

## Some Disregarded Sources of Baptist History\*

PRINCIPAL UNDERWOOD, in his Preface to the *History of English Baptists*, declares his resolution to confine himself to England, adding that the history of the Welsh Baptist churches can be recorded only by a native of the Principality. What a wonderful flourish of disregard! All I can say is that he has lost something good, some romantic records, almost all of them written in English: the arrival of John Miles in 1649 to found at Ilston in Gower the first Particular church in Wales, to write up 263 names in the church register, carry it off to America with him, where for many years it has found a home at the Browne University in Rhode Island; the arrival in the highlands of Brecon and Radnor in 1650 of Hanserd Knollys, one of the greatest names in Baptist history, to preach the gospel under the Act for the Propagation, and (incidentally) to be well paid for his work; the visit of William Rider to the church at Llanwenarth in 1655, a General Baptist imposing upon Particulars, to drive home the practice of the laying-on of hands, which was to cause endless controversy in later generations; the baptism of William Jones in 1667 by immersion, his founding of the church at Rhydwylym, parent church of the two present powerful Associations in south-western Wales; and how the example of the mighty Vavasor Powell, coupled with the influence (to a large extent) of the church of Broadmead across the Bristol Channel, bred groups of free-communicants on the Border who (Baptists in reality) came to life in the Indulgence documents of 1672 as Congregationals; and how Dr. Whitley, by a lack of acquaintance with the Welsh background leading to actual disregard, lost some very valuable points in correcting the classified summaries of Professor Lyon Turner in his second volume of *Original Records*. Would not Principal Underwood enjoy these high-souled romances, even excuse the occasional lapses of human endeavour? And follow on to read the story of Andrew Fuller's visit to the two South Wales Associations in 1812, the visit of Dr. John Ryland to the Moleston Association meetings in 1814, where he preached three times, twice after the redoubtable Christmas Evans; of the Missionary Meeting at Swansea in 1815, when Robert Hall, with Drs. Rippon and Ryland, were expected to speak; of the

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bold invitation to William Winterbotham to preach at the Carmarthen meetings in 1819, he being a man who had spent over two years in prison as a favourer of the French Revolution, but had endeared himself to the tough Calvinists of the Association by editing one of the hyper-Calvinistic works of Dr. Gill.<sup>1</sup> And what of the Circular Letters of the various Associations, by now over 1,500 in number and many of them written in English, bringing testimony both to vagaries of doctrine and the vicissitudes of the churches? I am sure after this course of reading—letters as well as romances—the Baptist historian must admit that it is neither a good nor wholesome thing to leave the entire track of Welsh Baptist history at the mercy of native runners.

In the last paragraph the words “lack of acquaintance” were used and a hint given of virtual disregard. But let not such pinch-beck terms make us forget at this juncture to pay tribute to two gallant historians of Dissent, no less than the late Professor Lyon Turner and the late Dr. W. T. Whitley, the first whose three volumes of *Original Records*—penetrating, detailed, comprehensive—are simply invaluable, and the second, at once gleaner, compiler, editor, bibliographer, historian, whose memory should be very vivid to us all in this year of Jubilee. In the tables of his third volume, based in the licence-entries in State Papers 320, 321, and especially on the Entry Book 38A Turner, who had a virile obsession for statistics, was pleased to find 210 Baptist preachers who were licensed in 1672-3, and 202 meeting-houses.<sup>2</sup> These results were put under the microscope by Dr. Whitley, who rescued an additional thirty Baptists from the ranks of Presbyterians and Congregationals, but generously conceded that some people called Baptists by Turner were not Baptists at all.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, as has already been hinted, by disregarding the evidence from Wales, he missed some cogent material in which he would find about twelve Baptists, all free-communionists of the Bunyan School, masquerading (like Bunyan himself) under the name of Congregationals, and one or two of them under a Presbyterian cloak, old friends and disciples of Powell in the highlands of Radnor, old colleagues of William Thomas of Llltantrisant, a frequent visitor to Broadmead, in the central hundreds of Monmouth.<sup>4</sup> Interesting men like Maurice Griffith of Beguildy, friend and companion of Vavator in his great itinerant days, like Thomas Quarrell of Shirenewton, a close relative of Vavator's first wife, and William Milman, the Sabbatarian Anabaptist, who first came to Wales as a schoolmaster, and whose personality was so puzzling to the clerks at Whitehall that they forgot to enter his Christian name on the licence-entry, and forgot also to call him and his householder at Llangwm either Congregational or Baptist on the same entry.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, one free-communionist leader, Christopher Price of Abergavenny, at once minister, apothecary, and man of means, did not attempt to deceive

either Lyon Turner or Dr. Whitley, but roundly declared himself a Baptist, a flourish of conviction that was somewhat tarnished by his doings during the Indulgence of 1687.

