

A Scenario of Baptist Essex.

COLCHESTER, the oldest town in Britain, where Boadicea had exterminated a colony of Roman invaders. Separatists, studying their Bibles soon after the King James Version came out, read a little book by John Murton, a glover from Gainsborough, *Truth's Champion*, which leads some of them to see that everyone who commits himself to Christ should seal that covenant in baptism. Within a score of years a soap-boiler is able to preach widely, and leaving a church here, ranges into the west, where one vicar is horrified at his occupying a pulpit, in a grey coat; another is scandalised at his dipping his converts in the Severn. Back to Essex, debating at Terling, helped by a weaver, Samuel Oates, in other villages. As one convert died a fortnight after her baptism, Oates indicted for murdering her; acquitted at assizes, after a fine advertisement.

Colchester invaded by Royalists from Kent, blockaded by Fairfax. Royalist ships trying to relieve, captured by the dragoons of Colonel Jerome Sankey, a Baptist soon to make a mark in Ireland. With the town ruined, a Baptist evangelist from Northumberland obtaining the use of a parish church, till it turns out he thinks public worship ought to be on the Sabbath, Saturday; exit Thomas Tillam.

Five Baptist officers, including Captain Kiffin and Colonel Packer, commissioned by the Council of State under its Baptist President, to preach throughout Essex. One or two ex-clergy also touring. Groups arise, worshipping in their farmhouses.

Progress stopped by the accession of Charles. Lamb's son Isaac, chaplain on the vessel that brought him over, promptly discharged. A Baptist captain of another warship, prefers his career to his convictions, lives to be buried in the odour of Anglican sanctity at Leigh, as an admiral. Edmund Hickingill, army chaplain and old friend of Tillam, accepts ordination, settles at Colchester, and is a thorn in the side of the town. Tillam organises emigration up the Rhine, and streams of his adherents pass through Harwich out of the frying pan of Charles into the fire soon kindled by his cousin Louis in the Palatinate.

A plucky church at Burnham-on-Crouch starting its minutes and telling of wide evangelism; soon to suffer for its enterprise, and to persevere. Arrival at Woodham Mortimer Hall of a retired accoucheur, who had been very useful to Charles; Squire Peter Chamberlain, too retiring to call himself Baptist till he

was dead, when a handsome tomb testified that he had been baptised in 1648, and had kept Sabbath on Saturday above thirty-two years.

Richard Tidmarsh of Oxford sent by a Conference of Baptists to waken Essex again; campaign at Wivenhoe with its Cinque Port traditions and formation of another church at Colchester, to connect all his converts. Benjamin Keach extending this work as far as Thaxted and Bury.

More retired Londoners. A draper from the Minories buying the manor of Little Maplestead, once owned by the Knights Hospitallers, who have left a little Round Church; henceforth Baptists appoint the vicar. Davis soft-pedals that he worships on the Seventh-day, but bequeaths the manor to endow such fellow-believers. A retired ship-captain bequeaths another great farm to help five London churches, which never try to spread their convictions here. All progress now due to local men.

Burnham behind its sea-wall which defends a sinking mainland, has stemmed the tide of persecution; its Elder, Ham Stacey, is asked to superintend all the village churches near, as well as those at Braintree, Halstead, Coggeshall, Hedingham, Tilbury. Does not realize that this needs the energy of a younger man, takes the title Messenger, yet gives no message outside his town. Most churches fail to consolidate by building central meeting-houses. One Elder inclined to wear a periwig, and his wife a "high dress"; a scandalised church at Colchester appeals for advice to the contrary. A brewer there chosen to shepherd the younger church with its far-flung members, and his frequent travels to buy barley combine with superintendence. The great palace at Audley End, which the thrifty King James had declared too expensive for a king to keep up, gets a Baptist steward, who opens worship at Saffron Walden; good premises given by a friend, assure its existence even till to-day. Colonel Packer's church at Theobalds across the Lea, helps plant a church at Waltham near the splendid remnants of Harold's Abbey, and its first pastor dabbles in poetry. Except for a little building, churches fall asleep and some die.

The Presbyterian church at Saffron Walden cannot get an orthodox minister, so invites a nephew of Andrew Gifford with a free hand; so orthodox that he soon baptises forty-six people in the Cam, and founds a second church there. This balances the disappearance of Terling, whose minister had chiefly preached funeral sermons. A militia colonel, farmer, starts at Earl's Colne; amused Colchester folk say that those who cannot get white bread must take brown; they don't know that brown is more wholesome.

Quick response to the B.M.S. by forming the first Association in the kingdom designed to spread the gospel; itinerant engaged,

student sent to Gifford's Bristol Academy. Andrew Fuller's brother builds up a church at Thorpe-le-socken.

Napoleon's wars bring soldiery to Galleywood common, where they amuse themselves with racing. The Association provides a church as an antidote at Chelmsford; while Baptists in the navy find their home from home at Harwich. Militia men discover ardent preachers in their ranks; others range about the county, so that every year sees some new Baptist church. An itinerant when threatened by mobs summonses the ringleaders, gets the constable to stand beside him at his open-air work. Whole county backs the new Baptist Union. Andrew Fuller comes preaching for the B.M.S., in Congregational churches, and Baptist churches spring up in his wake. An old-fashioned pastor hears from his son in Van Dieman's Land of the awful plight of the convicts there; hears God's call and goes; Colchester thus founds Baptist churches in Tasmania. A Halstead man tries negroes in Jamaica, goes on to Creek Indians in Alabama. Newman from Waltham Abbey, keeping school, is called by a London group to head a new Academy; an early student comes to Epping forest and starts a church at Loughton; like his tutor, lives by a private school. Scandalised high-calvinists dislike new style, split many churches and rove about starting their style; every way the gospel is preached.

