

Barton-in-the-Beans.

IN the year 1745 a group of seven people, six men and one woman, formed themselves into a Christian Church in an obscure Leicestershire hamlet. When its centenary was celebrated in 1845 there were more than forty churches in the Midland area which were in its direct descent. What the number has grown to today the present writer has been unable to verify with exactitude, but it is certainly large enough to make the bi-centenary worthy of special notice, even though wartime conditions have made impossible any worthy public commemoration of it. As a "mother" church Barton-in-the-Beans has a record with few equals in Baptist annals.

It was not as a *Baptist* church, however, that the actual beginning was made. Evangelical zeal rather than denominational interest was the impelling motive, and the cause was well established before the pioneers decided on its name. Their first meeting-house, erected and paid for before the end of the first year, expressed ideas that derived from the Moravian Brethren. It had a large rostrum, with room for many preachers or leaders, while the upper story was devised for the living accomodation of the unmarried members of the society. This Moravian Settlement plan, however, did not meet with local approval, and it was never carried out. After lengthy discussion it was decided to adopt the name "Independent". This involved no association, however, with the denomination of that name. It simply expressed the fact that the little community claimed the rights of a self-governing community, free from all outside authority or control.

Ten years passed before the church became definitely Baptist. It was not a sudden decision, but the culmination of a long process of development and gradual emergence into fuller light and knowledge. They began by following without question the almost universal custom of infant sprinkling. When convinced, by their independent study of the New Testament, that its mode was immersion, they adopted that mode, though still only for infants. Further study led them to abandon infant baptism altogether, and to substitute for it a simple ceremony that was the prototype of our modern infant dedication service. The next step was into full recognition of New Testament teaching and practice concerning both subjects and mode of baptism. When that position was reached, entirely through their own independent study of the matter, they showed a like independence in the way that they faced the practical problem that emerged. They sought no outside aid. Two of the leaders among the company of Barton preachers

respectively baptized each other, and then together baptized all the other members of the little community who were prepared to follow their example.

But to go back to the beginning. We have just referred to the "Barton preachers". That is the most significant expression in the early story of this notable piece of Christian enterprise. Many Churches and Christian organisations owe their origin and development to the inspiring leadership of an outstanding personality. Not so at Barton. From the beginning it was there a matter of team work, and so it continued throughout all the earlier period. Of the original seven, two were appointed elders, with full preaching and pastoral responsibilities, while two others were their recognised assistants, and the band of preachers increased in number with the growth of the work.

The Countess of Huntingdon was at that time residing at Donington Park. One of her servants, David Taylor, began evangelistic work in the neighbourhood. In 1741 he visited Glenfield and Ratby, two Leicester villages, where among his converts was Samuel Deacon, father of the Samuel Deacon who was later to become the most famous of the Barton preachers. Taylor was joined by others in the work, which spread to neighbouring villages, including Barton. Here the pioneers met for a time with violent opposition, but they weathered the storm, and the work became firmly established. The first service at Barton was conducted by John Taylor, a schoolmaster, in 1743. He was not related to David, though for some years they laboured together in itinerant evangelism, both in the Midlands and in other parts of the country.

The Barton preachers travelled widely. They were all engaged in arduous secular toil during the week, but on Sundays they were to be found preaching the Word over a very wide area. When one remembers the road and travel conditions of the mid-eighteenth century it is difficult to understand how they accomplished so much, but the fact remains that within fifteen years they had established causes not only in their own immediate vicinity, but also in the neighbouring counties of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Warwickshire. Apart from those farthest afield the home circuit had so grown that in 1760 it became advisable to establish five centres for the community instead of the one at Barton. They were at Barton, Melbourne, Kegworth, Loughborough and Kirkby Woodhouse. The Barton group included Hugglescote, Markfield, Stanton, Hinckley and Longford. The Lord's Supper was administered at Barton and Hugglescote alternatively, but even with this limitation of the area there were members who had to travel as much as twenty miles to attend these sacramental services.

Each of the five groups had its own ministers and was a self-governing community. But they did not become independent of one another. Independence was for them a precious principle of church polity, but they did not interpret it in isolationist terms as so many of their successors have done. They were independent, or interdependent, members of a wider fellowship. The preachers of the scattered groups met for monthly conference, generally at the Mother Church, and there were quarterly united gatherings for the members, held in rotation among the groups.