#### THE RELIGIOUS CENSUS OF 1676

Before coming to this later Indulgence it would be well to note the Religious Census of 1676, set on foot by Archbishop Sheldon and his coadjutors just after the withdrawal of the licences in 1675 in order to prove the abiding weakness of nonconformity in the land. Answers were required from each parish to three questions, the third reading thus: *What number of Dissenters are resident in your parish, which either obstinately refuse, or wholly absent themselves, from the communion of the Church of England at such times as by law they are required?* Only the bare number was asked for, no lead was given whether that number meant individuals or households above the age of sixteen, and most ghastly omission of all, no sub-analysis was suggested regarding the strength of the respective sects, of resolving the total into its constituent elements. The returns for England and Wales are lodged in the William Salt Library at Stafford, surely some of the most challenging documents in the history of Nonconformity, and also the most refractory. I have not heard of many Baptists resorting to the Salt Library, copying out the relevant figures for certain parishes, and returning home to extract the exact number of Baptists from the parish total of "obstinate refusers." Occasional efforts are heard of, as we read in the *Baptist Quarterly* for 1952 in an article by Mr. Page on the Baptists of Sandy in Bedfordshire.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-two Nonconformists were counted here in 1676, apparently (he says) members at Bedford, but worshipping at Blunham, all twenty-two appropriated as Baptists, a rather dangerous conclusion in so Congregational a county as Bedfordshire. Dr. Whitley himself, writing of Eythorn in Kent, says that twelve Dissenters were counted there in 1676, and "safely" draws the conclusion that they were all Baptists, *for no other form of Dissent (he says) was known there*, a not altogether safe dictum when Presbyterian and Congregational discoverers (not to mention Quakers) are on the prowl for beginnings.<sup>7</sup> On the whole, I believe we have been more successful in Wales. Take the parish of Llandysilio in West Wales, where we have the help of the Rhydwylym Register and the churchwardens' reports. The census number is ten Nonconformists, in a parish where the impacts of Independents, Quakers, and Baptists were all three at work. The wardens in 1678 report fifteen schismatics, evidently counting in wives and including a gentleman who had refused to take the oath as churchwarden; in 1684 they report seventeen, also counting in wives. It is known that about 1676 Independent influence had loosened considerably in the parish, leaving us with the conclusion that the ten were Baptists and Quakers, and that they were heads

of families. The exact number of Baptists is still problematical. We are nearer the bone in two Carmarthenshire parishes; four was the number of Baptist schismatics reported by the wardens of Llannon in 1684, four was the Nonconformist number in 1676. For Llangennech the wardens name seven in 1684, adding in the wife of one of them; the census has six. Could one apply similar methods of apportionment to the 300 Nonconformists entered at Bromsgrove in Worcestershire, the largest number in the diocese, especially noting that six years later 87 members were written down on the Baptist church book?<sup>8</sup> And who will be brave enough to attempt to analyse the 800 Nonconformists, and deduce the exact number of Baptists, counted in the Northgate district of Canterbury, remembering that an Anglican reformer had reported in 1669 that Quakers were numerous there, Baptists not so numerous, and that we know that the Independents had organized one settled church in the city in 1646, and another in 1647 (the first Baptists are not dated before 1654)?<sup>9</sup> To return to Wales for a moment: the highlights of the census are the 220 Nonconformists counted in the parish of Clodock,<sup>10</sup> which includes Longtown and the Olchon Valley, which goes far (without proving) to see that Valley as the cradle of Baptist tradition in the Principality, and the 292 in Swansea. Not all Baptists: there is evidence for Independents in Clodock, and Baptists were certainly a minority in such a Congregational stronghold as Swansea. The 292 undoubtedly shadowed forth the later strength of Nonconformity in the town itself and in the valleys radiating from it. Have not the Baptist Union of Wales and the Congregational Union settled their headquarters there? There is a world of work for us to unravel the mysteries of the census, more especially in arriving at the number of Baptists concealed in the lump cumulations of Answer No. 3.

#### THE INDULGENCES OF 1687 AND 1688

The time has come to address ourselves to the Indulgences of 1687 and 1688, by which the Catholic James II, through the use of the dispensing power, hoped to establish Catholicism as the State religion, and to depress and embarrass the Church of England by suddenly showing favour to the Dissenters who had for the previous decade suffered the severest of persecutions. Not only was there promise of liberty of worship (by means of licences), but of appointment as magistrates, of entry to the highest offices of the great corporations. The temptations before the persecuted Nonconformists were tremendous, and the Baptists did not stand the test too well (as Dr. Whitley has shown), neither did the Presbyterians and Congregationals. As far as I know, there is no register extant of those who received licences under the Indulgence of 1687 nor under that of 1688, similar to the Entry Book 38A for the Indulgence of 1672 (only such a register would solve the doubts that

still exist over the attitude of Bunyan). Nor had Alexander Gordon or Dr. Whitley, heard of any such,<sup>11</sup> though the former had seen some sporadic references in *Notes and Queries*; and it is unfortunate that the Calendar of State Papers for 1687-8 has not to date been published. But the Calendars of Treasury Books for the period have been; in them it is possible to see the sharp contrast between the King's warrant to the Remembrancer to discharge all processes issued against Recusants and Dissenters (this on 21st April, 1687) and the effort made just a year before by the authorities of Christ's Hospital, favoured by the King, by the application of the procedure *cy-près*, to annex for themselves the annuities (amounting to £225) accruing from the will of Thomas Bell, a surgeon, for the benefit of poor ministers and members of Congregational churches.<sup>12</sup> To return to the actual licences: the absence of a register is not really to be surprised at, for instead of having to come in person (or through a licence agent) to Whitehall as in 1672 which would naturally produce a register, in 1687 the licence could be issued by the nearest J.P. (as happened to the preacher Richard King at Southampton),<sup>13</sup> a transaction which could conveniently be forgotten in the Revolution which was at hand.

The most notable contribution of recent years to the study of these Indulgences is the lucid article of Mr. Arnold H. J. Baines in the *Baptist Quarterly* for 1955 based on a pamphlet he discovered at the Bodleian entitled *Innocency Vindicated*,<sup>13a</sup> an apologia emanating from the orthodox leaders of the London (Particular) Assembly of 1689. This pamphlet roundly declares that not a single congregation of Baptists had sent addresses to King James II thanking him for the exercise of the dispensing power to remove the penal laws, but admitted that "some lewd persons . . . of our Societies" were used by the late King to regulate Corporations, and emphasized yet again the "miscarriage of a few persons." Mr. Baines, however, cites the names of pretty prominent Baptist leaders, lewd persons or not, in London and Abingdon who had joined in the thanks; about eight such addresses came from groups of Baptists;<sup>14</sup> sixty altogether from the three main denominations, all published, without names of signatories, in the official *London Gazette*.

