

Baptists in a Huguenot Temple, La Patente Church, Spitalfields.

SUNDAY morning in a Puritan family eighty years ago; precise, peaceful and pleasant were its features. The week-day diversions were set aside, and we children had the run of *Peep of Day*, *Line upon Line*, *Old Humphrey's Tales*, *The Child's Companion*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a Bible picture-book my father had made. Those that were old enough were taken to chapel.

The family home in 1850 was Bermondsey, even then densely built into London on its northern side: its ancient Grange where monks had kept their cattle, covered with tanyards; its great Abbey only marked by a few pieces of wall and part of a gateway built into some cottages near our eighteenth-century house; but open meadows and market gardens southward; and ditches beside the Blue Anchor Road that skirted them.

My father's place of worship had been Grove Chapel, Camberwell, where the famous Joseph Irons attracted a large congregation. At that time he and Canon Melville at Camden Episcopal Chapel near by, were two of the greatest preachers of the Metropolis. I remember the Rev. J. Irons in his gown and bands, the mystic dove in the stained glass lunette over the pulpit, his emphatic delivery; Dr. Joseph Parker, forty years after, reminded me of him. He christened three of our family. When my father, like several other Grove members, became a Baptist, these perversions rather disturbed the bishop's peace of mind, and his fulminations led others of his hearers to inquire into the matter, with results opposite to his intentions.

This and other influences led to changes. Our Sunday walk was now mostly northward through Bermondsey Street, Tooley Street, Aldgate, past the open shops of the Jew butchers, by dull streets to Brown's Lane Chapel, Spitalfields. Counter attraction and nearer places, Unicorn Yard (where some of their people had belonged), Maze Pond, New Park Street, The King's Weigh House, and other causes, did not divert my parents' purpose.

Brown's Lane was a dreary thoroughfare in a district thickly populated by Jews and weavers; the latter mostly descendants of Huguenot refugees, after one of whom, Hanbury, the street is now re-named. The chapel, a large classic building with

galleries, was seated for nearly 1,200; pulpit, communion rail, and other accessories for the former worshippers remained; all looking empty and strange with the forty or fifty who assembled there eighty years ago. There was a curious baptistry; a large lead-lined tank standing on the floor. When in use a double set of wooden steps was placed at one end. At other times it had a cover and cloth and served as a reading desk or Communion table. It must have been a recent addition, for in January, 1848, Mr. Tryon borrowed the chapel in Artillery Street to baptize Samuel Griggs, a member of Brown's Lane.

The congregation was mostly from a distance: one family (once of Thomas Bayfield's chapel) came from Chelsea; one ancient lady was caretaker of a City Company's Hall; an artisan and his young family had recently migrated from Birmingham; others were in small businesses; and some were stray sheep from other folds seeking fresh pasture. Two of the families kept in touch with ours for many years, though others became dim memories of the past. The Elders in their front seat seemed to us children saturnine and unapproachable; they magnified their office. I remember one Sunday between services, a solemn little church-meeting was being held; one of them wished to ask a question of a young woman who was in the vestry; she had to put on her bonnet and shawl before appearing.

The beginning of this assembly and its continuance here for some years was one of those episodes that have so often occurred in religious history. Men, impelled by deep convictions, have entered into a conception of spiritual things that seemed to them a call to lead a new propaganda. The leader in my time was Frederick Tryon, born at Bulwick Park, Northants, 1813; of a family of some distinction whose ancestors were Dutch Walloons driven by persecution out of their native land some two centuries before. In due course he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, took a B.A. degree, and was ordained in Durham Cathedral. The influence of a college friend who had left their worldly set, and, soundly converted, become a clergyman at Cromford, led him into a deep spiritual experience; and as a young curate he laboured to set forth the gospel to the village people. The living of Deeping St. James was offered him, and disregarding the warning of friends that there was no society and no hunting there, he accepted it, and became Vicar as soon as he was of canonical age in 1837. The church became crowded on Sundays and spiritual blessing ensued.

Having to read the burial service over some drunkards and evil livers made him uneasy, and after much exercise of mind

and conscience he sent his resignation to the bishop. A Meeting House was built for him and opened in 1839; and there he sustained a marvellous ministry to full and attached congregations for more than sixty-three years.

Although akin to the Calvinistic Baptists, he stood outside, and took a distinctive line of teaching that attracted and impressed many. He depreciated the Antinomian and other tendencies that he felt were at work in some of the strict churches. Living near Deeping some years after, I often heard him and realised his power and ministerial gifts and diligence.

Calls and opportunities for preaching came from near and far, and led to his making monthly visits to London, where he became titular minister of a small congregation that assembled in Brown's Lane Chapel. Although there so seldom, and then mostly on a week night, his personality seemed to be ever present, and his rigid teaching as to daily life, habits, and worldliness was followed by his flock. The Chelsea people were dressed about as plainly as a conventual order; another family had sold their piano; my own dear mother kept a weekly fast. Self-denial was impressed in all, solemnity pervading the congregation.

