

Pioneer Anzac Baptists.

THE earliest settlers in Australia and Van Diemen's Land were carefully selected under Government auspices, and a jury was impanelled to decide on the merits of every one. He was then transported at the public expense, and settled, either on Port Jackson or at Hobart Town. Now Baptists have always been doubtful about accepting public aid, and have been in no manner of doubt as to rejecting public control. It is therefore no surprise that no trace of Baptist life can be discovered in the South Seas till a century ago. There was a large emigration of other denominations, both Roman Catholics and Anglicans were largely represented among the original settlers, and chaplains were often provided for them; so it is no wonder that these two communions are numerous, and that they possess valuable properties.

The first Baptist minister who seems to have officiated in Australia was John McKaag, who had been trained at Horton college, Bradford. By April, 1831, he was preaching in Sydney, baptising in the harbour, and forming a church. Next year the church accepted a site granted by the governor, on Bourke street, and a subscription list was opened, the secretary being a journalist and bookseller who had recently quitted the Wesleyan ministry. McKaag, however, found the financial burden heavy; he resigned in 1834 and seems to have died two years later.

The church applied for help to the B.M.S., who selected John Saunders. This man was an attorney before he became a minister, and he added to his experience by coming as chaplain to the women on a convict ship. He landed at the end of 1834, rallied the forces, and in September 1836 opened the building on Bathurst street, the first south of the equator. Round this old-fashioned edifice cluster many memories, and splendid ministries have been exercised there. After eleven years, in which Saunders proved an ardent advocate of total abstinence, he returned to the mother country. He is to be credited also with promptly founding a Baptist Association, whose first president in 1835 was John Stephen. But there was no second church formed during his stay.

John Ham, a minister from Birmingham, who had started for Sydney, but had stopped on the way to rally the forces at Melbourne, arrived in 1847. Three years later he was reinforced by a lad of twenty, William Hopkins Carey, son of Jonathan, son of William, of Serampore. As cottage meetings were being held on another shore of the harbour, at Parramatta, the opportunity was taken to form a second church with a second minister. Both men died soon, but James Voller came on the choice of the B.M.S., and exercised a ministry at Sydney till 1870; while

the Parramatta church, with more vicissitudes, established itself also.

These churches, and others which soon arose, after brief experimenting with open-membership, settled down to the Strict position, which still is general in New South Wales. But they were not Particular enough for some immigrants, and before 1858 a Strict and Particular church was formed, which after some migrations is now settled in Belvoir street.

The second colony, in Van Diemen's Land, had its first Baptist minister arrive in 1834. This was Henry Dowling, of the Strict and Particular type. He had done good work in London, in Worcester for the Countess of Huntingdon's church, had founded a church at Droitwich in 1811, had been first pastor at Colchester, Stanmore street. His son had settled in the island, and wrote urging his father to come to a terribly needy field. On his arrival, he devoted himself largely to an itinerant ministry, especially among the penal gangs who were opening up the country; this was so well appreciated by the authorities that they gave him every facility and some help. But while he thus went to seek sinners and save them, he also built up two Baptist churches. Hobart Town in 1835 acquired a home in Harrington street six years later, and depended largely on J. Ware for the ministry. Dowling became pastor at Launceston, where he continued his work for thirty-five years, mostly in the building in York street.

Another early worker was S. Hewlett, who came from Wollongong on the mainland in 1846. This church was reformed in 1859.

A more liberal type of Baptist work was fostered by the Gibson family, who imported many men of Spurgeon's training, and induced their churches to organize a Baptist Union of Tasmania which holds together the ministers and churches in close alliance.

South Australia was the third province to see organised Baptist life. The pioneers here were of the "Scotch Baptist" type, David Maclaren of Perth being very able.

It is needless to recount the splits and migrations which resulted in the church of 1838 ending in 1849. A second church, of the Strict and Particular order, was founded in 1842; its story is equally disappointing, and ended in 1870. The oldest surviving church was founded at Gumeracha in 1843, while the church now in Tynte street, North Adelaide, looks back to 1848. Others arose, but the whole situation was transformed by the arrival of a militant young minister from Regent's Park, Silas Mead, in 1861. With him the pioneer stage ended, and that of organization began.

