

The Nottinghamshire Baptists Mission, Worship & Training

Evangelism

The Particular Baptist churches at the beginning of the nineteenth century, belonging, as they did, to a well-established body, observed a fair degree of formality in their church life and services. One would expect to find earnestness and conviction at the Friar Lane Chapel, Nottingham, but little of the uninhibited enthusiasm shown, for example, by the Primitive Methodists. The impression that this continued is borne out by the records of the successor churches to Friar Lane, the George Street and Derby Road churches. The latter, in particular, built up a reputation for the high musical standard attained in its services. It would also be expected that the Calvinistic view of election would restrain Particular Baptists from extensive evangelism, and indeed, where the Calvinism was extreme, it did so. The Friar Lane Church, however, was a member of the Northamptonshire Association which produced such leaders as Andrew Fuller and William Carey, whose Calvinism was anything but extreme, and it was in the Friar Lane Chapel that Carey preached the "deathless sermon" in 1792 which resulted in the Baptist Missionary Society. It is therefore not surprising to find Friar Lane engaging in evangelism at an early date. It established Sunday schools in Nottingham and Arnold in the first decade of the nineteenth century and within the next few years founded churches at Southwell, Woodborough and Calverton, and encouraged the formation of the churches in Sutton-on-Trent and Newark.

The situation with regard to the General Baptist churches was different. They owed more to the Methodist Revival than to early Baptist tradition. Like the Particular Baptists they would preach in cottages and barns but they were just as ready to preach in the open air. The Kirkby Woodhouse group of churches began in this way as did the East Leake group. The Basford and Prospect Place churches also commenced in this way, and the church which was to become the large and active Stoney Street Church, obtained a footing in Nottingham when two ministers preached in the open air at the execution of a criminal without too much regard for decorum. Unlike those of the Particular Baptists, the efforts of the General Baptists did frequently result in opposition. At East Leake economic pressure was exerted to such a degree that a farmer was compelled to give up his farm. At Hose there was abuse, breaking of windows and pelting with refuse. At Kirkby Woodhouse one man was shot at and had his house fired¹ and the rector interfered with the schooling of the children. At Wid-

merpool parson and squire combined to oppose the Baptists and some were dispossessed of their cottages.

After the churches were well established open air meetings were held from time to time and, later in the century, Particular Baptists also engaged in this form of evangelism. The Kirkby Woodhouse church, for example, in 1845 invited its minister "Bro. Stenson to preach out of doors in different parts of the parish on weeknights and Lord's Day as opportunity offers"² and the Sunday school minutes refer to open air meetings at the "Folly" and "Forest Side" almost every week in the 1850s. Palm Street, Basford, Beeston, Newark, George Street, Derby Road and many other churches also refer to regular open air meetings in the latter part of the century. In Nottingham the central Baptist and Independent churches co-operated in forming a Town Mission in 1838³ in which a missionary was engaged to promote outdoor preaching, scripture reading, tract distribution and visiting in the courts and alleys of central Nottingham.

Tract distribution was a carefully organised method of evangelism in mid-nineteenth century Nottingham Baptist life. In the 1840s the Stoney Street Church had this work carefully organised.⁴ The town was divided into thirty-three districts, including 1,359 houses, which were covered every week by sixty-five distributors. In many cases the tract was the only literature which entered the house and was therefore likely to be carefully read. The description of the tracts as "books" and the fact that they were frequently lent⁵ rather than given away indicates that something more than a simple leaflet was often distributed. James Hopkinson,⁶ who joined the Stoney Street Church in 1837, says:

"The church at Stoney Street had several active young men belonging to it. I often go back in imagination to the many happy times we spent together. They were zealous to promote and extend the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. Two of them in particular, Mr. Charles Lindley and Mr. Samuel Taylor. They were good organisers. Through their joint labours Nottingham was divided into districts so as to enable each tract society to work on their own ground so that no part of the town was neglected.

