

# St. Mary's, Norwich.

(Continued from page 177.)

## III.

### PERSECUTION AND TOLERATION, 1667 to 1742.

WHEN Daniel Bradford and his friends separated from their paedobaptist brethren to form a Baptist fellowship, they were taking a bold step. Doubtless they were charged with being "breakers of churches," and enemies of Christian unity. The church which they were leaving had tolerated their Baptist opinions. They had not been expelled for differing from the majority, but they were withdrawing themselves. The minute in the Congregational Church Book lays the onus for the separation on Bradford, but expresses no blame—

"having declared . . . that he could not hould Comunion any longer with ye Church, he was declared . . . to be no longer a member of this Church."

Surely for the sake of preserving unity at a time when the Church was faced with overwhelming opposition and active persecution, they might have continued in fellowship with brethren with whom they were at one in all points save that of Baptism. But they were contending for a truth and a principle which could not be upheld in the fellowship of their paedobaptist brethren without giving offence. To proclaim Baptist doctrine in a paedobaptist Church would have been the negation of unity, whereas to form a separate church on a Baptist basis, maintaining friendly relations with the paedobaptist mother Church enabled the continuance of all the unity which was real. History has vindicated their action. The Church they then founded has born a witness through the centuries for which many souls in many lands render thanks to God, whereas there is no reason to think that, had they not separated from it, the Congregational Church would have been any stronger in the long run.

The record of a few of those associated with Bradford in the foundation of the Baptist Church in Norwich remains. His right hand man was Henry Austine, a dyer by trade, and a Freeman of the City. He had joined the Congregational Church in 1650, and had acted as one of its messengers at the foundation of the North Walsham Church. With them were Ann Cullier and William Wainford, who had joined the Church in 1644, and Mary Salter who had been admitted in 1654. Mary

Gooding, too, may have been the widow of James Gooding, one of the Rotterdam exiles. There were doubtless others whose record has perished.

The heavy hand of persecution soon fell upon the new Church. In July, 1668, a writ was issued for the arrest of Daniel Bradford and others. Bradford was examined at the Quarter Sessions at the end of August, but no verdict is recorded. The first positive mention of the Church is to be found among the records of its persecutors. In 1669, Bishop Reynolds made a return of Conventicles to Archbishop Sheldon wherein this entry follows one concerning the Congregational mother church :

“ Another Conventicle is held at another house of the said John Tofte, where one Daniel Bradford lives.  
Sect—Anabaptists. Numbers—about 30. Heads and Teachers—the said Daniel Bradford, and Henry Austine, a dyer.”

In 1672, King Charles' Declaration of Indulgence offered renewed liberty to nonconformists. The Norwich dissenters of the three denominations took advantage of the declaration and secured licences for their preachers and meeting places. The Baptists had evidently been developing to the full the gifts of their members, for they took out preaching licences for five—Daniel Bradford, Henry Austine, Thomas Flatman, John Waddelow and William Tuke, while the larger body of Presbyterians took out three licences and the Congregationalists four. The Church was now meeting in William Tuke's house in St. Clements, which was duly licenced.

Thomas Flatman was a Tallow Chandler who had been enterprising enough to issue copper farthings during the shortage of small change. In 1677, he was nominated as a Constable—an onerous, though honorary office. It could be an especially uncomfortable position for a nonconformist, for the city records tell that one Constable was fined £5 for wilfully and wittingly neglecting his duty in levying distress of the goods of Anne Whitlock, widow, by virtue of a warrant directing him to levy £20 for suffering a conventicle in her house. Flatman paid £3 to secure exemption from bearing the office of Constable for ever in any parish in the city. The Church Book has a minute in Austine's handwriting recording a request to Flatman to

“ assist every other day in preaching, both Lord's day and weke day for our support and buylding up and bearing our testimony.”

John Waddelow's name appears in the first list of Church members as does that of his wife Alice. He was a Worstead Weaver, and a Freeman of the City by birth.

There was at this time a lively rivalry between Baptists and Quakers. In the "Book of Sufferings" of the Norwich Quakers is recorded in 1674—

"Queries sent to the Professors which chiefly concern the people called Baptists and their Ministers."

These queries concern the nature of the Lord's Supper and of Baptism.

"And what Baptism is it ye are baptised with? Is it John's with water, or Christ's with the Holy Ghost? Or do you pretend to be baptised with John's Baptism and Christ's also? Or are ye not truly neither in John's Baptism nor Christ Jesus's?"

In a long series of questions they argue that water baptism is only a shadow of reality, and that there is no more warrant for continuing it than for continuing circumcision. The document is subscribed

"From some who are lovers of the Doctrine of Christ's Baptism . . . who are in scorn called Quakers."

