

Some Notable Names in Midland Baptist History.

THE month of June will witness the gathering of the clans from 411 Baptist Churches in the East and West Midlands. They will come from eleven English counties, which contain at least another 127 Churches of our faith and order. Their association meetings may be as epoch-making as those of 1651, when representatives met and resolved to send forth to the world "the first General Baptist Confession to speak for more than one Church." It was called "the faith and practice of thirty congregations gathered according to the Primitive Pattern." It is, therefore, surely fitting to remind ourselves of some of the notable names that have contributed to our glorious heritage. It is not surprising that our history is so rich when you remember that we cover an area which from the days of the earliest British Christianity has been of special interest. It was at Aust, on the Severn, in Gloucestershire, that Augustine had his conference with the leaders of the Early British Churches in 603 A.D. Paulinus, about 626 A.D. baptized a large number of the citizens of Lincoln in the Trent. "The Morning Star of the Reformation"—John Wycliffe, the greatest Yorkshireman that ever lived—commenced and ended his ministry in these parts. The copies of his English version of the Scriptures, and the preaching of the Lollards prepared the way for our modern days. Hugh Latimer, a Leicestershire born man, was Bishop of Worcester. Anne Askew, the martyr, who was burnt at Smithfield in 1546, came from Stallingboro, near Grimsby, and many claim her as a Baptist.

The first pastor of the Pilgrim Church at Gainsborough, was John Smyth, the se-Baptist, who was born at Sturton-le-Steeple, Notts., and is the founder of the General Baptists. Another Baptist who accompanied him was John Murton, who became a furrier at Amsterdam. Roger Williams, the first Baptist in America, first met John Cotton in Lincolnshire. In the days of the Commonwealth, Lincolnshire and Worcestershire were the two chief Baptist centres of the country. Though King Charles I. unfurled his standard on the Castle Rock of Nottingham, yet Oliver Cromwell won his first victory at Horncastle, and his

“crowning mercy” at Worcester. His ablest lieutenant was Major-General Thomas Harrison, a native of Newcastle-under-Lyme, known as the “Head of the Anabaptists.” A Baptist, Colonel John Hutchinson, became Governor of Nottingham Castle; Henry D’anvers, the Governor of Stafford Castle, was a convert and wrote afterwards the first English “Treatise of Baptism.” Sir Henry Vane, the younger, who protested against Cromwell’s dissolution of the Rump Parliament, gathered and preached to his neighbours at Belleau, and thus was one of the founders of the South Marsh Church, which later centred in Boston, where Thomas Grantham was baptised in 1653, and ministered. Grantham became the General Baptist leader and messenger. In 1661 he was mainly responsible for presenting three petitions or addresses to King Charles II. He suffered “ten imprisonments for conscience sake.” Another who signed these addresses, was John Kelsey, of Kirton-in-Lindsey, who languished in Lincoln and Nottingham prisons for seventeen years.

As early as 1626 there were General Baptist churches at Lincoln and Coventry, in touch with the Mennonites. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys both were to be found in 1606 at an all night conference with Puritan leaders, at the house of Sir William Bowes, near Coventry. Benjamin Cox, M.A., helped found the Calvinistic Baptist Church at Coventry in 1644, and you find him attending the Midland Association at Moreton-in-the-Marsh in 1658. In 1660 Thomas Hobson, a Baptist, was Mayor of Coventry. Henry Denne’s visit to Spalding in 1646 led to the formation of a G.B. Church; the first baptism took place, near midnight, at a place called Little Croft; of the four who thus confessed Christ, one was Anne Stennett. For this service Denne was arrested and committed to Lincoln gaol.

At this time John Tombes, M.A., B.D., was Master of the Temple (London), driven out by Puritan hostility to Baptists; he returned in 1647, as lecturer to his native Bewdley, organised the Baptist Church there, 1649, and trained pupils; held public debate with R. Baxter and became one of the Tryers. Hanserd Knollys was born at Cawkwell, near Louth, in 1599; led to Christ by the testimony of a godly widow, at Gainsborough, he eventually embraced Baptist principles and became one of the greatest preachers of London. For over ninety years he witnessed scenes unparalleled in English history. Again and again you find him inspiring churches with his visits. Samuel Oates, a weaver from Rutland, you find disputing in 1649, at Barrow-on-Soar, with George Fox, about “Faith and Baptism.” He also disputed with William Sheffield, M.A., the rector of Ibstock, for three hours, in Leicester Castle. Oates was chaplain to Colonel Pride’s regiment and father of the notorious Titus Oates.

