

Some Old Association Reports.

THE perusal of a round dozen of the Reports, Minutes and Letters of a Baptist Association of a century ago makes interesting reading. In this case the volume consists of the Annual Reports of the General Baptist Association, for the years 1838-1849. Taking a cross section, we are informed as to the constitution, doctrine and life of the Association and its 130, more or less, churches at the time, while a perusal of the series indicates their ideals and trend. Some of the subjects dealt with are timely and fresh today, while others have passed into oblivion, or remain as matters of history only.

"The Association of the General Baptists of the New Connexion" covered twenty-two of the counties of England, but had no Churches in the extreme North, in the South-west, or in Wales. Leicester with its five Churches, its Academy and its eminent ministers, was evidently an important General Baptist centre. London had four Churches and Derby three. The name Pike, Goadby, Burns, Stevenson, Jones and Winks are much in evidence.

Regular attention and much space is given to the Academy, and its location seems to depend mainly upon the convenience of the Tutor. Within the space of a few years, it is to be found at Wisbech, Loughborough, London and Leicester. Another subject of constant care is the monthly periodical, *The General Baptist Repository*. This publication had a chequered career and appeared under different titles. At one time it was published at a loss, but came out regularly and pluckily. Later, however, after "retrenchment and reform" and the show of a little denominational grit, it became a thriving concern. As the *Baptist Reporter* it seems to have passed into the hands of the indefatigable J. F. Winks, of Leicester. Unfortunately, there is no complete copy of this valuable monthly to be found anywhere.

Bribery at Parliamentary Elections appears to have been of considerable trouble to the Churches a century ago, when "corrupt men" sought to "obtain the suffrages of persons independent of their convictions." The Association's resolution, in 1841, tells its own story: "That the Association regards the elective franchise as a sacred and important trust, which cannot be bought or sold without an obvious violation of social, public and Christian

morality, as such transactions involve a barter of the best interests of the country for sordid gain; it therefore recommends the churches to visit every known case of the reception of a bribe, amongst its members with the severest censure which church discipline allows; and most sincerely hopes that all our people will be faithful, virtuous and patriotic, in their votes, whatever consequences may follow."

In 1838, a loyal and dutiful resolution is passed and forwarded to the young Queen Victoria, in the following terms: "That this Association of the General Baptists, holding their annual meeting at the time of her Majesty's coronation, cannot but express their attachment to the person and government of her most gracious Majesty, the Queen; and fervently pray that civil and religious liberty may prevail and be perpetuated throughout the British Empire, and that her reign may be long and prosperous." In 1840, another address was presented to the Queen, "congratulating her Majesty and her Royal Consort on their late providential deliverance." On that occasion, "all present were permitted to vote, ladies not excepted." In 1842, still another proof of attachment to the throne is given in a resolution passed "at the Borough Road meeting house, Southwark, July 1st, 1842." This address is worded: "May it please the Queen, We your Majesty's loyal and dutiful subjects desire to express our devout and grateful thanks to Almighty God for his providential preservation of your Majesty from another disgraceful and wicked attempt upon your majesty's life."

In those days many Baptists "conscientiously declined to take an oath" and sought relief to that end in an Act of Parliament. Would not that suggest the common origin of Baptists and Quakers? The "Hungry Forties" have their record in these Reports and great concern is shown concerning "the deep distress in many parts of the country, especially in the manufacturing districts." At the same time our people suffered hardships in Poor Law Institutions and protest is made "against shutting up poor Dissenters on the Lord's Day in the Union Workhouse, and thus depriving them of their religious privileges, and the Association deems it tyranny and persecution, and calls upon the friends of civil and religious liberty to exert themselves against such unrighteous conduct." In 1843, a permanent committee is appointed "to watch over the rights of Dissenters." An "expression of belief" is made that "the Union of the Church and State is an unscriptural and mischievous union, etc." Quite a natural sequence to this is found in a resolution passed in 1844, "that we have witnessed with devout satisfaction and delight, the formation of the British Anti-State Church Association, etc."

The Baptists of a century ago, judging from these Reports,

were anti-war men. They urged the diffusion and practice of international and universal peace, and sent representatives to the Paris Peace Congress. Trust Deeds appear to have been a constant trouble to the Churches. Temperance advocacy does not seem to have been popular with the Association. In 1846, however, item VIII in the Conference Minutes reads as follows. "*Petition to Parliament, on Sunday traffic in strong drink.*—A petition having been read, was adopted; and the chairman of the Association was requested to sign it on behalf of the meeting." But what can the following item in the Minutes of the following year 1847 mean: "IV *Total Abstinence Question*—Resolved, That this Association do not entertain this question."?

The Association was decidedly opposed to the *Regium Donum*, and a committee "appointed to consider the subject, recommended the following resolution, 'That this Association will not in future sanction any minister's name being placed on its 'Minutes' who may, after this period, commence receiving the *Regium Donum*, or any similar or Government or Parliamentary grant'." But, an influential minority, though not thinking it desirable for Dissenters to receive the *Regium Donum*, yet conscientiously and decidedly protested against the first resolution adopted by the Association." The problem was a difficult one and the opposing parties each had good grounds to stand upon. Some aged and afflicted ministers who needed help, had received the *Regium Donum*. The Gordian knot was broken: these old warriors refused to receive the tainted favour and the Association took steps to provide that they should not suffer.