Twenty-four Baptist ministers signed the abjuring pamphlet of 1689 to clear the good name of the denomination of "reproach and infamy." We are surprised, even startled, that the twelfth signatory is Christopher Price of Abergavenny, the prominent free-communionist who boldly signed himself Baptist in 1672, and who in 1687 handed the Congregational address "within your county of Monmouth" to King James at Gloucester about 20th August, and which was printed in the *Gazette*, No. 2272 (25-29 August). The term *Congregational* need not frighten anybody; as has been said already, Price was a free-communionist of the Bunyan school, and in the

documents of the period such Baptists, like Bunyan himself, masqueraded as Congregationalists.<sup>15</sup> The Monmouth address of 1687 refers to "your extraordinary favour and princely clemency . . . humbly casting ourselves at your Royal Feet, paying humble thanks for your transcendent favour." And yet in 1689 Price is allowed to call himself one of the "lewd persons who were of our Societies" and to place himself calmly under "reproach and infamy." It is rather curious that under the great roof of the Bodleian rest the abjuring pamphlet of 1689 and the *Rawlinson MS. A.139A* of 1687 (f. 151) in which the Duke of Beaufort, as Lord President of Wales and the Marches accompanying King James on his journey to the West, pens with his own hand on his Monmouthshire report :

<i>Dissenter</i>	}	<i>Dr. Christopher Price. That</i>
<i>not in</i>		<i>gave the King the Address</i>
<i>Commission</i>		<i>at Gloucester,</i>

thus holding out (it is evident) high hopes of Dr. Price being made a J.P. under the new dispensation.

But we Baptists of Wales are not disposed to be too hard on this compromising free-communionist. Even the venerable William Kyffin reluctantly allowed himself to become an Alderman of the City of London (under, it is true, the limitations named by Mr. Baines), but his name stood first as a signatory of the Bodleian pamphlet. And Christopher Price had a great record as one of the upholders of John Tombes in the Abergavenny debate of 1653, as the man who gave the land on which the first Baptist chapel in Wales, that at Llanwenarth, was built, and as the channel by which the benefactions of George Griffith and Isaac Marlow were distributed among needy ministers in the Marches of Wales, both Baptist and Congregational. To close the paragraph, I should not like anyone to think I am accusing Mr. Baines of disregarding the evidence of the *Rawlinson MS.*; rather do I admire his great good fortune in giving to the world the message of *Innocency Vindicated*.

#### THE TOLERATION ACT OF 1689

No doubt the men of conscience and the dabblers in compromise<sup>16</sup> were all elated by the coming of toleration in 1689 when (in the words of an old church book) liberty of conscience was made legal by Act of Parliament. There were critics, of course, who pointed to the cumbrous eighteen clauses of the Toleration Act, to the swearing of two oaths and a declaration, to the necessary subscription to the 39 Articles, to the insistence on open doors, to the double fees (sixpence on swearing the oaths, sixpence on receiving the certificate). But the overwhelming voice of Dissent, later to be expressed in vivid antitheses by Macaulay, decided to accept the gift of toleration, with all its limitations, as the best concession they

could get from a parliament of Anglicans on the difficult morrow of a Revolution. Baptists, described as people "who scrupled the baptizing of infants," were especially pleased to be excused the 27th of the 39 Articles. There was nothing to do but to approach the nearest Diocesan Registry with a petition definitely naming the preacher and the place of meeting decided upon, or visit the Quarter Sessions of the county one resided in, with the confident knowledge that the Act gave no option of refusal to the Registrar or the Clerk of Sessions. Unfortunately, this choice of registration was, and still continues, a disconcerting bedevilment to researchers and historians: a systematic study of the working of the Act means, in England, the goodwill of forty Clerks of the Peace and over a score of Diocesan Registrars; in Wales thirteen Clerks and four Registrars at the least. Thus it is not surprising that exhaustive studies of the Act have never appeared; we have perforce to be satisfied with casual quotations in local newspapers, fugitive references in denominational *Transactions*, truncated entries in county histories, and (let us not forget) with the immense total of 54,804 entries in the keeping of the Registrar-General at Somerset House, of which 2,724 are definitely Baptist and 27,233 "Protestant Dissenters," a term which conceals many Baptist licences.<sup>17</sup> For all the staggering immensity of the total, it is really hopelessly incomplete, what with the loss in the country of the original records, the disappearance of the rolls in decayed boroughs, and sometimes the sheer prejudice and pigheadedness of officials. The entries covering 1689 to 1715 are grievously few, the most interesting period of all, witnessing the resurrection of Puritanism after a deadening persecution of nearly twenty-seven years. All these papers were called in pursuant to the Act of 1852, 15 and 16 Vict., cap. 36, and were not actual licences at all—these licences were dispersed all over the country, some of them appropriately framed in vestries or in self-respecting deacons' rooms—but bare returns of names and places. It is well to remind ourselves that a cursory examination of these attenuated entries at Somerset House will never be a substitute for the exact details of the original applications that lie in the custody of Registrars and Clerks of Sessions. In Wales we have attempted to do a little of this work: lists of Sessions licences for Glamorgan, all of the 18th century, have been printed in the *Transactions* of the Congregational body,<sup>18</sup> and in a few months the present writer hopes to present to our Historical Society a considered study of the working of the Act among the old Baptists of Caernarvonshire, based on the County Sessions papers and the records of the Diocesan Registry at Bangor.