The Barton group had three regular ministers, one of whom was Samuel Deacon, Sen^r. Six years later, in 1766, a further sub-division of the area was agreed upon, and Hinckley and Longford became a separate church. Their joint membership numbered fifty, but within seven years it had grown to nearly two hundred, and they were strong enough to become two separate communities. For a short time after 1766 the now more restricted Barton group had a period of decline, or at least of arrested progress. This was chiefly due to ministerial losses, but fortunately it was not long before that particular problem was solved, and renewed prosperity set in, under the remarkable ministry of Samuel Deacon, Jun^r. In 1798 the final sub-division of the group took place, and Hugglescote became independent. Meanwhile there had been considerable extension in the immediate Barton area, and causes had been established and chapels erected in a number of the surrounding villages. Today the Barton Church still works as a group, with branches in six villages.

It is impossible here to tell fully the story of the wider extension of the work initiated and long supervised by the Barton preachers. It is summarised, however, in the following list taken from the official association records on the occasion of the Centenary in 1845. It is not a complete record, however, for *inter alia* it does not include the churches at Coalville, Whitwick and Coleorton, which were all founded by workers from Hugglescote before 1845, or that at Shepshed, daughter church of Loughborough.

TABULAR LIST OF CHURCHES.
IN THE MIDLAND DISTRICT OF THE NEW CONNEXION
OF GENERAL BAPTISTS,
Showing their relation to the Church at Barton.

CHURCHES.	PARENTAGE.	DATE OF ORIGIN.
BARTON ... ..	... ..	1745
MELBOURNE	Barton	1760
Cauldwell	Melbourne	1785
Ashby and Packington ...	Melbourne	1807
Austrey	Ashby and Packington ...	1808
Measham and Netherseal ...	Ashby and Packington ...	1840
LOUGHBOROUGH	Barton	1760
Leake and Wimeswold ...	Loughborough	1782
Broughton and Hose	Leake	1806
Quorndon and Woodhouse ...	Loughborough	1804
Rothley and Sibleby	Loughborough	1802
KEGWORTH	Barton	1760
Ilkiston and Smalley	Kegworth	1785
Castle Donnington	Kegworth	1783
Sutton Bonnington	Kegworth	1795
Long Whatton and Belton ...	Kegworth	1798
KIRKBY WOODHOUSE	Barton	1760
HINCKLEY	Barton	1766
Longford	Hinckley	1773
Longford (<i>Union Place</i>) ...	Longford	1827
Thurlaston	Hinckley	1814
Wolvey	Hinckley	1815
HUGGLESCOTE	Barton	1798

The above Churches came in a direct line from Barton—the following originated in a union of effort by the Barton preachers and their coadjutors, aided by others.

Sutton Coldfield ... ..	... ..	1775
Birmingham ... ..	... ..	1786
Nottingham (<i>Stoney Street</i>) ...	... ..	1775
Nottingham (<i>Broad Street</i>) ...	Nottingham	1818
Beeston ... ..	... ..	1804
Derby ... ..	... ..	1791
Derby (<i>Sacheverell Street</i>) ...	(Divided in 2 Churches) ...	1831
Duffield ... ..	... ..	1810

The Church at Friar Lane, Leicester, existed before the formation of the Barton Church, but had nearly become extinct: its resuscitation and extension may be attributed to the labours of the Barton preachers, their coadjutors and successors.

Leicester (<i>Friar Lane</i>) ... ..	... ..	1660
Leicester (<i>Archdeacon Lane</i>) ...	Friar Lane	1799
Leicester (<i>Carley Street</i>)	Friar Lane	1823
Leicester (<i>Dover Street</i>)	Friar Lane	1823
Leicester (<i>Vine Street</i>)	Archdeacon Lane	1841
Billesden	Friar Lane	1820

Churches also exist at the following places, the origin of some of which is not known to the compiler, but most of them no doubt sprang from the above:—Belper, Burton-on-Trent, Coventry, Cradeley Heath, Fleckney, Smeeton, Hathern, Market Harborough, Northampton.