William Pardoe, born in 1630, at Tenbury, a G.B. messenger and clothworker, suffered imprisonment at Hereford, Worcester, and Leicester, finally settling at Lichfield.

In 1651, John Eckels settled at Bromsgrove, he was known as "the boy preacher," and trained by Tombes, on one occasion he was "taken whilst preaching and greatly abused, being confined in a dungeon of Worcester gaol," and only liberated on Mr. Swift, one of the Members of Parliament for the county, being bound for him in £1000. He baptised the Rev. Richard Claridge, A.M., rector of Peopleton, and David Crosley, the Northern Baptist Apostle. Bromsgrove sent into the ministry in 1793, John Palmer, who served the town of Shrewsbury as Baptist pastor and Doctor of Medicine thirty years; and in 1870 the Rev. George Hill, M.A., D.D., whose pastorates at Oxford, Leeds, Derby, and Nottingham were all memorable.

Charles II.'s Declaration of Indulgence, of 1672, was not accepted by all our people. Forty-three licences were issued for the Baptists of Lincolnshire; but the oldest church, meeting at Crowle, Epworth and Butterwith, made no application though it had more than a hundred members at the time. In Salop and Worcestershire not a single Baptist except John Langford, on the Herefordshire border, took any notice of the King's Declaration. The other counties were only lukewarm. The most notable Baptists in our area availing themselves of the same were Richard Farmer, Richard Adams and John Kitchen.

At Leominster, you find the work of Tombes being followed up by Vavasour Powell, the Apostle of Wales, who later is heard of near Oswestry. Joseph Stennett, Junior, was at Leominster, 1714-19. He became a D.D. of Edinburgh. He was the greatest of four generations of ministers which originated from Lincolnshire, and whose services stretched from 1687 to 1795. Here also in 1740, Joshua Thomas was baptised, becoming pastor in 1753, and continuing 44 years. He was five times Moderator of the Midland Association and wrote *The History of the Baptist Associations in Wales*.

The first half of the eighteenth century was one of apathy and decay, but now we note the names of families that continue for more than a century, and some still are with us, making the Churches their debtors. John Sing at Bridgnorth; John Collett Ryland, M.A., is preaching at Warwick, where his son, the famous Dr. Ryland was born; Isaac Poynting, for twenty-five years at Worcester; his son John succeeded him in 1740, and was pastor fifty-one years. The salary of the latter was so small that he had to keep a boarding-school, but, leading the life of a bachelor, he succeeded in leaving a fortune of £1,200, most of which passed to charitable institutions.

About the middle of the century there came from Goodshaw, in Rossendale, sons of a Baptist blacksmith, four brothers who were to be the greatest forces in the West Midlands. Their name was Butterworth. John settled at Cow Lane, Coventry in 1753, where he remained fifty years; one of his sons became M.P. for the city, another founded a firm of law stationers in London which still continues. James settled at Bromsgrove in 1775—his father's house had been the preaching place for David Crosley—and continued until 1798; Lawrence settled at Bengeworth (now Evesham) in 1768, and continued sixty years, being for forty years secretary of the Association; he received M.A. degree from Brown University; and the last, Henry, was for about forty years pastor at Bridgnorth. Their pastorates—all successful—totalled two centuries. Surely a record! John Butterworth at Coventry, was succeeded by Francis Franklin, who fulfilled a fifty-four years' pastorate, and his descendants still are in the fellowship, while one represents us in the Chinese mission field. We get a delightful sketch of this minister as Rufus Lyon in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*.