Victoria was settled from Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), and New South Wales, and Baptists emerged at once, in 1838. In this case there was no waiting for ministers; a site was borrowed, where lately was the *Argus* office, a store-keeper lent a large tent, and with other help started services and soon had the joy of baptizing in the harbour. Then came a "Scotch Baptist" minister, John Joseph Mouritz, a Dundalk man, who had served in the Indian army. Another man lent his furniture warehouse; then Mouritz opened a dairy farm to the north, built a baptistery on it, and before long organized a church on his own lines. It is quite possible, but hardly profitable, to trace its subsequent history.

Most Baptists, however, rallied around John Ham from Birmingham, in 1843, who organized a church, which accepted a valuable central site from the governor. The stone of a building was laid in 1845 by Saunders from Sydney, and this building, as somewhat enlarged, is still so dear to the laymen that every proposal to rebuild and provide larger premises has been rejected. Only in 1928 has the ground behind been remarkably utilized, providing good denominational accommodation.

Ham passed on to Sydney, leaving sons who were pillars of the church. A third church was organized in 1850, soon splendidly housed in Albert Street. Then with the coming of Isaac New and James Taylor from the motherland, a fine era opened. A Colonial Missionary Society was formed, men were imported on a large scale, and churches were planted with forethought. An Australasian Baptist Magazine began in 1858, and soon Associations and Unions and Missionary Societies were forming in every part.

In Queensland, Baptists did not feel strong enough for separate action at first, but linked with others in 1849, not standing on their own feet till the arrival of B. G. Wilson from the B.M.S. in 1858. Two letters lent by Mr. Coles of Worcester will give a picture of those early days:—

Ipswich, Queensland. *March 31st, 1862.*

MY DEAREST HALSTAFF AND ELIZA,

I suppose you are beginning to think that I never was going to write any more to you, as I have remained silent so long; but the only thing I can ask you is to pardon me for being so neglectful. The December and January English mails have arrived in Ipswich, but I did not receive any letters or newspapers by them. I do not know if you have received any from home; perhaps if you have any news from Exeter you will tell me in your next letter, and if you have any late Exeter newspapers that you do not want, I should like to see them,

and be much obliged to you for them. I am quite ashamed of myself when I look at your last kind and welcome letter, to think it should have remained so long unanswered. I received your letter January 7th date, November 5th, and December 18th, 1861. I am glad to hear that you were all in good health, and trust you are all the same at present. I must express my most sincere thanks for the portrait of your dear children, Rose and Halstaff; dear Rose appears from the portrait to be a very fine girl, and little Halstaff a very pretty curly-headed boy.

It was a great disappointment to me that you were not able to give me any news about my brother George; I should very much like to find him out and write to him. The last letters I received from England were, one from father dated September 30th, 1861, and one from mother dated October 4th, 1861. Father tells me in his letter that he attends the Cathedral services with mother and Charles; he says, "The whole of the interior of the Cathedral has been covered with matting and filled with chairs; a pulpit, a reading-desk, and seats for the choir have also been erected; the place is generally filled as far as possible, and large as this great and ancient edifice is, it cannot hold all that are anxious to obtain admission to it. . . . Samuel is a regular attendant at the chapel of the congregation of the Independents at Castle street."

I have nearly forgotten to say anything about myself. Well, it is with feelings of gratitude to the Most High, that my visit to the Bush has very much improved my state of health. I have returned to Ipswich, and am working in the shop again at Mr. Munro Smith. I was rejoiced, my dear brother, to hear by your last letter that the cause of the Lord Jesus appears to flourish with you at Brighton. I think it will not be uninteresting to you to say a few words about our services at Ipswich. On Sunday, January 26th, the Rev. B. G. Wilson, of Brisbane, preached at our place of worship. In the evening five candidates on a profession of their faith in Jesus were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and added to the church. On the following Sabbath they sat with us at the Lord's table. One of the new members is my employer, Mr. Munro Smith; he was before a Presbyterian.

I hope you will not keep me so long waiting for a letter as I have kept you. Kind love to all the family. Believe me to remain, your affectionate brother, Richard Harrison Bannan.

