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The Old General Baptists

1811 - 1915

(i) *The Old General Baptists at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.*

W. T. WHITLEY concluded his magisterial edition of the minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists in the year 1811, for the very good reason that that was the date when the second minute book of the Assembly was completed, and a third begun. No doubt Whitley argued that by this time the Old General Baptist cause was completely Unitarian and of no further interest to the Baptist historian. Their vagaries and antics afterwards elicited his scorn: they were one of the bypaths (or dead-ends) of Baptist history, of which he strongly disapproved¹. The year 1811 however, is without significance; a number of more satisfactory, alternative dates could be suggested which mark a really significant movement to Unitarianism on the part of the Old General Baptist body: the death of Gilbert Boyes, who had striven to keep the Old and New Connexions together, in 1800; the admission of William Vidler and his church to the old body in 1801 or of Richard Wright and his church at Wisbeach in 1805; the formal withdrawal of Dan Taylor from the Assembly in 1803, or of John Deacon in 1806; the resolution of the New Connexion ministers in 1813, condemning "the baneful poison of Socinianism" and denying their pulpits to the advocates of "that destructive system"²; the report of a special commission received by the Assembly of 1815 which declared roundly that "Unitarianism with the exception of baptism may surely be called the cause of the General Baptists"³.

However, in deference to Whitley we shall begin in 1811, and ask ourselves, first of all, what was the Old General Baptist Connexion like in that year, geographically, socially and spiritually?

It was not quite in the hopeless decay which some historians have imagined. The Kent and Sussex churches where its chief support persisted were still to experience a few years of growth and development. Brighton and Northiam were two new causes recently founded by Vidler; Hammond Hill, Chatham, had built a new church in 1802, Cranbrook in 1808. Headcorn was to follow suit in 1819, Benjamin Martin's church at Adrian Street, Dover the strongest in the connexion with a morning congregation of 400, in 1820, and Beddenden in 1834. Canterbury, Bessell's Green,

Horsham, Billingshurst and Ditchling were far from dead, though prospects at Hythe, Wingham, Deal, Ramsgate, Tunbridge Wells, Battle, Rolvenden and Cuckfield were not rosy⁵. Smarden, its chapel abandoned, now met in a private house. Chichester too was in difficulties and the Eastgate church united with the local Presbyterian congregation in 1815, a precedent followed by the Southover (Lewes) church in 1818⁶. Some of the hazards suffered by these scattered congregations in the South East may be gathered from the church book of the Turner's Hill, Horley, and (in 1811) Nutfield church, which served an area of approximately 15 x 12 square miles, never had a proper home, and met in turn in the farmhouses of its leading members. Like many other General Baptist chapels of the area it had suffered from the activities of the new sect of Freethinking Christians which had made serious inroads into the Cranbrook Church⁷.

To the north London boasted four General Baptist causes; the historic Glasshouse Yard, now meeting at Worship Street, and where the annual Assemblies of the denomination were held; Church Lane, Deptford, which had recently absorbed the cause at Horsleydown; White's alley, also meeting in Worship Street since 1781, but a congregation separate from Glasshouse Yard, and anxious to acquire another site; and Parliament Court, Elanhan Winchester's very advanced congregation, soon (1817) to call as its minister the Rev. W. J. Fox. (The latter's first act was to ridicule the Baptist element in the congregation, which soon after became the notorious South Place Ethical Church⁸.) In London also was situated the General Baptist Academy, founded in 1792, and now under the guidance of Dr. John Evans, in whose home the students resided⁹.