The Evangelical Revival has left its mark on all the Protestant Churches, and no section felt its influence more than that of the General Baptists. Dan Taylor, at Halifax, embraced Baptist sentiments, and since he was an Arminian, he set off to walk to Boston, to ask William Thompson to baptise him. To his surprise he found a company of General Baptists at Gamston, Notts.; and there he was baptised on February 16th, 1763, in the river, by the pastor Joseph Jeffery. Later he was ordained to the ministry by Gilbert Boyce, who was sixty-two years minister of Coningsby, in Lincolnshire, the friend of John Wesley, and the last messenger there of the old Connexion. At Barton-in-the-Beans a gracious movement began in 1741, which eventually became Baptist and has always been the centre of a group of Churches. Its most noted family was that of Samuel Deacon, who himself was one of the pastors for fifty-two years; his son Samuel was pastor there thirty-seven years, while John revived the cause in Friar Lane, Leicester, which he served for nearly forty years. Dan Taylor and these Barton preachers were mainly responsible for the formation of the New Connexion of General Baptists in 1770.

John Ash, LL.D., was pastor at Pershore 1751-79. Along with Dr. Caleb Evans he compiled a hymn-book in 1769, while six years later he issued *A New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language*. Benjamin Beddome, M.A., who for fifty years was at Bourton-on-the-Water, was born in 1718 at Henley-in-Arden, where his father, John, was pastor as well as at Alcester. Bernard Foskett helped at Alcester before going to

Broadmead, in 1720, to act not only as pastor but as tutor in the Academy at Bristol.

In 1753, Robert Hall came from Cumberland to Arnesby, where he was thirty-eight years; there his famous son, Robert, was born in 1764. The latter became the greatest preacher of his day and was a M.A. and D.D. of Aberdeen. His ministries at Bristol, Cambridge and Leicester still bear fruit.

It was at Park Street Chapel, Nottingham, in May, 1792, that William Carey preached his famous sermon, that roused the churches to the need of the regions beyond the seas. His clarion call was that they should

Expect great things from God,
And attempt great things for God.

This resulted in the formation of the first modern foreign missionary society, at Kettering, October 2nd, 1792, and of the thirteen pioneers present, at least six belong to us, viz:—John Ryland, Abraham Greenwood, Joshua Burton, Samuel Pearce, William Staughton and William Carey. Carey and John Thomas were the first to go out; the latter was born at Fairford, in Gloucestershire. William Ward, of Serampore, was a native of Derby, and edited a newspaper at Stafford. George Grenfell, the pioneer of the Congo Mission, belonged to Birmingham, where also was born W. K. Landels, who for fifty years laboured in Italy.

The General Baptist Foreign Missionary Society had for its birthplace, Boston, in 1816. Amongst its earliest and most distinguished missionaries we claim William Bampton, James Peggs, Dr. Amos Sutton, Isaac Stubbins, and Dr. John Buckley, the last named being President of Orissa College and chief reviser of the Oriya Bible. The founder of this Society was J. G. Pike, who settled at Derby in 1810; he was also founder of a family which has an unbroken succession of ministers and missionaries ever since J. C. Pike succeeded his father, in 1855, as secretary of the Foreign Missionary Society.

The enthusiasm for education must not be judged by the precarious existence of the Midland College. Morgan Edwards, who was pastor at Boston, in 1750-57, emigrated to America, in 1761 and was the chief promoter of Rhode Island College, now Brown University, the oldest Baptist College in the New World. Dr. William Steadman—the first principal of the Northern Education Society was born near Leominster in 1764. Dr. William Staughton, of Coventry, was President of at least three American colleges. The Principals of all our English colleges to-day, as well as Dr. Blomfield, were born or served as pastors within our bounds. McMaster and Acadia Universities have received our sons as Professors on their staffs. The latter one of its principals

in Dr. Thos. Trotter. D. J. East left Leamington for Calabar College. The Midland College has had honoured Principals and tutors like Joseph Wallis, the Stevensons, Dr. Underwood, Thomas Goadby and Dr. Witton Davies. Though her number of students was never large she produced the very best, and rightly gloried in the fact that Dr. John Clifford, a native of Sawley, was among her *alumni*. He not only won more degrees at London University than any minister of religion had ever done, but became the greatest citizen of the greatest city of the world. No wonder he followed the Prince of Preachers—Dr. Alex. McLaren—in the chair of the Baptist World Alliance. Another of the Midland men was Dr. Newton Marshall, one of many of Dr. Clifford's "boys."

The Goadby family from Market Bosworth, forms a most important chapter in Baptist history; for a century it produced "Not Saints but Men." Joseph, who settled at Packington in 1799, was the first minister.