The record goes on to remark that these queries have not been answered to this day.

The King's Indulgence was finally revoked in 1675, when persecution was renewed. Samuel Duncan, a Quaker, addressed a letter to "Friends called Presbyterians and Independents." Were not some of them, he says, visited with the Dayspring from on High, and did they not feel the call of the Lord in their hearts, souls and spirits? Do they not now feel the strength of the Lord withdrawn in that they cannot hold forth a public testimony in worshipping God? Let them take heed of fathering their weakness upon Christ and calling it Christian prudence, for the arm of the Lord is as strong as ever and His love stronger than death. The Quakers have maintained their testimony and received blessing. That the Baptists, who had previously engaged the Quakers' attention, are not mentioned in this admonition suggests that they were bearing a bolder witness. That they suffered unofficial persecution in common with the Quakers is hinted elsewhere in the "Book of Sufferings." This tells how certain persons came into the Quakers' meeting and

“With much cruelty, smiting, punching, and pulling some of us by the arms to hale us out of the Meeting with such violence as if they would have torn our limbs off the body,”

these persons broke their doors and windows, threw fire and mire, and drew blood many times.

“One of these wicked fellows whose name was Hall, counted the Captain of them, was afterward put in prison for beating the Baptists in their Meeting, and after he was released of his imprisonment, he became a cripple, and so continued till he died.”

In December, 1681, the Court of the Mayoralty issued a warning to the nonconformist leaders :

“That they doe forbear from henceforth to teach or meete at any conventicle or meeting house contrary to law.”

The warning was sent to Henry Austine, as leader of the Baptists, from which it appears that Daniel Bradford had died before this date.

One of the earliest records in the books of St. Mary's is a list headed—

“The number of the names of the Baptised Church in the City of Norwich and the Country joyned together walking in the fellowship and order of the Gospell.”

The list is written in script, and contains the names of twenty-four men and twenty-three women, and is headed by that of Henry Austine. It is not dated but appears to have been compiled before 1689. There follow additions in Austine's hand-writing. Fourteen of the men on this list appear in the roll of Freemen of Norwich. Several are Worstead Weavers, and there are a Grocer, Baker, Tanner, Cordwainer, Glover and Tallow Chandler.

The Covenant and Articles in the Church book are undated, but their form and content suggest that they were composed before the end of the persecution period. The Articles are an expression of orthodox Calvinism. Those setting out the distinctive tenets of the Baptists are :—

“Wee believe that all that are of the election of Grace doe make up the misticall boddy of Christ, which is the generall assembly and church of the first borne which is written in heaven, and as the misticall body of Christ take in onely all the elect so there is the visible body and

Church of Christ which is a particular congregation being a company of faithfull people, baptised believers, sanctified in Christ Jesus called out of the world, who vullontarily agree to walke together in obedience to Christ their head and law-giver in all the lawes and ordinances of his house. . . . Wee believe that the ordinance of Water Baptisme is a Gosple ordinance which is to be administered to none but believers it being the plaine positive comand of Chi to make dissiples by teaching of them and then Baptising them.

Wee believe that Christ have Instituted severall ordinances and lawes delivered to the Church, as that ordinance of the Lord's Supper by which we shew forth his death till he come, the building up of one anoether in a most Holy faith, Glorifieing God with one mouth and one heart.

Wee believe unto this Church is committed the power of putting in operation all Church censures admonitions withdrawing comunion casting out or purging out of the old leaven and that Christ for the perfecting of the saints for the worke of the ministry for the edifieing of his body have given severall officers unto the Church, some Apostles some prophets some evangelists, Pastors Teachers and Deacons, which officers are not to be Lords over God's heritage, but stewards in the house of God, not to have dominion over the faith of Believers, but helpers of their joy. The free choice of all officers in the Church doth belong unto the Church itselife: Noe officers are to be put upon it, but they to chose from amonge themselves men qualified according to Gosple rule, to minister in the severall offices that Christ have sett in his Church."

"The Covenant and Agreement that we doe joyne together in" is in these terms.

"First wee doe here in the feare of the everliving God covenant and agree willingly and vountarily and mutually in his strength to walke in all the lawes and ordinances of God blamelessly.

Secondly: To keepe ourselves from all corruptions and polutions in the worship of God.

Thirdly: To edifie one anoether in our most holy faith, to continew stadfast in Gosple fellowship.

ffourthly: To have a faithful testimony to those truths that are most opposed, endeavouring to keep the word of God. . . .

Fifthly: to be watching over one another and to be counselling and advising, supporting, relieving, strengthening and comforting one another and as occasion shall require, be warning, admonishing and reproveing one another.