Elsewhere the General Baptist cause was in ruins. Three of the home counties were represented by a single church each: Godalming in Surrey, Saffron Walden in Essex, and Brentford in Middlesex. In three of the areas of its traditional strength, the Leicester Association survived in the Assembly minutes as a name, but of the two churches which were believed to be extant at Leicester and Wymoswold, nothing was known¹⁰; of Northamptonshire, John Stanger reported that the churches were annihilated—he did not know of a single cause left¹¹, whilst Lincolnshire, though appearing prominently in the Assembly minutes, was represented, now that its natural centres in Boston, Lincoln, Spalding and Coningsby had themselves perished, by only two live congregations, Lutton and Fleet¹². The North-East, though remote, held out more promise: David Eaton's York congregation acquired a new chapel in 1816, there was a church at Selby admitted to the Association the same year¹³, Hull could boast of no fewer than three Unitarian General Baptist churches¹⁴, and Newcastle-on-Tyne had a chapel on Pandon Bank¹⁵. These causes however were very closely dependent on the Unitarian Academy at York under Charles Well-

beloved, the Unitarian element was much stronger than the Baptist, and though York and the allied congregation at Cawood were to survive on General Baptist lists into the 1850s, they contributed nothing to denominational life.

Three very isolated congregations were Portsmouth, Nantwich where Mr. John Cooper's General Baptist congregation was moving more slowly than most to Unitarianism, and Trowbridge, where the Conigre chapel had progressed in a similar direction. Both Nantwich and Trowbridge were received into the Assembly in the same year, 1824¹⁶. There was also South Wales whence the Association was thrilled to receive reports of growth, and of new causes founded. In 1813 Richard Wright, the Unitarian missionary, and still a General Baptist, had visited Benjamin Phillipps, minister of Salem, Meidrym, the patriarch of these causes, and was informed of Welsh-speaking congregations at Panteg, St. Clear's, Llandilo, Swansea, Gellionen, Wig and Notais, Merthyr Tydvil and elsewhere. Visiting Little England beyond Wales, Wright himself added another at Templeton¹⁷. The rejoicing was premature; the few conservative churches were afraid that the Assembly was too liberal for them¹⁸, the liberal majority far too much under the influence of the local Unitarian Societies and congregations to wish to affiliate to a distant body in London¹⁹. In any case these General Baptist churches were weak and scattered, subject to all kinds of hostile religious and social pressures, and were often merely house meetings. The English leaders failed to understand that they represented a mode of thought rather than a denomination—though many of these churches appear on Assembly lists up to the 1860s, only Wick and Nottage permanently attached themselves to the General Baptist body²⁰.

Finally it should be remembered that scattered throughout the whole country was a large number of decaying General Baptist causes, waiting to be swept up in the evangelising net of the New Connexion. This rescue operation was remarkable in itself, especially in the case of a chapel like Whittlesey in Cambridgeshire, reduced by 1823 to one old man whom the Connexion turned into the nucleus of a new church: the process still awaits its historian. As Whitley points out, it was virtually complete by 1833²¹.

The General Assembly, meeting at Worship Street each year, was very much a family gathering. Horsham might be represented by an Agate, Dendy, Potter, Caffyn, Rowland, Wood, Nash, Kensett or Sadler, Billingshurst by a Turner, Carter, Jeffrey, Potter or Evershed, Dover by a Pyall, Ashdowne, Philpott, Marten, Culmer or Pound, Canterbury and Deal by a Browning, Pittock or Bradley, Luton by one of the Burrells. Later in the century J. C. Means recalled these men as almost all tradesmen or farmers, types of rustic Puritanism, serious and devout, hair brushed down over foreheads, enjoying an ample meal followed by spirits and water, and a vigorous puffing at clay pipes²². Gravely weakened by

those who had fallen away under the threat or reality of persecution, and by a very pronounced flow of emigrants to America²³, the Assembly partook of the character not merely of a religious and social gathering but of a kind of labour bureau through which employers could engage labour and apprentices learn of vacancies²⁴. Not all the General Baptists belonged to this one social class however: there was a sprinkling of the rich and powerful: John Treacher, for example, a London merchant, Common Councillor and one of the founders of University College, was a deacon of Worship Street for nearly half a century²⁵, Thomas Prentis, solicitor of Rochester and radical reformer, was a member at Chatham²⁶, the family of John Dendy (1754—1814), large landowner and minister at Horsham, was soon to achieve distinction in letters, medicine and social reform (the Dendys, like the Treachers, were armigerous)²⁷, H. E. Howse, Esq., of Bath, a member at Trowbridge, whose "Selection" was the favourite General Baptist hymn book, was very wealthy indeed²⁸. At the other end of the social scale Thomas Foster, shoemaker and preacher at Godalming, was impoverished and latterly in receipt of parochial relief²⁹.