Whenever we had a fresh lot of tracts we used to have two and three nights to get them ready. And a quantity of young women would bring needles and cotton to stitch the covers on, while several young men arranged them for stitching. Sometimes we used to sing. And Mr. Pickering would come and talk to us and read some interesting book. Those were very happy times indeed particularly the Tuesday evening when six young men met in the vestry to sort the tracts and get them ready for distribution on Sunday".

The William Pickering referred to was the minister at Stoney Street from 1819 to 1849.

The amount of tract distribution carried out by Nonconformist churches in Nottingham was prodigious. The reports given at the

annual meeting of the Nottingham Religious Tract Society in 1843⁷ show that there were nine churches distributing tracts in central Nottingham, visiting nearly 12,000 houses weekly in 347 districts, with 424 distributors. Nine suburbs and nearby villages were also covered. The two Baptist churches, Stoney Street and Broad Street, covered respectively 1,352 houses in thirty-three districts with sixty-five distributors, and 800 houses in twenty-two districts with thirty distributors. If churches were well attended in those days it certainly owed something to this intensive propaganda. The records of other Baptist churches in the middle of the century shows that they similarly engaged in the regular distribution of literature, among them Mansfield Road, Beeston, Southwell, Kirkby Woodhouse, Broughton and Newark, a list which includes both General and Particular Baptists.

The earliest record of an evangelistic mission is that organised by the central Nottingham Baptist and Independent churches in December 1839.⁸ The various chapels were used, and each day began with a prayer meeting at 7.0 a.m. On Tuesday December 3, attendance at the 7.0 a.m. prayer meeting reached a thousand. The meetings were crowded, and in spite of their being transferred to the largest public building in Nottingham, Wesley Chapel, hundreds were turned away. On Thursday evening the meeting commenced at 7.0 p.m. when the Stoney Street minister, Hugh Hunter, preached. At 8.30 p.m., Alliott, the Independent minister addressed the Sunday school teachers, who "hung on his lips with delight", and, between 9.0 and 10.0 p.m., Mr. New addressed "the children of pious parents", though the correspondent of the *Baptist Repository* remarks that by then there were hardly any children of pious parents left in the church! Apart from a similar series of meetings in January 1841, no further highly organised evangelistic meetings seem to have been held until the 1870s when they received a fresh impetus from the Moody and Sankey missions.

The central Nottingham churches organised a mission in 1870 which, like those of thirty years before, was also held in December. This was conducted, not as in 1839 and 1840, by the local ministers, but by the Rev. H. Varley. Varley was a well-known evangelist among the Baptists at that period. He had been in business as a butcher but had natural gifts as a preacher, appealing particularly to working men, and became minister of St. James' Square Baptist Church, Notting Hill. The mission again was very successful, with crowded meetings.⁹

After the Moody and Sankey missions of 1873, special missions became a really popular feature of Nottinghamshire Baptist life. Some churches held such a mission every year, one of them being Southwell, whose minister, trained by C. H. Spurgeon, regularly obtained an evangelist from the Metropolitan Tabernacle. In 1877 James Manning, the Midland Baptist Union official evangelist, held missions at Heanor, Newthorpe and Carrington. In 1886 twenty-one Basford Nonconformist churches, including the Baptist churches, held a mission in which four hundred professed conversion.¹⁰ Retford and Newark

frequently arranged missions. Forest Street, Kirkby-in-Ashfield had a series of missions in the 1890s, a Miss Abbott being missioner some years, other years a Mr. Marsh, a student from one of the theological colleges. In the early years of the 20th century such missions became even more frequent, almost every church in the county holding them. The larger churches invited well known preachers. In 1904 Woodborough Road invited the Rev. F. C. Spurr, a Baptist Union evangelist and the Methodist evangelist, Gypsy Smith.¹¹ The Tabernacle invited Dr. F. B. Meyer in 1904 and in 1902 and 1903 Arkwright Street and Netherfield respectively invited Henry Thorne, a former stage personality who delivered such lectures as "From the Stage to the Cross" and "After the Stage".