The Association "Letter to the Churches," written in 1845 by the Rev. J. G. Pike, on "Scriptural views of the Ordinances and Institutions of the Gospel, and the baneful tendency of the popish perversions of them now widely spreading in our Country" proved popular and a second edition was called for. The Letter is an excellent statement of Baptist doctrine and a still powerful and useful exposure of the errors of Roman Catholic teaching.

Not only did the Association address its annual "Letter" to the Churches, but the churches also forwarded each its annual "Letter," or report, to the Association. These are no stereotyped missives, but they very often touch upon interesting items that shed light upon certain practices in the social and church life of the period. The following quotation from the Report of the church at Tarporley, Cheshire, in 1845, will introduce us to an old friend that we have known so well: "Our Sabbath school is not so prosperous, principally owing to the Church day-schools compelling, as they do, the parents to send them to their Sabbath-school. We hope this will not be the case for long."

The Association faithfully supports Home and Foreign

Missions and, in 1846, expresses its sympathy with the B.M.S. "On account of the death of our brethren, Messrs. Yates, Mack, Knibb, and Burchell, most distinguished ornaments of the Baptist denomination and mission." The ire of the brethren is greatly stirred by the "Government support of Idolatry in India," and this is expressed by a resolution in the form of a question followed by a decisive and final "Yes," as follows: "As the British Government still continues its annual grant to the temple of Juggernaut, of 36,000 rupees, and likewise supports numerous temples in India, by regular money payments, in lieu of lands that have been resumed, is it not the duty of every church and congregation in the Connexion, to petition Parliament in the ensuing session against this anomalous and unchristian policy?—Yes."

The evergreen Education Question moved the clans vigorously in those days, but the intervening century has wrought incredible changes in the situation. At that time, Dissenters insisted that the Government should not meddle with the schools of the people—"And whilst this Association recommends the members of our churches to continue and increase their exertions for the diffusion of education by Sabbath schools and Day schools, it advises them most earnestly not, on any account, to receive Government assistance towards education." They would also call upon the electors to be faithful to these principles at the Parliamentary Elections.

These good old Baptists of a century ago condemned the prevailing slavery of their time, with zeal, vigour and a sense of conviction. Time and again they assailed the foul traffic, with thunder in their voices. They gave no quarter and would accept no compromise. At that time the Christian Churches of America, of all denominations, Baptists as well as others, lived largely by slavery! Churches and Associations, Colleges and Missionary Societies, Unions and Conventions were financed and controlled by slave-owners! Here, however, as in other cases, small companies of Baptists pioneered and led all Churches out of the great darkness. The loud condemnations and protestations of the General Baptists of England reverberated in the United States of America, and struck upon a sounding board in the heart of the Free Will Baptist denomination, in the great west country. This American body numbered upwards of sixty thousand members, and were anti-slavery to a man. Their hearty response created joy and astonishment in the hearts of the General Baptist Association, then numbering about eighteen thousand members. Having "learned with great satisfaction" of "the Free-Will Baptists of America, as to their purity on the Slave Question," the Association sends its congratulations, opens up an affectionate

correspondence, sends a deputation to the United States and invites a return deputation to England. "The Brethren, Joseph Goadby, of Leicester, and Jabez Burns, D.D., of London," went to America, while the Rev. Jonathan Woodman and the Rev. Eli Noyes, M.A., visited this country. There was no lack of love-feasts and hospitality on either side. Free Will and New Connexion Baptists congratulated each other upon their attitude towards slavery. On that theme, their hearts were beating in perfect unison. The Americans, however, went one better and invited the Englishmen to become like themselves, total abstainers from intoxicating liquors, as well as from slavery. They claimed to be out-and-outers for Liberty, Temperance, and Peace. An awkward *contretemps*. The New Connexion could not go quite so far. They admitted the evil of intemperance, and stated that many individual members of their churches were total abstainers, but that they could not make the pledge a condition of church membership.

At an early date all British Baptists were decidedly opposed to slavery, and therefore clashed with the main body of American Baptists. The London Baptist Association sent a Memorial to the Baptists of America, in the early thirties, appealing to them to oppose the traffic in human beings, and even sent a deputation across the Atlantic to that end. The story of the journey of the Revs. F. A. Cox and J. Hoby to America and back, in 1835, as told in *Facts for Baptist Churches* makes sad reading. Both went out like lions, bent upon convincing their American brethren of the wrong and evil of slavery, but they returned like lambs. Strong men though they were, they were cleverly hoodwinked by the slave-owning Christians of the West, warmly welcomed, lavishly entertained and gently ushered here and there, but carefully hindered from delivering their message to the Baptist Courts and Assemblies of North America. It does not seem that they struck upon the Free-Will Baptists, otherwise their experience might have been different. This small body had to pay the usual price for their pioneering as they testify in the following: "Our uncompromising principles on the subject of slavery, have brought upon us the odium both of the Churches and the State, and subjected us to many trials."

Our bunch of old "Association Letters" tells us, in eloquent terms, of the effect of a hundred years on the life of both Church and Society, and of the great distance covered by the span of a single century.

E. K. JONES.

We deeply regret the death of Dr. E. K. Jones and hope to include a commemorative article in our next issue.