Several portraits of individual congregations of this period have survived: John Dendy recalled Billingshurst as a delightful, plain, rural chapel with the men and women sitting on different sides, the deacons crouching round a table at the foot of the pulpit, the singers in the gallery, the hymns "introduced by the wail of a pitch pipe"³⁰. Charles Lloyd in his rare and fascinating autobiography *Life of a Dissenting Minister* (1813), which the writer tried to suppress soon after publication, had less tender memories of the Ditchling congregation: fanatically anti-Calvinist, devotedly Baptist ("they would compass land and sea to make one proselyte"), largely Unitarian but with a sprinkling of Deists and Trinitarians, almost impossible to converse with or preach to acceptably. And a very different congregation again was Deptford, with its rather superior congregation: Kingsfords, the bakers of ships' biscuits, Esdaile, a city banker, Stevens, a city alderman, who all drove to the chapel in carriages³¹.

Theologically the Old Connexion was in an interesting stage of development which the term Unitarian, especially when used perjoratively, does not help to elucidate. Dr. Nuttall has remarked how the Arminianism of eighteenth century Dissent was a head-creed rather than a heart-experience³². Credal confessions were forgotten by this time, except for occasional references to "the Bible, the doctrines of Christ mentioned in Hebrews 6: 1, 2 and general redemption", while the Arminianism which the General Baptists adduced from Scripture, their sole standard of authority, seemed to require a great deal of intellectual effort and argumentative reasoning to secure its validation. Perhaps this is why they were such avid readers and book collectors, why for example the farmers of Nutfield assembled the 800 volume "Horley Library"

which later became a denominational show piece. "Scriptura Sola" in the General Baptist context still meant, as Mosheim pointed out (and the body was most gratified that so distinguished an authority had deigned to notice it) a willingness "to welcome any to their Communion who profess themselves Christians and receive the Holy Scriptures as the source of truth and rule of faith"³³.

By this time few who were not Unitarians sought fellowship with them. The term "Unitarian" however they interpreted in the widest possible sense to include a whole range of deviant Christologies, from the high Arian who is very near to orthodoxy to the advanced Unitarian who is equally far removed. As Benjamin Marden explained: "Unitarian is a generic name including Arian as one of its species. Arians have as good a right to be called Unitarians as any others"³⁴. This would hardly have satisfied Priestley or his more dogmatic successors in the Unitarian movement, and just as in an earlier age the wearisome debates on Melchiorite Christology had sometimes led to a self-imposed and Quaker-like reticence, so now some felt that the doctrine of the Divine Unity should be quietly pushed into the background, and bold speculation thereon be "pusued with a prudent attention to times and circumstances"³⁵. The young aggressive Unitarians might be vocal, but one did not ask the older Arians, like Dr. John Evans (1767—1827), the academic doyen of the body and author of the famous *Sketch of the Denominations*, or Benjamin Mardon, M.A., or John Simpson, pastor of Worship Street and an ex-Wesleyan, just where they stood in the grand controversy: their only wish was to bear their heterodoxy discreetly and lightly. If pressed in fact, the Arian might well ask the ardent Priestleyan General Baptist the obvious question as to how he reconciled his most distinctive denominational tenet (and the General Baptists were often popularly known as "Generals" or "Freewillers") with the Priestleyan doctrine of necessity?³⁶

But though "Unitarianism" might be a source of contention, on two other subjects the General Baptists spoke as one man. In politics they were fiercely radical, proceeding much further than the Unitarian's now conventional appeal to the principles of Civil and Religious Liberty, by condemning the Monarchy and Aristocracy outright, drinking a toast, following an instance of Anglican bigotry, to the spirit of "Christian revenge"³⁷, being, like John Omer Squier, minister at Deptford, among the first to advocate such progressive causes as the abolition of capital punishment, the removal of Jewish disabilities, and legislation against cruelty to animals.