Not all local ministers were at first completely in favour of this method of evangelism. The Rev. Robert Silby of Hyson Green, addressing the Midland Conference at Barrow in 1882¹² on "Modern Methods of Evangelism", criticised the "sensationalism, jingoism and militarism" of the Salvation Army and the emotionalism of the Moody and Sankey missions with their "jolly tunes and anecdotes". Correspondents quickly rose to the defence of the Salvation Army, however, and there were few objections to evangelistic missions by the end of the century.

On the whole the missions seem to have been of value, sometimes considerable value. The Basford mission of 1886 mentioned produced four hundred conversions. A mission at the small church at Ruddington in 1899 resulted in nineteen baptisms; at Arkwright Street in 1902 there were seventy professions and at Woodborough Road in 1902 thirty-three "stepped out for Christ" but although Cross Street, Arnold was still finding missions quite successful until 1914, by the early days of the twentieth century, some churches were beginning to find them disappointing. Newark, for example, baptised three young people after the mission of 1898, but after that of 1899 the verdict was that the results were "not nearly what was wished". Derby Road in 1901 considered a mission conducted by the Rev. Charles Brown "disappointing in its results". The mission at Woodborough Road, when a strong team including F. B. Meyer, F. C. Spurr and Gypsy Smith took part, resulted in twenty-eight children and thirteen adults joining an enquirers' class, but this was far less spectacular than the missions of former years. It may be that the annual repetition and the greater sophistication of congregations detracted from the effect of the missions in later years.

A few churches followed the Primitive Methodist custom of holding camp meetings, such meetings often occupying a whole day. In such cases, of course, there was a series of meetings with breaks in between. Beeston, Old Basford and Kirkby Woodhouse held such meetings about the middle of the nineteenth century as the respective church minutes show. The latter church indeed seems to have continued holding them from the 1850s until the outbreak of the war in 1914, sometimes in co-operation with other Baptist or Methodist churches.

Baptist Chapels and their Services

The early Baptist chapels were simple rectangular meeting houses, many of the General Baptist chapels being barns adapted for the purpose of worship. The Collingham chapel was originally a grain store, built of rough stone and clay marl, which was given to the church in 1705. It survived until 1955 when it was pulled down, although regarded by the local archeological society as a building of historical importance. Many original chapels built in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries still survive, though most have been enlarged and altered. A common plan seems to have been used, providing a building of the dimensions thirty-three feet by twenty-four feet. Two such chapels are Newthorpe and Beeston (the latter now used by the Pentecostals) but both have been enlarged. As the Baptist community grew in size and wealth, much larger and more elaborate chapels were built in Nottingham. The Stoney Street, Broad Street and George Street chapels still survive though all are now put to secular uses. The original Mansfield Road chapel, built in 1849 at a cost of £4,623 had "an arcaded vestibule with semi-circular arches enriched with chevrons or zig-zag moulding".¹³ Such ornamentation was common, as was a *fleur-de-lys* ornamentation. There is little evidence of any specifically Christian symbolism. The pillars of the Derby Road Particular Baptist Church, erected in 1848, were ornamented with the carved heads of the Apostles but this was unusual. Although simplicity had given place to elaboration, no ornamentation was used which might suggest a Roman or ritualistic form of worship.

The services themselves were not very different in form from non-conformist services today. Hymns were sung, the bible was read and a sermon delivered. When Richard Ingham became minister at Broad Street in 1834¹⁴ he was informed that he would be expected to preach three times on Sundays. A list of church services in Lacselles and Hagar's Directory of 1848 shows that all Nottinghamshire Baptist churches held two services on Sunday with the exception of two or three churches which held three services. Some churches, especially country churches, found it difficult to hold an evening service in winter because of lighting problems. In later years gas lighting tended to eliminate this problem. There are records of Beeston discontinuing evening services in 1812¹⁵ during the Winter and of Southwell in 1838.¹⁶ Broad Street records a similar problem in 1852¹⁷ but in 1870, presumably because gas lighting was now possible, communion was transferred to the evening all the year round.¹⁸ Weeknights were not filled with the miscellaneous activities common later, though frequently a preaching service or meeting for prayer was held during the week. Of the twenty-six churches listed in 1848, nine had one weeknight meeting and two had two such meetings. Prayer meetings at 7.0 a.m. on Sunday mornings were popular. Special prayer meetings were held in times of crisis. In 1811 during the Napoleonic wars, the Beeston church agreed to hold a monthly prayer meeting "to call on God for his assistance and protection to his church and relief from the trouble-