Not only the exact terms of the Toleration Act have to be kept in mind but also its supplementary legislation: a statute of 1779, 19 Geo. III, c. 44, decreed that Dissenting petitioners were excused subscription to the 39 Articles on condition that they subscribed a

simple declaration that they were Christians and Protestants, and were ready to make the two Testaments the rule of their doctrine and practice; and a further statute of 1812, 52 Geo. III, c. 155, by which the oaths could be sworn before the nearest J.P., the record to be forwarded forthwith to the Clerk of Sessions (if the congregation was under twenty in number, oaths and licences were unnecessary).<sup>19</sup> This emphasis on the local Justices and Quarter Sessions would lead one to think that the Diocesan Registries were left deserted by Dissenting petitioners; that would be a serious misapprehension indeed, for in a tabulated list presented to Parliament covering the years 1760 to 1808, it appears that for every one petitioner at the Sessions there were five at the Registries,<sup>20</sup> nor did the Act of 1812 seem to affect the ratio in any substantial way. Ratios or not, the strict enquiries of Parliament notwithstanding, it is true to say that in hundreds of instances (to repeat an old story) the records of Registries and Sessions have been irretrievably lost, thus involving the disappearance of the original petitions, a loss particularly exasperating because they usually contained the names of the main upholders of a cause when the application was made, very often indeed of the founders themselves. The saddest example is that of Anglesey in Wales, where the surviving Sessions records open not earlier than 1768, and where the first licence to come to view in the Bangor Registry (to a Presbyterian) is dated 1774, eighty-five years after the passing of the Toleration Act! Very curiously, the Baptists of the county did not suffer much from these disasters, as the first Baptist invasion of this part of Wales did not happen before 1775-6, and it happened too that the petitions, when they did arrive, were reported fully and circumstantially. Further still: the Bangor Diocesan Registrar of 1922, a severe Anglican with a sympathetic sense of history, decided to make up for the laxity of his predecessors by himself compiling a list of all nonconformist licences issued for Anglesey since 1774, and printing it in the *Trans. of the Anglesey Hist. Soc.* for 1922 and 1924.

Do I accuse Baptist historians of disregarding the world of Toleration licences? I do not, the world is too immense, what with the records of Sessions, Registries, and Somerset House.<sup>21</sup> Do I suggest that this Historical Society should appoint a high-salaried expert to survey the whole field, and make a report? I am afraid the Treasurer will have something to say about that. But I do think that when an able and ambitious Baptist student appears, armed with skill in research and an inordinate patience, he should be tactfully guided to this syllabus of study, and advised to write a thesis for a higher degree on some substantial aspect of the problem. Or, why should this Society not appoint a panel of competent researchers out of its own body to find out exactly how the situation lies in the several counties? This would serve, to some extent, to

assuage the sad observation of Dr. Whitley about the paucity of evidence regarding the General Baptists of Surrey and Sussex: "No one seems to have explored the Quarter Session rolls to see what persons and places were registered in or after 1689."<sup>22</sup>

#### THE LAW REPORTS

A discussion of the Toleration Act leads inevitably to the old-fashioned *Law Reports* which were compiled by retired judges who enjoyed running over their old cases, scanning the lines of evidence, assessing the arguments, and peering over ancient verdicts; their Reports bear such honoured legal names as Ventris, Salkeld, Vernon, Lord Raymond, and others. It is in Salkeld we read of the case of *Rex & Regina v. Clark*, the story of an extreme Puritan who was bent on ignoring the Toleration Act, and going on preaching illegally as of yore in direct contravention of Clause XVIII. He preached, on the relevant occasion, to an audience of twenty. However, he was lucky; the prosecution in their pleadings had omitted the hoary but all-important words *contra formam statuti*; and so, said the Judge facetiously, "as far as I know, Clark preached to his wife and nineteen children," thus constituting a "family" within the meaning of the Conventicle Act of 1670 (under which he was prosecuted, being outside the Toleration Act).<sup>23</sup> More important is Lord Raymond's recital of the evidence in the case of *Green & Fifteen Others v. Pope*, when the three judges of the King's Bench, all Anglicans, brushed aside very brusquely the trivial reasons of Registrar Pope of Chester in refusing a licence to Green and his friends to name a place of meeting to preach in the parish of Hindley near Wigan.<sup>24</sup> The fates were not so kind to Mr. Peach in the reign of Queen Anne, a gentleman who used his certificate to preach outside his own county: "No," said the Judges, "a licence inrolled at the Sessions in one county will not extend into another county,"<sup>25</sup> a prohibition, however, that was over-ruled by (of all places) Clause IX in the Occasional Conformity Act of 1711, with the addendum that, if put to the question, he must swear the two oaths and declaration over again in the new county; always the preacher had to remember that he could preach only in a licenced place, and to his own sect. *Britton v. Standish*<sup>26</sup> (and, to some extent, *Burdett v. Newell*)<sup>27</sup> uncover somewhat different circumstances, Anglicans affecting to be Dissenters to save themselves from holding onerous offices (thus falling into the sin of occasional nonconformity) by pleading benefits from certain clauses of the Toleration Act. "If a man be a professed churchman," said the Chief Justice, "and his conscience will permit him sometimes to go to meeting instead of coming to church, the Act of Toleration will not excuse him; for it was not made for such sort of people." Quite dissociated from these Laodicean opportunists were the upright and conscientious men who figured in a goodly crop of cases, men who suffered from