On the subject of believer's baptism moreover there could be no compromise, however much the Unitarians might taunt them with the rite's incompatibility with the "increased enlightenment" or the "larger views" of the present age. When Dr. Evans published his four lectures on Baptism in 1825, and the *Monthly Repository*

in a very hostile review described it as a "diatribe"³⁸, the General Baptists responded as a body in defence of their "unpopular rite", authorizing in next year's Assembly, the printing of four tracts on believer's baptism, rounding on their Unitarian critics by a denunciation of those who were in process of abandoning both dominical ordinances whilst they abused those who strove to retain them³⁹.

(ii) *The Rise of Joseph Calrow Means*

Such a display of fervour for the "good old cause" (as they were accustomed to toast it) should not disguise the fact that in the 20s the more conservative element in the body was in full retreat before the younger Unitarian enthusiasts. When in 1824 for example the vacancies in the office of messenger, created by the deaths or resignations of Dobell, Pyall, Kingsford and Marten, were filled by four younger men, these let it be known that they only assumed that office on the understanding that it was of human not divine institution⁴⁰. Meanwhile the practice of inserting the word "Unitarian" before "General Baptist" in official designations of their churches was spreading, and for several men the body was proving an impossible half-way house: James Gilchrist, elder at Chatham and Worship Street, became orthodox in 1827, and published "Unitarianism Abandoned" the same year: on the other hand the Rev. Edwin Chapman in 1832 left the Connexion on becoming fully Unitarian and moved to the Stamford Street Unitarian Church.

But in 1823 there attended the annual Assembly at Worship Street a very young man destined for over fifty years to fight a rearguard action to retain a distinctive General Baptist witness, and prevent the Connexion's absorption by the Unitarian body, Joseph Calrow Means, trained by Dr. Evans, baptised at Deptford the previous year, a teacher and pastor, poet, writer for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and, in personal faith, one of the reticent school of high Arians. Within three years Means had so ingratiated himself with the Assembly that he had persuaded it to open up fraternal relations with the mildly liberal "Christian" denomination of America (obviously as an antidote to the pull of English Unitarianism) and accept quantities of "Christian" literature for sale under the auspices of the Assembly. In 1831 Means, by this time minister at Trinity Place whither the Worship Street congregation had now removed and soon to be Messenger and Secretary of the Assembly, was appointed the editor of the *General Baptist Advocate*, a literary venture launched to serve the small and ailing denomination, and at a price, 2d. per copy, within the means of its humblest supporters.

For the next five years Means employed the *Advocate*, to the obvious annoyance of other potential contributors, to air his own remedies for denominational recovery. In the first issue or two he trod warily, strongly defending the two sacraments, alleg-

ing that the Unitarians were not "preaching Christ", looking wistfully to his successful "Midland Brethren" (the New Connexion) and praying that "the zeal of our revered fathers" be added to "our modern science, modern liberalism and complete toleration"⁴¹. In 1833, encouraged by a revival within his working-class congregation at Trinity Place, Means' attack hardened, and the denunciations became more specific: the Unitarians have subordinated revelation to reason, and have idolised free enquiry "as though it were good in and for itself alone". Their neglect of church order and their advanced biblical criticism have become intolerable⁴². The next year a leading Unitarian gave Means an obvious opening for a fresh attack, when the Rev. William Yates advocated the restoration within Unitarianism of the old Presbyterian polity in order to exclude "the blacksmith, carpenter, tailor, or some other needy tradesman or artificer from our pulpits"⁴³. This obvious reference to the lowly General Baptists drew forth a sarcastic rejoinder on the historic contribution of Presbyterianism to the Unitarians' much prized freedom of thought! Means' ire was now roused. He went on to advocate the revival of Covenant theology, and unfolded a sacrificial view of the atonement which, while holding a mean between "mere moralists" and "orthodox satisfactionists" would probably be interpreted as orthodox by some—if so, Means declared, he would not apologise⁴⁴. A year later, quoting liberally from Wesley (his ancestry was Wesleyan) he was chiefly concerned to "exalt Christ"—this, as he had proved in his pastorate, was what really saved people "from sin to holiness; not march of intellect"⁴⁵.