some disasters which are abroad in the world in consequence of this present war".¹⁹ Collingham similarly set apart a day for fasting and prayer in 1816 because of "the dark state of affairs in a national point of view". Special days of prayer were held by many Nottinghamshire Baptist churches during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. In 1866 both Broad Street and Southwell held public days of prayer because of the cattle plague. That year, incidentally, is regarded as the one of the most serious on record for the prevalence of rinderpest. In 1805 George Street observed a day of public thanksgiving, apparently because of the danger of invasion having been removed by the Battle of Trafalgar about five weeks earlier.

"Experience meetings" were held by many churches, when members made public statements of their spiritual experiences. The Beeston minutes record such meetings in 1804, 1841 and 1849. Broad Street was holding such meetings fortnightly in 1835 and in 1846 when ten leaders for such meetings were appointed. James Hopkinson describes an experience meeting at Stoney Street in the 1840s when the chapel was so crowded that he was unable to find a place even among the "singers". "Cottage meetings", held in the homes of members were also frequent during the nineteenth century. At Stoney Street such meetings were arranged on a regular basis in different parts of the town. Kirkby Woodhouse records tell of a "moveable prayer meeting" in 1851, and in 1884 such meetings were still being held. Wymeswold in 1845 and Retford in 1881 were arranging such meetings. It would seem that cottage meetings were a regular feature of Baptist church activity in the nineteenth century. Today, presumably, we would call them "house groups".

"Tea meetings" were popular semi-social gatherings. Tea was provided for a small charge and an address was given. Southwell held such a meeting in 1839 in the "old workhouse". The old workhouse had just been purchased and was to be adapted as a chapel. The tea meeting was to raise funds for this purpose. Southwell often held tea meetings on Good Friday following the annual church meeting. George Street had an annual tea meeting for which elaborate arrangements were made. The pews in the body of the church were boarded over and the church was decorated with flowers.²⁰ New ministers were often welcomed at tea meetings; examples are the reception of J. J. Goadby at Lenton in 1858 and J. Shaw at Southwell in 1865. Broad Street had so many tea meetings that in 1844 a special copper boiler was installed to cope with the demand for hot water.

The custom of holding church meetings on Christmas Day has been referred to earlier. In some churches the day was spent at church, but not, apparently, in celebration of the Nativity. In 1830 Beeston began Christmas Day with a preaching service at 6.0 a.m. with services at 2.30 and 6.0 p.m. and a special church meeting at 7.30 p.m. "to enquire into the cause of the decline in prayer meetings and attendance at preaching in a gentle loving manner" Christmas at Stoney Street in 1839 was just as strenuous with a prayer meeting at 7.0 a.m., a

service at 11.0 a.m., a "renewal meeting" at 3.0 p.m., tea at 4.30 p.m. and the annual meeting of the Benevolent Society at 6.30 p.m. Later in the century Christmas Day was a little less demanding. In 1866 Kirkby Woodhouse, though still holding a church meeting in the morning, concluded the day with a tea and a "penny reading". Kirkby-in-Ashfield in 1885 organised a "religious free and easy" on Christmas Day evening and East Leake in 1881 had its "usual tea and service" and, in 1890, a Service of Song.