The services were usually conducted by one of the Elders; a hymn from Denham or Hart given out two lines at a time, and slowly sung; a scripture, a long prayer and a venerable printed sermon read, which nearly filled up two hours. Some brought their dinner and stayed for the afternoon, when there was usually a prayer-meeting. We children found quiet diversions in the sight of others who sat near; I read hymns and the *Experience of the Author*, and noticed various items in the place and people that I have never forgotten, though they led to those wandering thoughts we were warned against.

A baptismal service was a rare event. The candidates, clothed in sombre garb, sat in front, and when the time came ascended and descended the perilous steps. Baptists in those days did not favour any attempt to make the ordinance less of an ordeal. At one chapel, when the pool was slightly warmed with some hot water for a winter baptism, the matter was solemnly discussed and referred to an elderly minister. The good man considered it, and gave his opinion that "it was lawful to make the water in the baptistry the same temperature as the river Jordan."

The little cause soon declined. As Mr. Tryon lived so far away, and was so fully occupied, he could not maintain any adequate oversight. He was taken very ill in the autumn of 1851, and wrote in November that he had too great a field to

cover, so that he became hurried and overdone. The members made no attempt to touch the locality: introspection hindered spiritual growth and outlook, and petty jealousies crept in. Deaths, removals and other changes hastened the inevitable end, about 1852. We left London in 1854, and Brown's Lane Chapel seemed a half-forgotten thing of the past.

It was not until many years after, that I learned that the great building had been one of the many churches belonging to the Huguenots in London, and in this case distinguished by the name of "La Patente," a curious name for a church.

Applying to the Huguenot Society of London, I was put into touch with Mr. W. H. Manch e, one of its members, who has an extensive knowledge of the history of Spitalfields, and who kindly supplied particulars of Brown's Lane Chapel.

While there were two mass emigrations of Huguenots, after the massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day, 24 August, 1572, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 17 October, 1685, yet their coming to England began even in 1536, and continued till the reign of William of Orange. Some of the early refugees formed a colony just north of the city wall, west of St. Botolph in Bishopsgate, long known as Petit or Petty France. Under a charter of 1550, they worshipped in the old chapel of St. Anthony, Threadneedle Street.

East of Bishopsgate stood from 1197 to 1535 the Hospital of St. Mary's Priory. The Spital Fields are shown by Agas in 1560 as used by archers; Norden shows a lane in 1593 winding along the hedgerows. In 1612 Murton settled here with the first Baptist church. A generation later a regular Artillery Yard was fenced in, with Artillery Lane leading to it off Bishopsgate; and Hanserd Knollys established a boarding-school and a church here when peace was restored. In the square attached to Devonshire House, Kiffin housed another church at Fisher's Folly, while the House itself became a centre for Quakers. The development of all the Spitalfields was authorized in 1660, and seventeen years later Ogilby shows the open Field a mere remnant, hard by the Old Artillery Ground, with the old lane, now named after Browne, well lined by houses on the north. All this district was industrial, weavers abounding. So it is not surprising that with the great influx of 1686, refugee silk weavers from France should have selected this quarter.

For it must be remembered that though a certain number of refugees could and did adopt the Anglican service, they were Calvinists, and most of them rigidly refused any such form. It is the latter with whom we are now concerned. Recalling the

troubles in providing church accommodation during James II.'s reign, Baron de Schickler says:—

“One had to reckon first with the illwill of a Sovereign, who, having himself gone over to Roman Catholicism, was far from feeling for the waifs of the great tribulation the same sympathy shown by his subjects.”

He mentions the difficulty with which Pierre Allix, the famous pastor of Charenton, obtained permission in 1686 to hold services in Jewin Street, conditionally only on his conforming to the Anglican rites. In 1687 was opened their first nonconforming chapel in Spitalfields, St. Jean, and this was followed by others in other parts of the town. Diplomatic reasons caused a sudden change with James II.; and on the 13 August, 1688, he ordered Letters Patent to be granted to ten ministers, creating them a corporate body, with power, among others, to worship in their own way. Hence arose at once a chapel in the east, and another in the west. And in 1695 a handsome chapel was built in Parliament Court, off Artillery Lane.

The chapel in Brown's Lane has been used by many different congregations. It was built in 1720 for a Huguenot church, which had previously met in the Market Hall from about 1700. That hall was burned about this time, and the church must have been enterprising to erect a building capable of holding 1,200 people. Yet within three years it found itself unable to support a minister; it therefore adopted the liturgy of the Church of England, to obtain the Royal bounty. Even so it did not flourish, and in 1740 it dissolved, the building being sold—much as has happened to the French Church of England just south of Bloomsbury.

A second Huguenot congregation bought the building, removing from Crispin Street round the corner, where they were at once succeeded by William Bently from Turners' Hall. This second congregation was one of those chartered under the Letters Patent; and “La Patente” coat of arms was affixed to the back wall.

As the century ran on, French was less and less spoken, the newer generations naturally using English. French-speaking congregations grew fewer, and on 13 December, 1786, this second church surrendered property and patent to the senior French church, still meeting in Threadneedle Street. About the same time the Parliament Court Chapel, as rebuilt in 1763, passed to a Baptist from America, Elhanan Winchester.