But this was running too far ahead for the majority of the body: in 1836 Means, attacked for monopolising the *Advocate*, for expressing his own peculiar views and allowing no right of reply was removed from the editorial chair and replaced by the more elderly and staid Mardon. He resigned all his connexional offices, save that of Messenger, and even his pastorate a little later, in order to devote himself to his book *Jesus The Mercy Seat, Or The Scriptural View of The Atonement*, published in 1838.

Mardon endeavoured to cool tempers as best he could. His Assembly sermon of 1837 sought gently to acquit the Unitarian General Baptists, as he called them, from Means' strictures. They do not take a low and degrading view of Jesus Christ; they do value the atonement but will not use "fanatical, extravagant and unworthy language" in explaining it, but as Arminians, they will naturally prefer "rapturous and devout" expressions to "cold, metaphysical distinctions"⁴⁶. This approach was wise and conciliatory in the extreme, but it could not disguise the fact that with Means' departure the body swung more decisively to Unitarianism: the very title of its magazine was now changed from *General Baptist* to *Unitarian Baptist Advocate*, at the head of each issue now appeared before the traditional "One Lord, One Faith, One

Baptism", Sir Isaac Newton's "For effecting a rediscovery and re-establishment of the long-lost Truth". In successive issues the Devil is dismissed, along with Original Sin, the Resurrection goes without mention, Christianity is redefined as "benevolence", a scissors-and-paste type of biblical criticism proceeds apace⁴⁷.

Mr. Means was not however resigned to failure. Though his book had been very sharply reviewed in the *Advocate*, the Portsmouth church leapt to its defence, and at the Assembly of 1839 the aged Stephen Blundell of Cranbrook and the young J. O. Squier of Deptford both objected to the practice of regarding Unitarianism as a kind of denominational tenet, "however widely held by individuals and societies"⁴⁸.

In the early 40s in consequence he resumed his pastoral duties and some of his denominational responsibilities, and by 1847 he was again Secretary of the Assembly and ready to sound the opinion of the body which had apparently forgiven and forgotten all. In 1844 in company with Mr. Howse, Means had visited Wales and had found there a pathetic little Trinitarian General Baptist congregation at Merthyr Tydvil. Three years later this was induced to apply for membership of the Assembly and was welcomed thereto after a debate by 10 votes to 4. The "catholic" as opposed to the "Unitarian" nature of the body being thus successfully vindicated, Means in 1849 launched a much bolder attack. For many years the Academy had been turning out a decreasing number of students whom the General Baptist churches, being poor and now relying widely on a lay ministry, could not afford to employ. These students had accordingly accepted calls to Unitarian pulpits⁴⁹. Now Means proposed that as it was absurd for his own impoverished body to train students merely for the benefit of "our wealthier Presbyterian brethren", each student would for the future give a pledge that he would serve only a General Baptist congregation. The Unitarians were infuriated—perhaps understandably as they largely financed the Academy—one in fact denounced Means' proposal as "a restriction scarcely to be found even within the pale of the Romish Church". In the event the idea was dropped, but when a few years later the Academy, bereft of all students, closed down, Means could enjoy a kind of sour revenge.