Occasionally in Nottingham suggestions were made that some form of liturgy should be used. In 1857²¹ at the General Baptist Association in Loughborough the Mansfield Road Church enquired whether something of a liturgical nature might be used at the services of General Baptist churches. There was strong opposition. In 1863,²² however, the Rev. Samuel Cox proposed to the Mansfield Road Church that a "Scriptural Liturgy" should be used. The suggestion was accepted the following month and in 1864 the order of service was published by Cox under the title "The Biblical Liturgy" and was used until 1867. The Rev. George Hill introduced liturgical worship at Derby Road for a few months in 1894 after having advocated a liturgical form in an address on "Nonconformist Worship" at the Association meetings at Beeston the previous year. In the discussion which followed this address, J. T. Mallett, a layman of Broad Street urged the need for responsive readings. The general feeling of the Association however was against it and no church adopted a liturgy as a permanent feature of its worship.

Music and Singing

Very early in the nineteenth century instruments were introduced to accompany singing in the Nottinghamshire Baptist churches. The "bass viol" was the instrument most favoured. Sometimes the term violoncello is used and refers to the same instrument. The East Leake Church was using a bass viol prior to 1823—a minute of January 19 that year speaks of "resuming the bass viol". The bass viol seems to have been used until 1868 when it was decided to "procure" a harmonium for the anniversary services. This probably meant that a harmonium was hired as it was not until 1870 that such an instrument was actually purchased. The bass viol was sold in 1875 for five shillings. Beeston purchased a bass viol and a clarionet in 1838 which must have made the singing quite bright and attractive and it seems strange that the church should have abandoned them when a harmonium was purchased in 1854. Kirkby Woodhouse purchased a bass viol in 1851 but two years later it was taken from the instrumentalist, John Allen, because he did not attend the services regularly. It was sold the following year for four pounds and the money used to help to buy a harmonium. In 1861, however, Allen was allowed to bring his own bass viol and play it at the services. In 1868 Chapel Street, Kirkby possessed a bass viol and the choir had just presented the church with a cornet. A harmonium had been purchased by 1872 though the bass

viol was not disposed of for another ten years. At Retford Thomas Bowskill played a "bass fiddle" during the first half of the century and other stringed instruments were used. Broad Street used stringed instruments until 1857 when a harmonium was purchased. There was a choir at Broad Street by 1840 (choirs were usually referred to as the "singers") and in 1857 its professional instruction was costing the church four to five pounds a year. Mansfield changed from stringed instruments to a harmonium in 1861. The prosperous George Street church was the first local Baptist church to purchase an organ, which it did in 1847. Derby Road installed an organ at the time the chapel was built in 1849. Mansfield Road erected an organ in 1852. The most complete record of an orchestra in a Nottinghamshire Baptist church is that of Hucknall which included three fiddles, a basso, two tenor horns, a flute, cornet and an ophicleide.²³ An ophicleide was a woodwind instrument, now obsolete. Hucknall surrendered this impressive orchestra for a harmonium in 1854. It is understandable that a small church having only a single instrument such as a violoncello with an instrumentalist who was not very reliable, should consider it advantageous to purchase a harmonium, providing a fuller accompaniment for the singing, but it is difficult to understand a larger church with a fairly full orchestra relinquishing it. It may be that performers were unreliable resulting in an unbalanced orchestra or it may be that it seemed more up to date to have a harmonium. A single salaried organist, with perhaps a deputy, might be more reliable than a group playing a miscellaneous collection of instruments, but something of the brightness of the musical side of worship must have been lost.

As is well known, hymns were often read out line by line as they were sung. The records of the Beeston church indicate that a decision was made in 1857 to read out four lines at a time instead of two as had hitherto been the custom. Reading a few lines at a time was abandoned in 1863, doubtless as by then more people could read and more hymn books were available. Watts' hymns were used by Particular Baptist churches in the early part of the nineteenth century, though Rippon's *Selection* was more popular. In 1828 a book entitled *A New Selection* was published and it is this hymn book which is most frequently referred to in Nottingham Particular Baptist minute books. The General Baptists had their own *Baptist Hymn Book* which was revised in 1828. In 1888 *Psalms and Hymns* was published and was adopted by many Nottinghamshire churches until the *Baptist Hymnal* of 1900 was published. Some churches still retained the older books and even in the 1960s it was possible to find *Psalms and Hymns* still in use in one or two small village churches.