The Hyper-Calvinistic Baptists have had great leaders in our midst. William Gadsby was born at Attleborough in 1773. He settled at Hinckley in 1800, where he remained until 1805, when he moved to Manchester where he spent thirty-nine years. John Stevens, M.A., was at Boston, 1806-11, and while there issued his *Selection of Hymns*. J. C. Philpot, M.A., resigned his Fellowship of Worcester College, Oxford in 1835, and settled at Stamford, where he fulfilled a thirty years' ministry, as well as editing *The Gospel Standard*. Near by, at Deeping St. James, there also seceded from the Church of England the incumbent of the parish—the Rev. F. Tryon, B.A.—a relative of Admiral Tryon, and with the bricks he had bought to build his Rectory he built a Baptist Chapel, where he ministered for about sixty years.

Among historians we claim J. H. Wood, William Stokes, and Dr. B. Evans, the last being the historian of the Early English Baptists.

We have had an innumerable company of loyal laymen. No city has had a finer benefactor to Baptist church extension than Birmingham in William Middlemore. It was in this same city that William Carey found in 1792 the friend (Thomas Potts) that met the cost of his pamphlet. It was called an *Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, which Dr. George Smith describes as "the first and still the greatest Missionary Treatise in the English language."

J. Shirrow Wright, M.P. for Birmingham, belongs to us, Sir Joseph Bright, and W. Hunt of Nottingham; Sir Edward Wood and Alec Tyler, both of Leicester; the Wherrys of Bourne; the Fellowes of Bromsgrove and Cradley Heath; Thomas Smith of Dudley Priory; S. A. Daniell, E. M. Mitton,

and J. Player, all of Birmingham; Thomas Cooper, the Chartist; Thomas Cook, the founder of modern methods of touring; and many another enriched our church life.

There are countless others of whom brief mention must suffice. Joseph Hooke, who died in 1736, and was a messenger or superintendent of the G.B. churches from Sheffield to Wisbech. John Macgowan, the author of *The Dialogue of Devils*, at Bridgnorth in 1760. "The Seraphic Pearce," M.A., founder of the first auxiliary of the B.M.S., whose ministry in Birmingham, 1790-99 was all too short. Abraham Booth, born at Blackwell in Derbyshire, 1734, author of the *Reign of Grace*, trained deacons who founded Stepney College; Isaiah Birt, two of whose sons entered our ministry, and of these, Caleb was President of the Baptist Union in 1836. J. F. Winks, the pastor who became printer, editor and publisher of no fewer than five monthly magazines. Charles Vince, the pastor, who by speech and act was one of Birmingham's greatest citizens. Samuel Cox, D.D., founder and first editor of *The Expositor*, of Nottingham. Jabez Tunnicliffe, founder of the Band of Hope, native of Wolverhampton, began his ministry at Cradley. William Landels, D.D., and Arthur Mursell, who both left Birmingham for the Metropolis. Thomas Barras, the Nonconformist Bishop of Peterborough. J. C. Jones, M.A., whose pastorate of sixty-five years at Spalding, is the longest in our denominational history. J. B. Myers, S. A. Tipple and James Stuart, who all served the church at Wolverhampton. Forbes Jackson, M.A., of Worcester, who became Principal of Harley College. J. P. Mursell (President of the Baptist Union, 1864), Dr. N. Haycroft, M.A., James Thew, of Leicester. Robert Gray, J. Jenkyn-Brown, Arthur G. O'Neill (another Chartist), and John Hulme, who gave their lives to Birmingham. E. Hall-Jackson, of Louth, the poet, politician and historian. R. M. Julian, the secretary of the B.M.S. Centenary gatherings at Loughboro', first general superintendent of the West Midlands, who saw a Memorial Hall erected to the memory of his work in Calcutta during his lifetime. James Smith, whose ministries at Cheltenham were unique. George Howard James, of Derby and Nottingham, Octavius Winslow, D.D., of Leamington, William Cuff, the Gloucestershire boy who became the Apostle of East London. R. F. Handford, of Loughborough.

The half has not yet been told, the Lamb's Book of Life alone holds the record.

ARTHUR S. LANGLEY.

MILES HARRY, who founded Pen-y-garn church, 1727, worked the first printing-press in Monmouthshire, issuing in 1740 a reply to George Whitefield.