Next March, the Elders leased Brown's Lane to a German Lutheran congregation, of which the Rev. Christoph F. Truebner

was minister. This lease was for 14½ years at a rent of £31 10s. In 1800 the Threadneedle Street Elders sold the Brown's Lane chapel to John Gosse: his executors sold it for £280 to Mr. Robinson, who sold it in 1801 for £350 to J. C. Ubele. His daughter, Catherine Nash, leased it to Thomas Ridan Rawlings. And at this point comes in the brief Baptist interlude wherein I shared.¹

On 13 August, 1858, the property was sold by auction at Garraway's Coffee House, and its description will be of interest: "This freehold property comprises a substantially erected brick built chapel, with stone front, having a spacious forecourt, enclosed by massive and ornamental iron palisading, also a large and convenient Vestry-room and yard adjoining: situate in the South side of Brown's Lane, possession a frontage of 44 feet with a depth of 80 feet or thereabouts. The interior is fitted up with modern pews, side and end galleries, and possesses accommodation for 750 sittings, also a conveniently arranged class room. It is let to Mr. John Wells and others under an agreement for three or seven years, from the 29th September 1853, at a clear rental of £40 per annum, but of the estimated net annual value of £60."

It was purchased by Mr. James Edwards of Brown's Lane for £600. In 1858 he sold two-thirds to William Stubbs and John Wells for £200 each share. In 1862 it was sold for £600 to Mr. John Hughes to the use of the Trustees of the United Methodist Free Church. A Mrs. Jones advanced the £600 at five per cent. Caretaker's rooms and a vestry over were added to the original chapel in 1864, covering the forecourt of that building, bringing it to the street frontage. Changes soon followed and in 1887 the Trustees sold the property for £1,700 to the Rev. Prebendary Billing. He was incumbent of Christ Church, a building of 1728, designed by Nicholas Hawksmore, pupil of Sir Christopher Wren: it contains some relics, records, and tombs of the Huguenots, and in its early years its bell was rung for a quarter of an hour before six in the morning and

¹ Editor's Note as to the Baptist Church in Brown's Lane. Zoar Church was founded in 1807 by John Bailey, who hired a building erected about 1740 for Presbyterians in Great Ayliffe or Great Alie street, Stepney. It is conceivable that he absorbed an earlier Baptist Church meeting in that street. When his health failed, George Washington Wilks followed, 1826-1832. Then came a very unsettled time. One group started work in Stratford, and built Enon on West Ham Lane in 1842; this now belongs to the Metropolitan Strict Association. The Zoar building was put up to auction in 1845, and was bought by Joshua Pedley, one of the members. Apparently he was not liked by all, and another secession took place. This was the nucleus of the Church which hired Brown's Lane; it called itself Jireh.

before eight at night, to announce the beginning and end of the weaver's working day.

The galleries of the old chapel were removed, with its pulpit and other accessories, and the interior was adapted for parish uses. It was reopened on 7 November, 1887, by the Duchess of Teck, and her daughter, our present Queen, actually declared it open. Under new auspices the place has become most useful, with classes, clubs, and other parish activities; so that recently the roof has been raised, and a floor inserted at the former level of the ceiling. No trace remains of its brief occupancy by Baptists, but on the back wall may still be seen the coat of arms of "La Patente."

T. R. HOOPER.

GREAT GRANSDEN. Josiah Thompson gathered in 1770 some notes as to this church. It sprang out of the work of that great evangelist, Holcroft, and a Pedobaptist or mixed church was organized in 1703. Like many causes of that period, members lived in many villages and there was no one predominant centre. Its minister, Jabez Conder, belonged to Croydon in Cambridgeshire, where he died in 1724. In that phase it seems to have escaped the notice of Dr. John Evans. In 1732 Benjamin Dutton was called to the pastorate: he was the youngest son of Matthew Dutton, minister at Eversholt Baptist church, and after working as a clothier in Northampton, Wellingborough and Whittlesey, had succeeded his father. His coming altered the church to a Baptist basis, and encouraged it to erect a building just over the county line, at Great Gransden in Hunts. From this village his wife Anne poured out an amazing flood of literature; and he went over to America to sell it and raise funds for building—a remarkably hopeful campaign for those days! "By the foundering of the vessel on his return from America in 1748, he entered a watery grave in the fifty-seventh year of his age." David Evans came in 1749 from Hooknorton, but passed on to Biggleswade within two years. With 1755 a successor arrived in Timothy Keymer, a comb-maker from Worstead. Ten years later the succession was ensured, by Anne Dutton endowing the church: "she finished her course with joy, on the 18th of November 1765 aged 73 years . . . having written and published 25 volumes of choice letters to friends, and 38 tracts on divine and spiritual subjects." Keymer survived till 1771, when Thompson's information ended. He had not been struck with Anne Dutton, and indeed the tombstone quoted above was erected only in 1822; in 1887 it was renovated.