Son and grandson of Congregational ministers converted at Colchester; "Ah, Charles, I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist." "Ah, mother, the Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty, and given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought." Many of Spurgeon's training afterwards helped Essex baptist churches.

Londoners continue flowing out, to Romford, Chadwell Heath, the new-fashioned south end of Prittlewell, Stratford, Walthamstow, Plaistow, Barking. Joseph Tritton, partner in Barclay's bank, treasurer of the B.M.S., settles at Great Leighs, builds a chapel on his estate, his private property, and a church is formed open to all believers. Heads gravely shaken, more Strict churches embody; progressives lose heart and Association ceases. Solemn warning by Strict papers as to the wickedness of Associations.

Three little boys at Loughton collect for the chapel soup-kitchen, taste its winter brews; sit on the pew-floor during the twenty-minute prayer, looking at pictures in their bibles; twice to Sunday School, evening stories and hymns at the piano. Chapel fills, gallery added, with ornamental front and organ; conservatives very doubtful till concordance shows the word in the bible. New minister to help the old, carefully watched by his senior from

great armchair on the platform, snorting at any questionable doctrine. Pastor's school now kept by daughters, giving first-rate grounding; grateful brothers grow up to teach in Australia, explore the Congo, range over Canada and finish as deacon at Ottawa. Mother tries Home mission work in the gipsy tents of the forest; idea afterwards developed by gipsy-like caravan of the Association touring the county.

Waterside work started at Tidal Basin and Victoria Docks, then at Maldon. New County Union founded by Tritton with the old enterprise. Churches for immigrant Londoners at Southend, Leyton, Woodford, Forest Gate, Grays. As towns grow, chapels prove inadequate; one church persuaded to give up its fine site on a main street in exchange for one on a new road with some promise, provided with chapel built to their liking; when bargain complete, find that chapel is to be hidden by building in front; children of this world wiser in their generation, exact a handsome price for frontage.

Colchester one of the latest to keep up patriarchal ministers such as Spurrier, thrice president of the Association; ministers more transferable, not so engrossed in even county affairs; laymen more to the front, though John Bradford keeps his eyes open for opportunities to extend. Problems so serious that Pioneer Mission and Home Counties Association and Spurgeon all take a hand. A church benefited for centuries from an Essex farm, comes bodily from London into the county to Seven Kings. Far-sighted railway offers cheap season tickets to those who will build; chapels often follow, churches not quite sure whether they are London or Essex, unless beyond the cheap-ticket range like Clacton, or with local industry as Tilbury. Possibilities in West Ham shown by deaconess with vision, yoked with pastor to match; buildings crowded and constantly developed for use all day and every day; women, boys, girls, old folk; country home in Essex for weary mothers and anæmic children. More Union churches in new towns, giving a new opportunity to Free Churches.

War! Back to Napoleon's days with fear of invasion; Thames and Blackwater and Stour alive with craft; Tollesbury and Harwich not quite up to the magic opportunity.

Peace again, new duties felt. Strict churches have felt great mortality, hardly six pastors left. London creates in ten years a fine new town of 125,000 working-class folk dumped to struggle with hire-purchase. Brewers and cinema-owners leap at their chance; no Baptist Co., Ltd. equal to the emergency. Deaconesses and young ministers do their best, run Sunday Schools on double shift for children clamouring. The London frontier advances; Essex County Council approves new towns; Borough Councils extend their boundaries: new estates, arterial roads, change half

the county. Old churches build fresh premises; Association plans where more churches ought to arise.

A London Transport Board with vision decides to regard Harlow, Ongar, Brentwood, Tilbury as its concern; Green Line coaches supply, railway lines to be electrified, Tubes peep up from the depths. Baptists will have more growing pains; they thrive on such challenges.

W. T. WHITLEY.

William Oates, 1796.

Isle of Ely in the County of Cambridge to wit I certify that at the General Quarter Sessions of the peace holden at Ely in and for the said Isle of Ely on Tuesday the fifth day of April in the year of our Lord 1796 William Oates of Sutton in the said Isle of Ely being a dissenting minister took and subscribed the declaration required to be made and subscribed by protestant dissenting Ministers and Schoolmasters by an Act passed in the Nineteenth Year of the Reign of his present Majesty Hugh Robt. Evans, for

Jas. Bellamy, Deputy Clerk of the peace for the Isle of Ely.

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The above certificate on parchment, owned by Alfred A. Mumford, of Beaconsfield, would protect Oates from being impressed into the militia, and from the penalties of the Conventicle Acts. He was conceivably connected with Samuel Oates, of Rutland, 150 years earlier, a Baptist evangelist, who conformed after the Restoration, and whose son Titus was expelled by Baptists. William was baptised at Cottenham in 1786. The church at Sutton dates from 1749, though whether as Baptist is uncertain; by 1790 it was. Had it been Baptist in 1786, why was not Oates baptised there? By 1784, George Norman was pastor.

W.T.W.