Preoccupation with Mr. Means and his Unitarian antagonists tends to throw into the shade certain other tendencies which were affecting the General Baptist body in the 1840s. On the one hand, controversial Unitarianism was becoming as stale an exercise to the General Baptists as to the Unitarians themselves and spiritual depression was universal. As someone was later to put it, "how many members say, of the Geographical Society, could be got together once a week to hear a demonstration of the rotundity of the earth?" But the solution for the General Baptists was not so much the adoption of the new theology of Martineau or the

American Transcendentalists as the development of the Institutional Church. Sunday Schools, sick societies, benefit clubs, and chapel libraries seemed so much more effective than obsolescent theology, and as they required some evangelical enthusiasm to organize and persuade outsiders to utilize them, Means and his followers who had pioneered this elementary form of the social gospel, naturally gave their blessing to their widespread adoption by the churches during the 40s and later.

On the other hand the denomination was already beginning to exhibit the legal and financial incompetence which was to contribute to its ultimate downfall. In 1838 a David Taylor of Perth bequeathed £1,000 to the Assembly to support a Unitarian lecture in that town. His brother William queried the legacy as the Assembly was not a Unitarian body; the Assembly took him to court and Lord Jeffrey was compelled to join in the General Baptists' favourite debating game—When is a Unitarian not a Unitarian? In the end his Lordship decided on balance in the Assembly's favour, but by this time the money in question had been nearly all ear-marked for legal expenses. In 1840 a similar knotty theological problem had to be thrashed out at Chester Assizes over the Nantwich church: this too ended in the exhaustion of both Unitarian and Baptist claimants to the Hospital Street property and the closure of the chapel.

But if some endowments were melting away, an enormous and complex one came within the Assembly's competence in 1843. W. H. Black, F.S.A., assistant keeper at the Public Record Office and a considerable scholar, in that year brought his historic Seventh Day General Baptist Church in Mill Yard, London, together with two related causes at Kinesham and Natton in the West Country, into membership of the Assembly with which he now felt a spiritual kinship. This was no accession of numerical strength to the denomination (when Black died in 1872 he left behind a membership of three at Mill Yard) but he remained its devoted servant till he quarrelled with it in 1868, strove to preserve its endowments and inspire it with a sense of its historic past. Above all the Mill Yard church brought with it the Joseph Davis charity, comprising the manor and estate of Little Maplestead in Essex, and, oddly enough, the advowson to an Anglican living! Yet another element of eccentric antiquarian interest was added to the growing number associated with the General Baptist body⁵⁰.

NOTES

1. See for example Whitley's *History of British Baptists* (1923), 203.
2. *General Baptist Repository*, Vol. 5, 182.
3. *Monthly Repository*, 1815, 319. This report was not received unanimously, but its emphatic tone would suggest that 1815 marks a real