Sixthly: To be submitting to the discipline of Christ in his Church.

Seventhly: To be mutually caring for one another not seeking our own things but each the good and wealth of other."

This Covenant lacks the breadth of vision and missionary purpose of those of Rotterdam and the Congregational mother church. Years of persecution had turned the thoughts of the Church inwards, and self-preservation seemed the only possible goal.

The Glorious Revolution now set William and Mary on the Throne of England and marked the end of active persecution of Nonconformists. The Toleration Act, passed into law in 1689, protected all ministers provided they subscribed to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England—with a special exemption for Baptists in regard to those enjoining Infant Baptism. The Baptists who subscribed in Norwich were Henry Austine and Thomas Flatman, John Hooker and Samuel Austine. The latter, who is referred to as Doctor Austine, was a physician, and a man of some education.

The Baptists were now able to secure their first public meeting place—The "East Granary" which had been the Dorter of the Blackfriars' Convent, over the East Walk of the Cloisters. This became the property of the Corporation at the dissolution of the Friary, and since 1672 had been let to the Presbyterians, who now moved to a building of their own. The lease was made over to the Baptists. This lease was renewed in 1695 in Austine's name, with a rent to the city of four pounds per annum.

Baptist Churches, while Congregational in their government, have always drawn together in fraternal union. For years they had been isolated by persecution, but now toleration enabled them to organise. In July, 1689, the London ministers took the initiative and invited each Church to send two brethren, preferably one in the ministry and one principal member, to meet in London in September. About one hundred Churches were represented at the assembly, which lasted for more than a week. The Norwich Church was represented by Henry Austine, pastor, and Thomas Flatman, minister. From the

account published, we learn that unity prevailed. They thanked God for deliverance from persecution, but lamented the decay of the Churches, suggesting as causes—want of zeal for God and the House of God, few living up to what they profess; the spirit of this world too much in the hearts of Christians; neglect of duty concerning the ministry, in neglecting the sacred ordinance of ordination, and to make gospel provision for the maintenance of the ministry; and failure in observance of the Lord's Day. It was decided to raise a fund to be used for assisting Churches unable to maintain a ministry, for sending out ministers to preach, and to visit the Churches, and for assisting members who were disposed to study, had an inviting gift and were sound in fundamentals in attaining a knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. They discussed numerous issues and came to some interesting conclusions: it is expedient for small churches living near together, and unable to maintain separate ministers, to unite: baptised believers are at liberty to hear sober and pious Independents and Presbyterians when they have no opportunity to attend their own assembly: ministers should seriously consider the excesses of apparel among their members—it is a shame for men to wear long hair or long perriwigs, though some ornaments may be allowed.

Henry Austine and probably most of the Pastors attending this first assembly, following the tradition of St. Paul, plied their trades as well as ministering to their Churches. During the persecution this worked well. It was safer to be known as Austine, the dyer, a respected tradesman. Under the cloak of this position he could carry on pastoral work without attracting attention, whereas every movement of a professional minister would have been suspect. But Austine and his colleagues had sat under able and learned ministers. They were conscious of their own defects and knew the value of an educated and separated ministry. Thus, the assembly gave much time to consideration of the training, ordination and maintenance of the ministry.

Pursuant of plans laid at the Assembly, Richard Tidmarsh, pastor of the Church at Oxford, made a journey into the Eastern Counties, preaching, baptising, and visiting the Churches. Coming into Norfolk, he preached four times at Pulham Market—

“from thence to Norwich where he preached twice, where is much need of help.”

Help came in the shape of a separated minister from London, Edward Williams, who, in 1690 or 1691, was appointed

co-paster with Austine. He had been a member of the Church in Old Gravel Lane, and in 1681, had been transferred to William Kiffin's Church in Devonshire Square.

In 1692, Henry Austine and Edward Williams were delegates to the Assembly which met in London in May. There had been a bitter controversy as to the desirability of singing hymns in public worship and the disputants agreed to submit the matter to a committee of the Assembly. Henry Austine was one of the seven who served on this committee. The decision was that both sides had erred—"To proclaim one another's errors is of the evil one." The disputants were urged to forgive one another, and call in all controversial books. No matter of principle was involved, and each Church was competent to decide whether to sing or not. Doubtless, Norwich was a singing Church as were those with which Williams had previously been connected.

About this time a member of the Church, Nathan Wyles, went to London to work in the ministry. In 1694, the Church in Old Gravel Lane

"did give him liberty to sit down as a transient member he still retaining his Church membership with the Church at Norwich, and that this Church will at his request be ready in common with other Churches to assist him with their ministers and members to carry on the work of God in his Hands."