the disabilities of Dissenters under the wretched Corporation Act of 1661, debarring them from all offices of honour and profit in the large towns. In the second year of William and Mary a Dissenter named Clarke was nominated bailiff of the town of Guildford, but the Anglican mayor prosecuted him unsuccessfully in the King's Bench for disobeying the Corporation Act.<sup>28</sup> Not so was the fortune of a wealthy Nonconformist merchant of Norwich named Larwood who was named sheriff, an honour he refused on conscientious grounds. This refusal brought him to the King's Bench, his prosecutors demanding a heavy fine for his refractoriness. Two judges against him, one for. The minority judge objected to punishing a man twice for the same offence; in any case, he said, it was ridiculous to punish a man for refusing to do what the law already prevented him from doing. The majority argument laid it down that the law was passed in order to induce people to come up to the standards necessary to fulfil certain offices; it was never passed to show favour to Dissenters, but to encourage them to become Churchmen, Chief Justice Holt winding up with the portentous dictum that no man should take advantage of his own disability.<sup>29</sup> It was the verdict in *Rex v. Larwood*, rather than in that of Clarke of Guildford, that the judges followed until the famous Sheriff's Cause and the historic judgment of Lord Mansfield in 1767. Even then the disabilities of Dissenters were liable to recur, at witness the dicta of Lord Ellenborough in *Rex v. Walker* in 1817,<sup>30</sup> they had to wait for the complete removal of their grievances till the repeal of the Corporation Act in 1828. Though the Toleration Act does not touch the disabilities of Dissenters under the Corporation Act, by implication it brought an atmosphere of liberty and light to other ancillary interests: benefactions by will for the benefit of Dissenters were no longer frowned upon, nor did the judges interfere with the organization of funds for the development of Dissenting interests; in the astringent atmosphere of this new Revolution it was impossible for Christ's Hospital, as it attempted to do in 1686,<sup>31</sup> to lay its hands upon annuities accruing from a Dissenter's will for the benefit of poor Congregational ministers and their members. Schools still lay at the mercy of episcopal licence, but it was ruled in *Bates' Case* (as early as 1670) that a schoolmaster, though without a bishop's licence, could not be turned out if he had been a founder's nominee, a ruling (by implication again) that led to the institution of a host of Dissenting academies.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, in face of the Tory reaction in the reign of Queen Anne and especially the passing of the Schism Act in 1714, such interpretations and the lot of the Dissenting academies became more and more precarious until the stability secured by the Hanoverian legislation of 1715-19.

In all these *Reports*, whether arising out of the problems of the Toleration Act, or the *malaise* of the Corporation, or the difficulties

of Dissenting schools (one remembers the very dispiriting account given by Dr. Whitley of the state of education among Baptists at the beginning of the 18th century),<sup>33</sup> very few names of Baptists, prominent or other, appear in their personnel, which may account for the hesitation of Baptist students to ask for the *Law Reports* at the library of Dr. Williams, where there is an imposing collection of them. Old, brown, musty, they are of intrinsic importance because of the decisions recorded, though but seldom involving Baptists by name, and the ensuing reactions upon Baptist ministers and laymen in town and country.

#### THE DISSIDENTING DEPUTIES

Charges of forgetting the laws and ignoring the *Law Reports* cannot be laid against the *Dissenting Deputies*, who started work in 1732 as representatives of the three main denominations to hear about virtual resuscitations of the old penal laws, infractions of the terms of the Toleration Act, and other outrages against ministers and their flocks. A *Sketch* of their proceedings was published in 1814;<sup>34</sup> but a much fuller account appeared in 1952, mainly the work of that very loyal and acute Cambridge Dissenter Bernard Lord Manning, and edited by Ormerod Greenwood, one of their present Secretaries. On pp. 155-181 of the *Sketch* there are summaries of cases in which the Deputies took action, and very interesting they are. Interesting, but rather valueless; they are bare summaries containing the names of places and an outline of the abuses suffered, but no further details about the ministers who brought the complaints, the full circumstances, the magistrates and clergy who were accused. Some years ago (1926, in fact) I addressed a letter to the then officials of the Deputies inquiring about the documentary background of the various cases, but this was the answer of the Secretary, Alfred J. Shephard: "I cannot get any information anywhere, nor have I anything in my office that will help you." In the volume published in 1952, p. 10, there is an explanation of Mr. Shephard's lack of information, for we are told that the early minute-books of the Deputies contained full files of the correspondence relating to every case, but that the later minutes were thinner, more official, less communicative. "(The) modern minutes usually record results reached without the full documentation which formerly accompanied the decision." I should dearly like to examine the early cases from Wales, but where is the line of demarcation between the circumstantial accounts and the later bare decisions? The answer is simple: make prolonged visits to the Guildhall Library, and examine the sixteen volumes of the Deputies' records that are lodged there (one was destroyed in the blitz of 1941). Though possibly the first five or six volumes will uncover the boundary line, I am not disposed, having just passed the span of eighty years, to shoulder this new duty; indeed, to the delight of

one or two critics here, I am going to disregard it, leaving those ministers who have gone to the Guildhall Library to search for stirring incidents in their chapel histories to throw stones at me. Yet, before going home, I may call there myself, ask for Vol. II under the date 27 Febr., 1784, to go over the story of a Baptist minister at Beaumaris in Anglesey being maltreated, when administering the ordinance of Baptism, by a Humphrey *Tyer* as the leader of a riotous mob. The name *Tyer* conveys nothing, but *Tyrrer* would, as the name of a Beaumaris family who later became useful members of Anglesey churches, and Baptists at that. Baptists would be glad to find this interloping 'r' in the record. *Tyer* is the spelling on p. 13 of the 1952 volume. (The visit will be unnecessary, as the Librarian assures me by letter that the original is *Tyrrer*.)