- turning point. Frank Buffard (*The Kent and Sussex Baptist Association* (1963), chapter 8) would agree.
4. The Kent churches had their own Assembly whose annual meetings were held at an inn and were pleasant social occasions. The Kent Association whose minute books are in Dr. Williams's Library last met in 1856.
 5. Hythe was already dead. Tunbridge Wells closed in 1813 and Yalding was dissolved the same year. Cuckfield, a branch of Ditchling, was closed by 1820, and Deal by 1830, but this cause was later revived. Ramsgate, down to 13 members in 1832, did not become legally extinct till 1884. Battle somehow survived into the 1890s and Rolvenden into the 1900s.
 6. In the West country Taunton General Baptist congregation united with the local Presbyterian church in 1815, and Mortonhamstead did likewise in 1818—J. Murch, *History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England* (1835), 470.
 7. References to these churches are numerous in the early volumes of the Unitarian and Baptist Historical Societies. See especially *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* (hereafter T.U.H.S.), Vols. 1 and 5, *passim*, and *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* (hereafter T.B.H.S.), Vol. 2, *passim*. Samuel Thompson (1766—1837), founder of the Free Thinking Christians and grandfather of S. T. Dobell, the poet, was buried in Ditchling chapel graveyard. The Free Thinking Christians were condemned, without mentioning them by name, as "supercilious and disgusting" by the General Baptist Assembly of 1818—*Monthly Repository*, 1818, 402.
 8. For a General Baptist attack on Fox's "irritable egoism", see *Monthly Repository*, 1818, 702.
 9. T.B.H.S., Vol. 3, 331f; G. E. Evans: *Antiquarian Notes*, Vol. 5, (1899).
 10. W. T. Whitley, *Minutes of the General Assembly of G.B. Churches* (1909), Vol. 2, 299f.
 11. J. Stanger, *Memoirs* (1824), 29, 30.
 12. Fleet and Luton where the New Connexion was also active would certainly have been absorbed by this stronger body but for Henry Poole, the elder at Luton, who was converted to Universalism by Vidler, and for a succession of mystically inclined pastors at Fleet who also led their congregation via Boehme to a liberal position—see B. Evans, *The Early English Baptists*, Vol. 2 (1864), 285-9.
 13. *Monthly Repository*, 1816, 352.
 14. See W. Whitaker, *One Line of the Puritan Tradition In Hull* (1910), 134.
 15. T.U.H.S., Vol. 4, 458.
 16. *Monthly Repository*, 1823, 303; J. Hall, *History of Nantwich* (1883), 393f.
 17. *Monthly Repository*, 1816, 682.
 18. See historical notes in the General Baptist Assembly Proceedings (hereafter Proceedings), 1872.
 19. Equally they had no desire for union with the New Connexion. Mr. Goadby of Ashby, having visited them in 1827 found "only the obnoxious leaven of Socinianism. May the Lord ever preserve us from it"—*General Baptist Repository*, 27 Oct., 1827.
 20. The Unitarian Almanac for 1853, 33-34, has reduced this amorphous mass of General Baptist causes to 9: by 1962, only Panteg, Wick and Nottage were left still retaining the General Baptist name—see T. O. Williams, *Undodiaeth A Rhyddid Meddwl* (1962), chapters 6 and 7.
 21. The list given by Whitley in *Minutes*, Vol. 2, 295f, I have endeavoured to check with the help of J. Taylor, *Statistics of the New Connexion of General Baptists* (1844), J. H. Wood's *Condensed History* (1847), and other sources. The following is a list of Old General Baptist chapels mentioned by Whitley which became New Connexion after

- 1811, with the dates of their so becoming: (Wisbeach, Chesham and Berkhamstead can not be included, as they had joined the New Connexion before 1811): otherwise we have Fleet (1812) (the Old General Baptist congregation after this date met in a small building erected in her garden by a lady member), Ipswich (1813) (but extinct by 1825), Epworth (1815), Morcott (1816), Smarden (1818), Yarmouth (1819), Ford, Wendover (1819), Norwich, White Friars Yard (1819), Gedney (1820), Coningsby (1830), Rashall (1840) (but closed again later), Ramsgate (1844). Tattershall which according to Whitley became New Connexion would seem to have died out altogether. To Whitley's list however may be added Chatteris (1818), Tarpорley (1818), Fleckney and Smeeton (1819), Lincoln (1822), Aylesbury (1837) (but extinct by 1840), Chatham (1814) (extinct by 1821, a split from the Old General Baptist church), Misterton (1816) (extinct 1833). To this list I would also add Nantwich (1862).
22. Historical note in Proceedings, 1877.
 23. For the extent of this emigration see B. Marten in *General Baptist Advocate* (hereafter G.B.A.), Vol. 2 (1832), 119f; T.U.H.S., Vol. 3, 420f. These two factors rather than a supposed theological declension may well account for the numerical decline of the Old General Baptists in the later eighteenth century. Their heterodoxy had not previously led to a falling away of support—see N. Caplan in . . . *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, Vol. 19, 188f.
 24. Samson Kingsford, minister at Canterbury 1771-1821 seems largely responsible for thus enlarging the scope of the Assembly's and of the individual church meeting's activities.
 25. T.B.H.S., Vol. 2, 226.
 26. *Proceedings*, 1837.
 27. For the Dendys, see H. McLachlan, *Records of A Family* (1933).
 28. For House, see G.B.A., 1835, 29.
 29. G.B.A., 1838, 70.
 30. J. Dendy, *Recollections of My Childhood* (n.d.).
 31. See the *Seed Sower*, March 1900. Whether or not Disraeli attended Deptford as a boy is a moot point; Milner Gibson and John Vesey Parnell certainly did.
 32. *The Puritan Spirit* (1967), 78, 79.
 33. *Unitarian Baptist Advocate* (hereafter U.B.A.), Vol. 1 (1837), 5.
 34. U.B.A., 1839, 35.
 35. *Proceedings*, 1817; *Monthly Repository*, 1817, 372.
 36. This was an obvious contradiction, and it did sometimes trouble the General Baptists. In 1838 the Portsmouth church officially condemned Priestley's psychological determinism, "that paralysing of every exertion necessary to our success": *Proceedings*, 1838.
 37. G.B.A., Vol. 2 (1832), 109. This extraordinary episode serves to remind us of the proximity of the General Baptists to the temper of that wild body of Free Thinking Christians whose radicalism seems to set it apart as an early example of a Labour sect: see my Oxford B. Litt thesis, "Social and Political Ideas of Representative English Unitarians" (1956).
 38. *Monthly Repository*, 1825, 108.
 39. *Monthly Repository*, 1826, 310.
 40. *Monthly Repository*, 1824, 305.
 41. G.B.A., Vol. 1, 50f, 96, 100f; Vol. 2, 15, 63, 94. Another event of 1832 had a similar tendency: the formation of a new "London and Southern General Baptist Association", mainly for the London and Sussex churches. It was recognized that there was already a Unitarian association serving the district, but a separate General Baptist organization was nevertheless considered desirable "to preserve us from some unfavourable influences".
 42. G.B.A., Vol. 3, 21, 59, 75, 160.