Ipswich, Queensland. *September 7th, 1863.*

MY DEAR HALSTAFF AND ELIZA,

I have just thought that it would not be uninteresting to you, to send a few lines about our little church in this town,

to let you know what we are doing. The first thing I must tell you, we have got another pastor; and since he has arrived he has baptized three persons and there are three more candidates for baptism. On Lord's day, August 30th, Mr. B. G. Wilson preached morning and evening in the chapel at Ipswich; and on the following Tuesday a tea-meeting was held in the hall of the School of Arts in honour of the anniversary of the church in this place and the recognition of Mr. Robert Moreton as pastor; over 300 sat down to tea. After tea a public meeting was held, opened by Mr. Wilson with prayer, Mr. Moreton in the chair. The secretary of the church read the following report:—

“The present Baptist cause held its opening services on the 26th and 28th of August 1860, and not having had any anniversary meeting since then, it will be understood that the report which we are about to give extends over a period of three years. It will be remembered by many present that at that time we lost our respected and devoted pastor, the Rev. Thomas Deacon, by death. In the following month, Mr. Roberts became pastor of the church, which numbered then only nine members, including the minister. Since then we have had an addition to the church of thirty-one members from various sources, nineteen by baptism and twelve from other churches, making a total on the church book of forty members since our commencement. We have, however, had some diminution of members; six have been dismissed to other churches, two have died, eight have removed to places too far off to commune with us, and two have been excluded, making a total of eighteen; which leaves twenty-two in communion with us. We have also three candidates for baptism. During the time that Mr. Roberts was pastor, we were enabled to give him that amount of support which rendered him independent of secular employment. After he left us we were without a pastor for a term of eleven months, which brought us up to the time of the arrival of Mr. Robert Moreton, from Maldon, Victoria, which is now about two months ago; and as we have succeeded in obtaining another minister, we are anxious to do all that lies in our power to support him and his family both comfortably and respectably.”

Mr. Moreton gave a statement of his Christian experience and his aim and principles in the work of the ministry. Mr. B. G. Wilson, Baptist of Brisbane, delivered an animated address, stating the position and principle of the body, and cordially welcoming his brother Moreton to the church in Ipswich, for which he had a most particular regard, he having formed it and viewed with interest all its proceedings since. He then gave the right hand of fellowship to Brother Moreton. Mr.

Beazley (Wesleyan minister of Ipswich), Mr. Kirby (Independent minister of Ipswich), Mr. Sheppard (Baptist of Brisbane), Mr. Femister (Baptist of Ipswich), etc., addressed the meeting; some hymns were sung between the speeches, and the meeting closed by prayer. . . .

A study of these early days, and of the abundant details which have been gathered by G. R. Nichols into the Mitchell Library at Sydney, and were thrown into literary form by William Higlett to celebrate the formation of the Australasian Baptist Union in 1926, offers much food for thought.

There was no Society in England which felt any obligation to follow up settlers with ministers, or to offer any help, or to organize an emigration. The B.M.S. responded when it was asked, but never took any initiative; nor did the Home Missionary Society; nor was any serious responsibility felt. Everything therefore hinged on the efforts of the settlers. No one can feel that pure Independency met the situation at all adequately.

Again, the denomination in England was from 1830 to 1855 gravely affected by the Communion question; the old Particular Baptists were dividing into two groups, one of which was Strict, and broke off fellowship with the others; and there were also fissiparous "Scotch Baptists." Unhappily these divisions were all transplanted to the South, so that in the early days there were unseemly spectacles of wrangling and division.

In every case the situation was saved by trained college men, bringing with them traditions of culture and of joint action.

It is pleasant to turn to New Zealand, and see a different course. An Englishman is too prone to forget that these islands are in practice as far off from Australia as Canada is from Ireland, and that even to-day only one aeroplane has brought them within twenty-four hours' distance. New Zealand again was settled by picked emigrants, but the principles of picking were different, and the colonists were of high type. Decimus Dolomore was the first minister, in 1851; others organized other churches. With 1877 Charles Dallaston from Spurgeon's opened the era of organization; Thomas Spurgeon at Auckland and Alfred North of Rawdon at Dunedin saw the Union formed in 1882.

The son of the latter now is head of the denominational college in Auckland. Indeed, the importance of training men for the ministry is felt both sides of the Tasman Sea; with men offering willingly, and fitting themselves for their life-work, it needs only consecrated leadership such as Mead and Chapman gave, to see the work prosper abundantly.