#### NON-PAROCHIAL REGISTERS

Among the multifarious activities of the Dissenting Deputies was a keen interest in church records, their proper preservation, and their acceptance as legal evidence on a par with the parish registers of the Established Church. There ensued a long series of triangular negotiations between the Deputies, a Royal Commission, and the Government of the day, the latter being particularly desirous of uniformity of registration and of the registers being stored in proximity to the Law Courts as factors relevant to the proving of wills and the devolution of property. The upshot was the passing of the Registration Act of 1836 which involved (through the action of the Commissioners) the transference in 1837 of chapel registers throughout England and Wales to Somerset House, and the passing of the Non-Parochial Registers Act of 1840, definitely according to the registers validity as legal evidence. Seven thousand registers were handed over to the custody of the Registrar-General,<sup>35</sup> ranging from those of the main denominations to those of foreign Protestant churches in England, Quakers, a few Roman Catholics, not forgetting the thousands of birth and baptism certificates which had been lodged at the Dr. Williams' Library in Red Cross Street (over 30,000 entries bound in eight volumes).

In 1841 official Lists of the registers were printed (henceforth referred to here as the *Catalogue*). They contained some barbarous distortions of place names, especially in Wales, and curious misspellings like William Gadsley for Gadsby, the pernickety hyper-Calvinist who is described as ministering at Manchester, St. George's Road, and Peter Anslie as minister of Exeter, South Street, for the Peter Anstie of the church records. The delivering officers were asked to fill up a form giving the date of the foundation of the cause, but often ill-informed secretaries and over-sanguine ministers were far awry in their estimates; we recall a sharp attack in the *Baptist Quarterly* for 1957 on the modern fanciful dating of anniversaries, confusing the beginning of building and the first meetings

with the exact institution of a self-governing independent church. The main cause at Reading was put back to the reign of Henry VIII, when no one today places the beginnings before 1640. Far more causes were over-modernised in date, like Rowley in Durham (1700 for 1652), Friar Lane in Leicester (1688 for 1651), while the founding of historic churches like Tiverton and Nantwich is made to appear absurdly late. It must have been the clerks at Somerset House who filled in Nottingham, George Street (now Derby Road), as founded *prior to 1742*, who thought such words a safe risk to take seeing that the first book of births that reached them started in that year; one wonders what the minister James Edwards was doing just at that time, and did he not know that the Baptist cause at Nottingham went back circa 1650? In the General Baptist church at Wisbech there seems to have been two registers, one of which extended from 1784 to 1837, and was returned to Somerset House by J. T. Cooper the minister (*Catalogue*, p. 8), while the other went back to 1700, was lost, but found by a local antiquary having some connections with the church, who made transcripts of it, and lodged the original in Somerset House about 1857.<sup>36</sup>

Though there are 7,000 registers at Somerset House, though the *Catalogue* runs to 112 pages, he would be a very credulous person indeed who believed that they were exhaustive of the Nonconformist strength in the country, that all the registers had come in. 464 Baptist causes were listed, 580 separate registers (many churches sending in two, several five or even six). Absent are the most historic registers of Wales, such as Rhydwylym, Llangloffan, Llanwenarth,<sup>37</sup> and that of the inaccessible retreat of Capel-y-ffin, the subject of a very interesting article by the Catholic Donald Attwater in the *Baptist Quarterly* of 1926-27. In England (and the following are examples only) there is not a word of the church book of Porton in Wiltshire, dating from 1655 to 1685,<sup>38</sup> nor of the General Baptist cause at Bourne in Lincolnshire, probably because the church book commencing in 1702 is mainly occupied with church developments, and not with births and burials,<sup>39</sup> nor of two church books which still remain at Great Ellingham in Norfolk, though a burials book has arrived at Somerset House.<sup>40</sup> There is not a word in the *Catalogue* of three old Baptist churches in the Isle of Axholme and of one register that goes back to 1673, seen and admired by a roving band of Baptist pilgrims in May, 1952<sup>41</sup>; nor can we expect to find any reference in the *Catalogue* to that of Warwick, Castle Hill church, as an irate minister named John Lincoln left the church in 1834 for London, taking all the church registers with him; they were later recovered, it is true, but never found their way to the Registrar-General.<sup>42</sup> Not dissimilar was the lot of the old register at Dalwood in Dorset, which extended from 1653 to 1795; in the latter year it was lent to Dr. Rippon for his *Register*; he never used it, kept it for many years, and on its return (we are told) it looked "as

if it had been in a barrel." The original—this news is given in the fourth volume of the *Trans.* of the Society—is now in its proper home, which is not Somerset House.<sup>43</sup> And where, we may ask, is that ancient book that testifies to 84 men and women, all Baptists, drawing up a covenant in the Staplehurst area of Kent in 1640? It is jealously guarded, not at Somerset House, but at Bound's Cross chapel in the Weald.<sup>44</sup> Rawdon, in Yorkshire, has four church registers at Somerset House, the earliest opening in 1756, but not the old church book that commenced in 1715.<sup>45</sup>

What of the 464 causes that *are* represented in Somerset House? Bewdley in Worcs. is certainly there, as there is a record that George Brookes the minister deposited two registers with the Registrar, which is confirmed by the *Catalogue*, p. 69; so did George Withall of Ditchling in Sussex, two registers (p. 65): both ministers, one gets the impression, delivered them in person.<sup>46</sup> The registers generally, with some notable exceptions, range in date from the three last decades before 1800 to the three after 1800; many of the birth registers are arranged in columns, citing the names of the parents in each case, and their occupations, touching therefore on the realms of genealogy and economics, and bringing life, colour and variety to these ancient societies. But how many have been copied by Baptist researchers? The registers of the Wisbech congregation of "baptized believers that owned universal redemption" have been examined,<sup>47</sup> and Mr. A. L. Humphreys in 1914 in writing the story of Wellington, South Street, Somerset, copied out in full (Part iv, pp. 593-620) the registers of that church in Somerset House; Dr. Tongue has also examined the burial records of Exeter, South Street.<sup>48</sup> But what are three causes out of 464, four registers out of 580? Would it be very wrong to say that these rich veins of Baptist history have been disregarded?