43. *Gospel Advocate*, Dec. 1833.
44. G.B.A., Vol. 3, 1f., 49, 96f.
45. G.B.A., Vol. 4, 66f, 81f.
46. U.B.A., Vol. 1, 37f.
47. This was an inevitable development when so much hung on a single proof-text, Matthew 28, 19, the favourite resort of the General Baptists and at the same time the most obviously trinitarian reference in the whole New Testament!
48. U.B.A., Vol. 3. *The Advocate*, though reduced in both size and price, perished in September of this same year, 1839.
49. The sort of thing that was happening is made clear in a pathetic letter written by Pastor John Shearman of Billingshurst to the Tavistock Unitarian church in 1851. He applies for the pastoral office. He is self-taught and of no great intellectual capacity, and "of plain, mediocre appearance and address". His congregation, all farmers, and all affected by the abolition of the Corn Laws, can no longer support him, even on the meagre stipend of £60 p.a. In the event the application was unsuccessful—T.U.H.S., Vol. 6, 171.
50. For the Seventh Day General Baptists see *The Seventh Day Baptists In Europe and America: Historical Papers*, 2 Vols. (1910); E. A. Payne and A. Micklewright in *Notes and Queries*, Vols. 191-193 (1946-48). The Joseph Davis Charity is explained most fully in letters to the *Saffron Walden Weekly News*, August 1905. The Mill Yard cause was of course later revived and continues to flourish.

IAN SELLERS.

(Dr. Sellers' study of the old General Baptists, which he gave as a paper to the Summer School in July last, will be completed with a further article in the next issue. Ed.)

THE BAPTISM OF THOMAS COOPER

THE baptism of Thomas Cooper is referred to by Douglas Ashby in his history *Friar Lane — The Story of Three Hundred Years*. Cooper had been a Methodist lay preacher and one of the leaders of the Chartist Movement. It was through a conversation with the wife of a Baptist minister that he became "a Baptist in conviction, and on Whit Sunday 1859, my old and dear friend Joseph Foulkes Winks immersed me in Baptism in Friar Lane Chapel, Leicester . . . I forthwith joined the General Baptists." This is a quotation from Cooper's autobiography and it is only natural to jump to the conclusion that he became a member of Friar Lane: the puzzle is that Cooper's name does not appear on the membership roll of that church!