

From Norwich to New Zealand

AN interesting story of a Baptist family has been disclosed as a result of correspondence and investigation between myself in the Baptist Church House, London, and a correspondent in New Zealand. It concerns a family called Ivory.

John Ivory was born in Norwich on 28 July 1794. He was baptized by the Rev. Abraham Pye of Providence Chapel, Norwich, and Mr. Pye and the church soon began to encourage John to preach. As a result he began in 1819 to conduct services regularly in the village of Costessey. Nearly half the inhabitants of this village were stated to be Catholics, Costessey being the seat of the Jermingham family, staunch Roman Catholics. However, it was not long before the little cause which had been begun in 1797 by the Rev. Mark Wilks began to grow. The rented room which was used for services became inadequate, and a fund was launched in order to provide a chapel. Through the help of many Norwich friends, who sometimes came to Costessey to hear Ivory, the fund grew and the building was completed in January 1822, and opened on 7 February. It was set in the middle of the village, with a gravel drive, and shrub borders in front, and a burial ground at the rear. John Ivory had been travelling backwards and forwards between Costessey and Norwich, but he now decided to move to the village. The cause could not adequately support him, so he opened a school. He said once that the school kept him in two ways, it "provided for my temporal necessities" and it brought many under his influence. John Culley, the owner of the mill in the village, and a member of St. Mary's, Norwich, paid half fees for any of his workmen's children who attended.

John Ivory is said to have been a tall, attractive man, who propounded a theology based on Calvin's *Institutes*. Many people walked or drove from Norwich—a distance of five miles—in order to hear him. The work at Costessey was not enough for him, and he began to hold services at Felthorpe and Drayton. Felthorpe was eight miles from Norwich, and there he hired a room and began to preach, commencing on 2 December 1828. In less than three years he erected a chapel, and the congregation grew until it numbered 100.

At 70 years of age Ivory had to retire. He deeply regretted this, but his wife had become a permanent invalid and demanded all his attention. She had borne him a large family of 22 children, of which three sons and five daughters survived. One daughter returned home to share with him the care of the mother. During the years that followed he did little beyond look after his wife, occasionally making a

pastoral call on the elderly or the sick. When he was 82 his wife died, but he was himself now so feeble that he could not attend the chapel very often. He died on 8 January 1879, in his 85th year, and was buried behind the chapel. The church still exists, and has at the present time 27 members. Prospects are good, and the members are planning to build a new hall.

Now for the interesting parallel. One of John Ivory's sons was William, a gardener. He was married at St. Andrew's Parish Church, Norwich, on 1 January 1844 to Elizabeth Kemp, the daughter of a shoemaker. She could neither read nor write. The marriage certificate shows William's father as a schoolmaster.

William and his wife sailed with their five children for New Zealand in 1857, and on arrival at Rangiora immediately began to hold services in a cottage. In 1860 or 61 they found that their numbers were increasing so much that they hired the newly-built Oddfellow's Hall and William Ivory became the official leader. The church was formally constituted in 1862, and articles of faith were drawn up under the title of 'A Plain Statement.' Eighteen pages of religious sentiments followed the title page, all setting forth the tenets of a Calvinistic Baptist faith. In the statement there is a declaration that William Ivory is appointed teacher, he having refused to be called pastor. Early in the following year a chapel was built—the first in Canterbury, and the fifth in New Zealand. It was built of timber, said to be cut from bush which Ivory owned, so he must have prospered.

Ivory ranked as one of the pulpit personalities of his time. His meetings started at 10.45 in the morning and went on until one o'clock. He stood beside the pulpit, refusing to enter it. In the course of time even his eloquence proved too much for his congregation, and they insisted on the erection of a clock in a prominent position! But this had little effect. The only musical instrument he would permit on ordinary Sundays was a pitchpipe, but on festival occasions he allowed a small orchestra. He died in 1911, 94 years of age. Two other interesting details are worthy of record. In the Rangiora Baptist Chapel minute book it is recorded that in 1872 a three-year-old oak tree was planted in the grounds of the chapel, reared from an acorn taken from an oak tree in the grounds of the Baptist chapel at Costessey. This oak tree grew to be a tremendous size, until in 1944 it became diseased and had to be chopped down. A communion table was made from the wood. The other detail is that after William Ivory retired from his post of teacher at the Rangiora chapel, there was a brief period during which William Samson led the church but the congregation had even greater difficulty owing to the length of his sermons. Soon Aquila Ivory, a younger brother of William Ivory, who also had come to New Zealand, took charge. Descendants of the Ivory family still live in New Zealand.