Apart from being a prolific mother of churches within its own Midland area, Barton has its honourable place in the wider history of the General Baptists. When Dan Taylor determined to revive the General Baptist cause by the formation of a new Connexion, one of his first steps was to make overtures to the five groups of churches into which the original Barton Church had been divided. He met with a cordial response. They sent representatives to the preliminary meeting held at Lincoln in 1769, and at the historic meeting in London in the following year eight of the nineteen ministers who were present were from the Midlands. If the Yorkshireman, Dan Taylor, has the honour of being the builder of the New Connexion of General Baptists, the Barton churches provided him with his chief and most reliable foundation stones.

The Barton preachers included some remarkable personalities. They were men from humble walks of life, but many had outstanding gifts. Joseph Donisthorpe, the blacksmith, Francis Smith, Nathaniel Pickering, John Grimley, Samuel Deacon, Sen^r., John Whyatt and William Smith were but a few of those whose record is worthy of remembrance. And in the second generation there were many others who maintained the succession, with Samuel Deacon, Jun^r outstanding among them. He was born in 1746, and was baptised in 1766. He had been apprenticed to a clock-maker, and he set up in business for himself in Barton. The business he established was later carried on by his descendants down to quite recent years, and had a wide reputation that endures to this day. He hesitated a long while about taking part in preaching work, but his hesitations were at last overruled by the strongly expressed judgment of the church on the matter, and in 1779 he was duly appointed to the pastorate, Dan Taylor taking part in his ordination. He filled that office for nearly forty years, and became one of the most widely known and honoured General Baptist ministers of his time. In the denomination his literary output, both in prose and verse, was excelled only by that of Dan Taylor himself. His hymns had a wide popularity, though it has not endured, and only two were included in the *Baptist Hymnal* when that book was issued as the official General Baptist Hymn book in 1879.

Another famous name associated with Barton is that of Goadby. Joseph Goadby was born at Market Bosworth, where his father had a business and also held the office of Parish Clerk, in 1774. In his late teens he began to attend the ministry of Samuel Deacon, and in 1793 was baptized and joined the Church. Soon afterwards he began to preach, and showed such promise that on his Pastor's recommendation he was accepted as a student at Dan Taylor's Academy in the Mile End Road. At

the end of his course he received three calls, but they were all declined, and he returned to his native district, and began his ministerial work in the little village of Packington, near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, which was one of the branches of the Melbourne group, and quite near to Barton itself. A few years later Ashby and Packington ceased to be a branch of the Melbourne Church, and Joseph Goadby became its independent minister, with charge also of a new cause that was established at Measham. He remained in this pastorate until his death in 1841.

The next two generations of this remarkable family figure even more prominently in General Baptist history. The eldest son of the Ashby minister, another Joseph, became minister of Dover Street, Leicester, and later of Woodgate, Loughborough, while the second son, John, went to Orissa as a missionary. Joseph Jun^r. had five sons, of whom four entered the ministry. Joseph Jackson, Thomas, John Orissa, and Frederick William. Thomas became the principal of the Midland Baptist College. John Orissa and Frederick William both died in their middle thirties, the former in India, whither he had gone in the footsteps of his uncle, and the latter after a ministry at Bluntisham and Watford that was giving very high promise. He is remembered as the author of the hymns "A crowd fills the court of the Temple", which was composed for the Barton School Anniversary in 1878, and "O Thou whose hand hast brought us unto this joyful day", written in the same year for the opening of the new Beechen Grove Chapel, Watford.

As a final tribute to Barton's widespread influence and fame it may be recalled that it is on record that an Orissan convert once naively asked if London were as large a place as Barton!

PERCY AUSTIN.

NOTE.—The story is fully told in Adam Taylor's *History of the English General Baptists* (vol. 2), and in *Historic Memorials of Barton, Melbourne, and other General Baptist Churches*, by J. R. Godfrey. There is a *Memoir of Samuel Deacon*, and the record of the Goadby's is enshrined in the composite family biography, *Not Saints but Men*. It is also worthy of note that Abraham Booth, later the pastor of the leading Particular Baptist Church in London, began his career as a Barton convert, and as minister of the branch church at Kirkby-Woodhouse; and that Dr. and Mrs. John Buckley, of Orissa, went forth from Barton churches.