

## A Forgotten Eighteenth Century Baptist Church in Leeds.

THE recent decision of the Leeds Corporation to demolish Ebenezer Chapel, Leeds, has revived memories of the origin of the Methodist New Connexion, for it was in this Leeds building that the Rev. Alexander Kilham (1762-1798) began this offshoot from the Wesleyan movement in 1797. In that year the chapel had been purchased from the Baptists, and it is because hardly anything is known of the previous period of its Baptist history that I have ventured to put down what little it has been possible to glean from various sources.

Ebenezer, so named by the Baptists, was the "Second Baptist church" to be formed in Leeds. The first<sup>1</sup> was that which, formed in 1779, invited Thomas Langdon to come from Bristol College even before he had finished his studies there. He came on trial in June, 1779, eventually settled in May, 1781, at a salary of £30 per annum, and remained here as pastor of the "Old Stone Chapel" (begun 1780, finished the year following) all his life. But it is said that some of his original members so liked another student sent from Bristol to replace Langdon in the vacation of 1780 that they decided to create a separate Church, and invite the new student to be its pastor. This student was William Price: of him something is known, though not much, but of his Church as a building and as a body of members almost nothing is known at all.

Price was born in Pembrokeshire, South Wales, in January, 1757. At the age of fifteen he became a member of the Baptist Church "there," as the only available biographical account vaguely puts it; and it was through hearing a sermon on Romans xiii., 12, by Rev. Edmund Jones of Pontypool, that his mind was first seriously engaged "in the essential pursuits of gospel truth." Two years later he began to fill occasional preaching engagements in the neighbourhood, and in 1777 he entered the College at Bristol. Here he remained under the tutorial supervision of Hugh and Caleb Evans until he moved to Leeds in 1780. And, exactly like his contemporary and fellow-student Langdon, he was to find that the Leeds cause would provide him with his one and only pastorate. He died in Leeds on Saturday, July 26, 1794. It was an age of long, single pastorates, indeed, but Price was comparatively a young man when he died.

<sup>1</sup> For a full account see my articles in the *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. VI. (1932), pp. 72ff., 116ff., 166ff. On Kilham, see the *D.N.B.*, XXXI., 102-3, for a convenient summary of his life and work.

He was not a brilliant figure, we gather, but it did not follow, as might have been imagined by those who took note only of his reserve, that he was by any means an ignoramus. He made no attempt to dazzle, rather did he wish to help and to uplift his hearers, and "although unequivocally a Calvinist in sentiment," he "never profaned the hours sacred to public worship by an abstract attention to speculative opinions, nor were those hours disgraced by silly conceits or angry invectives against those whose views were not congenial with his own." His friend Parsons, an Independent minister, who preached his funeral sermon (the only contemporary account extant<sup>2</sup>) speaks of the many marks of the true gentleman he possessed, especially his humility and his hatred of all insincerity, his Christian charity and conscientious devotion to all a minister's duties. We may infer a certain shyness about him, perhaps even a timidity, but at any rate it is clear that the religion he preached was that which he also practised.

He wrote one small pamphlet of seventy pages: "Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Barnard's Discourse on Baptism, in three letters to a friend," whose title sufficiently indicates both subject and object of Price's thoughts. In January, 1789, William Crabtree, of Bradford, delivered a sermon in Ebenezer which was published<sup>3</sup> two months later "at the request of the hearers"; it would be interesting to know whether the occasion was the opening of new church premises, for it is not known when Ebenezer was built and opened.

Price was succeeded at Ebenezer by Hugh Williamson, who was ordained to its pastorate on June 24th, 1795; on that occasion "Mr. Rowland, of Cold-Rowley, read suitable scriptures and prayed, and Mr. Ashworth, of Gildersome, further engaged in prayer," whilst William Crabtree, of Bradford, and Thomas Langdon, of Leeds, preached the sermons.<sup>4</sup> It is not known at what date Williamson left Leeds, but he cannot have remained here long, for the church building was for sale at the latest by May, 1797, when the Methodists bought it for the use of the Rev. A. Kilham. It seems as if Ebenezer were that very tragic thing, a church built in an age of quick separations out of affection and enthusiasm for one man, else why should it cease to be Baptist so soon after his death?

<sup>2</sup> The particulars of Price printed in Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register*, 1794-7, pp. 112-115, consist solely of extracts from the funeral sermon mentioned. See the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Advertised in the *Leeds Intelligencer* of March 3rd, 1789, as "in the press and speedily will be published, price 6d."

<sup>4</sup> Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register*, 1794-7, p. 346.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY.

1. "Remarks on the Rev. Mr. Barnard's Discourse on Baptism, in Three Letters to a Friend. By William Price . . . Leeds, Printed by James Bowling, and may be had at the Vestry of Ebenezer Chapel. Price One Shilling." Undated, but the third letter ends (p. 70), "Ebenezer Chapel, Leeds, January 1793." 70 pp., 8vo.

2. "The Prosperity of a Gospel Church Considered: in a Sermon delivered at the Ebenezer-Chapel, at Leeds, January 14, 1789, and published at the Request of the Hearers. By William Crabtree. . . . Bradford, printed for the Author, by George Nicholson; . . . Price Sixpence." 42 pp., 8vo.

3. "The Loss of the Righteous Lamented and Improved. A Sermon Preached August the Tenth, 1794, To a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at Ebenezer Chapel, Leeds, on the Death of the Reverend William Price, Their late Minister. By Edward Parsons. . . . Sheffield, printed for John Smith; and sold by J. Binns, Leeds; . . . [&c.] 1794." 30 pp., 8vo. (Not in Dr. Whitley's *Baptist Bibliography*.)

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