 26, 1842. "The Committee heard with pleasure that Rev. John Stevenson, M.A., had engaged very commodious and eligible premises in a healthy situation (18, Grosvenor Place, Camberwell) in which to conduct the Institution."

As suggested, the issue was submitted for decision to the General Baptist Association at its assembly in Loughborough, June 1843, and it was resolved:—(1) "That the location of the Academy shall be in the Midland District. (2) That Rev. John Stevenson, M.A., be affectionately requested not to resign his office as Tutor." Mr. Stevenson wrote that there was "not any probability of his removal into the Midland District," and it was therefore resolved "that Mr. Stevenson's resignation be accepted"—in view of the state of his health. It was further agreed that Leicester should be the location; that the tutor be not allowed to take charge of any church; and that Rev. Joseph Wallis of Commercial Road Church, London, E., be requested to accept the office of tutor. Mr. Wallis acceded to this request and continued in office fourteen years, during which time forty-four students passed through the institution, and its annual income, which in 1800 was only £136, had risen to £390 in 1846.

In 1856 controversy was revived as to the location of the institution. Rev. S. C. Sarjant, B.A. (who afterwards seceded to the Anglican Church) raised the question whether it should not be fixed in London, whether secular instruction should not be taken entirely free from the usual routine of study and acquired at one of the colleges of the University of London, and whether a theological course similar to that given in Scottish divinity halls, should not be given, either by means of a resident tutor, or with the aid of a stated series of lectures from other ministers. Rev. J. C. Pike also submitted proposals, but the prevailing opinion was in favour of removal to Nottingham and the obtaining of suitable premises for the erection of a building permanently devoted to the business of the institution.

The death of Mr. Wallis in 1857 necessitated a new appointment, and when the business came before the G.B. Association, meeting again at Loughborough on June 24, 1857, it was significantly resolved:—“(1) That for the sake of securing unanimity, the present locality of the institution be Nottingham. (2) That there be a Principal of the College who shall be assisted in the business of the Institution by one or more Tutors.” It is noteworthy that here the term “College” occurs for the first time in the records. In pursuance of these resolutions, a home for the college was provided in premises acquired at Sherwood Rise, Nottingham, whilst Rev. Wm. Underwood was appointed principal, and Rev. Wm. Rawson Stevenson, M.A., classical and mathematical tutor.

In 1861 more commodious property was purchased at Chilwell—about four miles from Nottingham—and to that (then more rural) retreat the Principal, the tutor, the students, and the staff migrated. The buildings are still visible from the train at a point near to Beeston Station, but they are dwarfed by what remains of the gigantic munition works not far away.

Dr. Underwood and Mr. Stevenson resigned in 1873, after having had the training of thirty-seven men in the sixteen years, and they were succeeded by Rev. Thomas Goadby, B.A., and Rev. Charles Clarke, B.A., respectively.

Within a few years the University College was founded at Nottingham and in order that the Baptist students might there study classics and science, our college was removed from Chilwell to 89a, Forest Road, which was its final home, and so a second time it was located in Nottingham. The property at Chilwell was sold for £4,550. The purchase of the premises at Nottingham cost £3,400 and the erection of a house for the principal (89b, Forest Road) involved further outlay. Accommodation was thus provided for fifteen students so that this remained the smallest of the colleges in England and Wales. During Principal Goadby's term of office 1873—1889, fifty-two men underwent training. After two years of administration under a “Tutorial Syndicate,” the college had for its principal Rev. T. Witton Davies, B.A., Ph.D., D.D., who resigned in 1898, when twenty-seven more men had received training. From 1899 to 1913, Rev. S. W. Bowser, B.A., was principal and thirty-eight students entered under his *régime*. Rev. John Douglas, B.A., was tutor from 1904 to 1909. Just before the Great War and until 1920, a “House Governor” occupied the principal's residence and three more students were added to the list. About three hundred have been educated since the “Academy” was founded in 1797.