One must admit that little encouragement to examine the registers has come from the recognized historians of Nonconformity; Dr. Stoughton managed to write Vol. VIII of his *History* without the slightest reference to them; the same is also true of H. W. Clark's *History of English Nonconformity*, Vol. II; Dr. Whitley's broad sweep in his *History of British Baptists* is not broad enough to include the non-parochial registers apart from a fleeting reference in the preface to the first volume of his *Bibliography*.<sup>49</sup> Principal Underwood gives a large place to the General Baptists in his *History*, but little (if any) to their several registers that have been listed. More revealing is the account given by the Rev. Bryan Dale in the first volume of *Trans. Cong. Hist. Soc.* in his introductory remarks to the "Non-Parochial Registers in Yorkshire"; he makes it clear, much more clear than the account given in the *Protestant Dissenting Deputies* of 1952, that the summoning in of the registers were not a statutory demand at all—there is no reference to them in the Registration Act of 1836—but a request by the Royal Com-

missioners who were paving the way for the Non-Parochial Registers Act of 1840, a request to which no penalty was attached for neglect or refusal. This must be the prime explanation for the dearth of registers from Wales, and for the strange fact, that though seven Independent causes at Sheffield are represented at Somerset House, there is not one Baptist, though they had a well established church in the town at the end of the 17th century.<sup>50</sup>

Talking of registers, there are also the parish registers of the country, as important as ever, in the custody of the local clergy; it is often a very fruitful study to compare the lists of petitioners under the Toleration Act with family entries in a long series of parish registers, and watch the impact of descent and marriage, occupation and social standing, upon the personnel of the petitioners. The study may be deepened by consulting the ponderous volumes issued by the Historical Manuscript Commission and the local records of municipal corporations; in these may be seen, occasionally perhaps, Baptists dabbling in politics, or inheriting property or (though pious men) coming down to the arena to secure important offices. Excellent examples of delving in municipal records are the several efforts of Professor Lyon Turner and Dr. Whitley to find the probable Leicester Nonconformists who gave lodgment and hospitality to Bunyan when he visited the town in October, 1672. Evidence of an ancillary character is the light thrown by the Liverpool Directories upon the prominent leaders of the church at Byrom Street, without (for all that) solving several problems arising out of the membership there in 1794 of a migrant Welsh preacher from the Conway Valley named William Gibson, father of John Gibson, R.A. Cognate in material to that catalogued by the Manuscript Commission are the estate documents found dispersed in mansions all over the country, though very many of them by today have found a home in county repositories. Though these are mainly concerned with leases and demises, mortgages and marriage settlements, we get occasional glimpses of Baptist men and women, glimpses all the more interesting because of their rarity. For example, an old chronicler named one of the founders of a little cause on the north coast of Anglesey (about 1794) as John Rowland, to be copied by half a dozen other chroniclers in the course of the 19th century. However, the agent of Lord Boston, on whose estate the farm lay, has the tenant's name down for those years as William Rowland; and it is very unlikely that the agent was wrong. A small point, but significant.

Are we thoroughly alert for Baptists in the variegated sources of the last paragraph, parish registers, directories, commissioners' catalogues, estate papers? In this year of Jubilee we ought to be.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The article on Winterbotham in the D.N.B. was written by J. R. (amsay) Macdonald, who was to become Prime Minister of this country in 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Original Records*, iii, 728-9.

<sup>3</sup> *ib.*, iii, 837-842.

<sup>4</sup> In reviewing the author's book on *Wales under the Indulgence*, pub. 1928, Dr. Whitley went a good way in acknowledging the cogency of the evidence from Wales (*Bapt. Quarterly*, iv, 280-7).

<sup>5</sup> For these silences, examine the actual text of E.B. 38A, pp. 204, 220. "One Milman" he was to an Anglican informer in 1669.

<sup>6</sup> p. 356.

<sup>7</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, iii, 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Bapt. Quarterly*, i, 381.

<sup>9</sup> Lyon Turner: *Orig. Recs.*, iii, 807: *Bapt. Quarterly*, iii, 91.

<sup>10</sup> This parish is in county Hereford, but in the diocese of St. David's up to 1852. In the days of persecution, the accused Nonconformists had to tramp the weary way to the consistory court at Brecon.

<sup>11</sup> As expressed in letters to the author, from A.G. in Febr., 1924, from W.T.W. in Febr., 1923.

<sup>12</sup> Calendar for 1685-9, viii (ii. 520, 535; iii. 1321). Compare the utter ignominy of the verdict in *Attorney-General v. Baxter* in 1684 (I Vernon, 248-250).

<sup>13</sup> *Bapt. Quarterly*, i, 225.

<sup>13a</sup> It is not quite true that Mr. Baines discovered the Bodleian tract as there is a very thin reference to it in Dr. Whitley's *Bibliography* (i. 121). But it was he who gave the first authoritative account of it.

<sup>14</sup> Two such addresses (there are doubts about the third) were printed in *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, v, 83-88.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Gordon is refreshingly iconoclastic about Bunyan: "I know of no evidence that Bunyan was a Baptist. I tell my Baptist friends that they have put his statue at Baptist Church House in the right place, outside" (in a letter to the author, 15th February, 1926). For a corrective of Gordon's extremism, read the article of J. Hobson Thomas in *Baptist Quarterly*, iv, 97-103.