The same Church book, in 1696 mentions "Brother Wiles' congregation." He became pastor of a Church at St. Paul's Shadwell, which he represented at the Assemblies of 1704 and 1705.

Six short entries in the Church Book, in Williams' neat handwriting, are all the records of his ministry of over twenty years. Four relate to excommunications, one of them for "running in debt when not capable to pay to the reproach of the Gospel," and three for neglect of duty to the Church. The other two entries record collections made at the Granary in 1697 and 1698—16s. "upon a Brief for Mr. Uriell for a fire in Cumberland," and 10s. 6d. "for a Fire in ye town of Lancaster."

Edward Williams died in 1714, at the age of 73. His body was buried in the ground of the mother Church at the Old Meeting House, where his memorial may still be seen, bearing the inscription—

"Is Williams dead, that cannot bee  
Since dead in Christ so Liveth hee."

His widow Jane Williams left the Church its first endowment—a sum of £50, to be put out to interest by two trustees, the proceeds being paid annually to the poor of the Church.

After Williams' death, the Church unanimously called

“our Reverend Brother Mr. Sam Austine and our Reverend Brother Mr. William Baker to ye Pastoral care of ye church to act together jointly as Pastors and Elders.”

They were duly set apart with fasting and prayer. The Church had now left the East Granary, and hired a meeting place in the parish of St. Michael's Coslany. For the next ten years the Church Book records only withdrawals from disorderly members. Most of the cases are for moral offences—drunkenness; “taking a thing or two from a shop or two”; “turning his back on his wife, children and creditors,” and so on. The rest are for failure to commune with the Church. Signatures to the minutes show that, by 1716, two deacons had been appointed, John Nicker, a Furrier, and Richard Spratt, a Baker, both Freemen of the City.

In 1723 we learn that the members numbered twenty-six of each sex. In 1725 at a solemn meeting William Watts was elected a deacon. Among his duties was that of treasurer. His Account Book shews that Mr. Baker's salary was £26 per annum. After this the main items of expenditure are £5 rent for the Meeting House, the cost of “Wine and bread for the Sakrement”, and relief of 6d. per week to widow ffasset—a total of £37 per annum. On the side of Income, five quarterly subscribers provide £26 8s. 6d., Mr. Baker contributes £6, and there are collections “Gardered at the Doore” and “Recd at the Sakrement”.

William Baker died in 1726, and this year the Church incurred the formidable expense of £18 in moving to a new meeting house in the same parish. Among the items of expense is 15s. 10½d.

“Pd. for workmens allowance and for Beare that was allowed the helpers when we Removed the meeting things.”

From 1727 to 1750 fairly regular annual grants were received from “the fund at London”, varying from £3 to £5. In the former year Edward Munford came to minister to the Church. After two months' ministry he was sufficiently established for his wife to come down from London to join him, but it was more than two years before he “was set Down

a Pastor over this Baptised Church." There were at this date only ten men and seventeen women members.

Munford ministered to the Church till his death in 1737, receiving a salary of £30 a year. He was succeeded by John Miller who was set apart to the pastorate in 1738 but lived only one year thereafter. Diodate Hore came from Plymouth in 1740, the Church paying £8 15s. 10d. for the cost of bring his wife, daughter and household goods this long journey. He stayed but one year. The following entries in the Account Book are relevant :

" For what I am out of when the ministers cam to consult with us about Mr. Hores gooin away from us	... ..	1	0	0
Pd. Mr. Stinnet for the first time prichen after Mr. Hore's gooin away	... ..	10	0	
Pd. for Mr. Stinnet's hors standing one night		1	0	

With no settled minister, and supplies hard to come by, the Lord's Supper could seldom conveniently be observed. In March 1742, we read

" Pd. for wine, bread and candel for three Sacraments this year 11s. 5d." and in 1743 " Out of for two Sackraments for we had no more this year 6s. 4d."

The Church had fallen to a low ebb. The men from whose work it had grown had been people of importance. Hugh Peters, John Davenport and Thomas Allen were well known on both sides of the Atlantic, while William Bridge was one of the foremost of English ecclesiastics. Those who had carried this work to its logical conclusion by moving on to the Baptist position are herioic figures. They achieved no fame, but they guided the Church through the storms of twenty years' existence as an illegal body. Toleration came, but the years of strife and persecution bore their fruit in a period of religious sterility unparalleled in English history. The men who led the Norwich Baptist Church through this period were small men. They left no record beyond the ill-spelt minutes in the Church book which witness no breadth of outlook. They had taken the torch from men who were nobler than they; in their hands it flickered and grew dim, but they passed it unquenched to their successors. In the years to come it was to burn brightly.

CHARLES B. JEWSON.

*(To be continued.)*