

Early Baptists at Nottingham.

THE story of Baptist life in Nottingham is somewhat intricate, and it shows two or three lines of development.

The earliest reference is by George Fox, who in 1650 and 1654 met Baptists there, under Rice Jones. They were evidently of the oldest type, the General Baptists, whose leader in Amsterdam and Holland in 1612 had been Thomas Helwys of Basford. In 1656 a meeting was held at Stamford, when John Kirby was apparently Elder; he promised to stir up "Winford & Rimson," which may mean Wilford on the Trent, and Rempstone near Wymeswold. In 1700 Samuel Cresswell was Elder; he went to the General Association in London, and presented a difficulty that had arisen at Wymeswold. In 1713 George Eaton was Elder; he reprinted in the town a book by Francis Stanley, dedicating it to the Messengers, Elders and Brethren in Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Nottingham. But in 1720 he ordained Josiah Thompson at Shrewsbury; as Thompson was a Particular Baptist, it is evident that in these seven years Eaton had adopted Calvinistic principles.

A new chapter therefore opens, and from this year we hear no more of any General Baptists at Nottingham for half a century. By 5 June the church seems to have become Particular Baptist, and the pastor was Thomas Richardson, lately the pastor at Tottlebank in Lancashire. Richardson in just over two years went to Pinners' Hall in London, but he had housed the Nottingham church on Friar Lane, where a meeting-house was built close to Collins' Hospital. This house was bought in 1724, and there George Eaton continued to lead the church, with the help for a short time of Andrew Gifford. About 1750, a secession took place, and on Pilchergate a group worshipped awhile under Morley; but as by 1753 James Morley was at Birmingham, it probably rejoined the main body on Eaton's death. In 1758 the church thought of buying a larger home, and obtained the patronage of the Board in London; but nothing was done. So it was in the historic building that Carey preached his famous sermon during 1791. A quarter of a century later, the church sold the meeting-house to the Scotch Baptists, and migrated to George Street, where it still worships. It betrays great modesty in dating itself only 1740, a date that marks no event in its history.

The Scotch Baptists were members of the Friar Lane

church till 1804, when they separated and went first to Bridlesmith Gate, then to Boot Lane, the modern Milton Street. They bought Friar Lane chapel in 1816, and saw the lane re-named Park Street. In 1858 they moved to Circus Street, selling the historic building, which was then used for business purposes. The Scotch Baptists disappeared between 1886 and 1891.

In 1828 a third secession from the original church took place, and within three years there was a Bethesda in Paradise Place, a court off Barker Gate. Alfred Booker was soon pastor there. This group was probably of the sternest Calvinist type.

A fourth daughter appeared in 1847, and has been housed continuously on Derby Road.

Meanwhile General Baptists reappeared in 1775, when William Fox registered his home for worship, and formed a church, which met in his garret. They soon moved to Jack Knutter's Lane, hiring a room; and in 1783, they bought a Methodist chapel, where Robert Smith settled within two years. His work was so successful that they bought land on Stoney Street and built themselves a fourth home in 1799. Branches were founded at Basford 1802, Arnold 1823, Ruddington 1825, Carlton 1826, Bulwell and Hyson Green 1828, Radford 1833, Hucknall 1835, New Lenton 1841, and other places; most of these have in time become independent churches.

The best example of this is when Robert Smith built on Broad Street in 1818, and formed a new church next year, where he and his brother James henceforth worshipped. In 1901, this second church agreed to join with a church opposite the Victoria station on Mansfield Road; two years later the Broad Street premises were sold, and both churches united in the newer building. In 1913 the church built itself a new home round the corner on the Gregory Boulevard, selling the Mansfield Road premises to the Mechanics' Institution. The descent from 1819 is obscured by retaining only the date of the third church, 1849. The registers of births connected with the Broad Street members was kept by Robert Smith till his death in 1829, then by his brother James. In 1837 all such registers were taken into Government custody, but James first made a fine copy, which remains in Nottingham. On its pages may be seen that Philip James Bailey, author of *Festus*, was born in 1816.