<sup>16</sup> According to Dr. Whitley and Mr. Baines one of the most prominent London Baptist ministers who thanked James II for his Indulgence was William Collins of Petty France; unlike Dr. Christopher Price, he did not sign the abjuring pamphlet of 1689; he was prominent, but not unnaturally, as signatory of the Association Oath of Loyalty to William III in 1696. (*Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, vi, 183).

<sup>17</sup> *Trans. Cong. Hist. Soc.*, vi, 199-208. The returns were to cover the period 1689 up to 29th June, 1852.

<sup>18</sup> *Cofiadur*, 1950, 72-78.

<sup>19</sup> The whole procedure of the Toleration Act (and its supplementaries) was brought to an end by the Act of 1852.

<sup>20</sup> *Hist. Dissenting Deputies* (1814), 107-109, note.\*

<sup>21</sup> I am referring here to the whole ambit of Toleration records. The Baptist evidence in itself is large, but not unmanageable.

<sup>22</sup> *Bapt. Quarterly*, iv, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Trinity Term, 5 William and Mary, K.B. (1 Salkeld, 370).

<sup>24</sup> Michaelmas, 8 William III (1 Lord Raymond, 125-8).

<sup>25</sup> Michaelmas, 3 Anne, K.B. (2 Salkeld, 572).

- <sup>26</sup> *Sketch. Hist. Diss. Deputies*, 200-1, note.\*
- <sup>27</sup> Michaelmas, 4 Anne (1 Lord Raymond, 1211).
- <sup>28</sup> Michaelmas Term, 2 William and Mary (2 Ventris, 247-8).
- <sup>29</sup> *Rex & Regina v. Larwood*, Hilary 6 & 7 William and Mary. The case is reported in two separate places by Salkeld and once by Lord Raymond.
- <sup>30</sup> K.B., Easter, 57 Geo. III (6 Maule & Selwyn, 277-279).
- <sup>31</sup> Compare N. 12 (and text).
- <sup>32</sup> Michaelmas, 21 Charles II (1 Ventris, 41).
- <sup>33</sup> *Hist. British Baptists*, 182-184.
- <sup>34</sup> My copy has 1814 clearly imprinted on it, but the *Protestant Diss. Dep.* of 1952 says 1813 (p. 11 and n. 4).
- <sup>35</sup> These 7,000 registers, deposited at Somerset House under the combined force of the Acts of 1836 and 1840, must be very sharply distinguished from the 54,000 odd Toleration Act returns that came in under the Act of 1852, also to Somerset House (see N. 17). The 7,000 is the number given in the Annual Report of the Deputies for 1840 (*Prot. Diss. Depts.*, 270).
- <sup>36</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, i. 178-180.
- <sup>37</sup> All three are now in the National Library of Wales.
- <sup>38</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, i. 56.
- <sup>39</sup> *Bapt. Quarterly*, xv. 236-8.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, xv. 218-220.
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, xiv. 370.
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, xvi. 62.
- <sup>43</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, iv. 129-130. The article is referring to the causes of Kilmington and Loughwood in Dalwood.
- <sup>44</sup> *Bapt. Quarterly*, ii. 374.
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, iii. 179-180.
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, iv. 73 (Ditchling); xiii. 121 (Bewdley).
- <sup>47</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, i. 178-180. Dr. Whitley wrote many articles in this first volume, but the list of contributors does not attach his name to the Wisbeach account. The term *examined* in the text is an over-statement; all Dr. Whitley did was to cite the title of the old register that opened in 1700 (*Bibliography*, i. 205).
- <sup>48</sup> I am particularly grateful to Dr. Tongue, the Librarian of the Society, for the references to Wellington and Exeter.
- <sup>49</sup> He seems to imply that the registers were collected in 1838, but corrects this to 1837 in the preface to the second volume. All those I have examined undoubtedly arrived in 1837.
- <sup>50</sup> *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, vii. 19-21.

#### *Additional Note.*

THE LISTS OF 1859. In the foregoing paragraphs dealing with the non-parochial registers the lists referred to are those published in 1841 sponsored by the Registrar-General. There was a second edition in 1859, the "working copy" at Somerset House. Those who expected large accessions in the new addition were sadly disappointed. There are not more than sixty all told, the great majority of these being added in red ink (in the copy I have examined) at the foot of the relevant pages. No response came from the Baptist causes at Porton in Wiltshire, Bourne in Lincolnshire, from Great Ellingham with its two church books, from the three old churches in the Isle of Axholme, nor from Dalwood in Dorset, Bound's Cross in the Weald, nor Warwick Castle Hill. They all decided to keep their ancient registers.

Wisbech is the one exception of those referred to above. The shelves of Somerset House bear witness to the recovery of the old General Baptist register recording births from 1700, deaths from 1706, marriages from 1715 and witness also to the benevolent activities of the enterprising local antiquary described in *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, i. 180. Unfortunately, this came in too late to be "authenticated" by the officials of the Registrar-General; to quote the official words: "Certificates from these unauthenticated registers are given under signature only, not under seal." With the Wisbech Manuscript register came a printed copy. Was this also the work of the local antiquary?

One column in the 1841 lists was omitted in the 1858 edition, that containing the names of the officiating ministers of the churches when the registers were delivered over in 1836-7, a rather regrettable omission. Nor was any real effort made to revise some of the barbarous mis-spellings of 1841.

THOMAS RICHARDS

#### SPECIAL NOTICE

The Editor would be glad to hear from any reader who would be willing to part with a copy of the *Baptist Quarterly* for January, 1958.