Nottinghamshire Baptists and Foreign Missions

Reference has already been made to the well known occasion when Carey preached the sermon in Friar Lane Chapel, Nottingham, on May 31 1792, which led to the formation of the Particular Baptist Missionary Society and there is no need to repeat it here. The associa-

tion of the General Baptist Missionary Society with Nottingham is not so well known. During the first decade of the nineteenth century proposals that a missionary society should be formed were brought forward among the General Baptists on a number of occasions. No specific action was taken until the Rev. J. G. Pike of Derby in 1814 or 1815 suggested to the Particular Baptist Missionary Society that they should accept a General Baptist Missionary, a suggestion which was rejected. Later, he suggested that a General Baptist Auxiliary should be formed to support the Society, leaving the latter on the same footing as before. This proposal was also emphatically rejected. Pike then wrote to the *Baptist Repository*, calling for the establishment of a General Baptist Missionary Society. This letter is thought to have been read at a church meeting at Stoney Street. The result was that Stoney Street prepared a case for establishing a mission and presented it at the Midland Conference at Wymeswold on June 4 1816, and in the meantime opened a fund for subscriptions. The Conference passed on the proposal, with its support to the Association meeting at Boston that year, a proposal which the Conference accepted and appointed Pike Secretary of the Society. Robert Seal, a lace manufacturer and deacon of Stoney Street, was appointed treasurer, an office he held for sixteen years. The first committee meeting of the Society was held in Nottingham, doubtless at Stoney Street, the members of the committee being Ashwell, Radford, J. Smith, R. Smith, Bennet, Pike and Saunders.²⁴ The first four of these at least were Stoney Street members, Robert Smith being the Stoney Street minister.

Among the missionaries who went abroad from Nottinghamshire in the nineteenth century were Thomas Hudson, ordained at Stoney Street, who went to Jamaica in 1826, William Brook and T. Grant of Orissa, both ordained at Stoney Street in 1841, W. Bailey, ordained at Broad Street in 1845 for the Orissa Mission, William Hill, also of Orissa, who spent six months at Stoney Street in 1855 before sailing. Valedictory services were usually held at Stoney Street, the main church in the Midlands where the General Baptists were strongest. In 1880 Miss A. M. Wells of the Derby Road Church sailed for India, in 1884 Edwin Mowl left Mansfield for Jamaica and in 1889 Thomas Norledge left the Newark church for India. Gifts to the missionary societies from Nottingham were often generous. In 1826 when Thomas Hudson was ordained at Stoney Street, collections totalled fifty pounds. In 1857²⁵ when it was revealed at the Baptist Union meetings in Nottingham that there was a deficit of £1,000 in the accounts of the General Baptist Society which was preventing J. O. Goadby and J. Buckley from sailing, the sum was subscribed within an hour, mostly from Nottingham donors. Two gave two hundred pounds each, one gave fifty, two gave twenty, five gave ten pounds and four gave five pounds each. This was substantial giving when the difference in the value of money between 1857 and today is remembered. During the rest of the century Nottingham was strongly represented on the Committee of the General Baptist Missionary Society. In 1884, for

example, out of thirty-six members, nine, including the treasurer, Thomas Hill, are identifiable as from Nottingham. When the General Baptists and Particular Baptists united in 1891, their missionary societies also united, but for some reason none of the Nottingham members of the committee of the General Baptist society were appointed to the committee of the united society, which seems strange as the Nottingham General Baptists had behind them three quarters of a century of enthusiasm and experience.

The contribution of Nottingham to the Particular Baptist Missionary Society was of a high level, though as Nottinghamshire had fewer Particular Baptist churches than General Baptist churches its influence on the society as a whole was not so great. Newark joined enthusiastically in the jubilee celebrations of the mission in 1842, a marquee being erected and a crowd of 900 gathering from the town and surrounding villages. The few churches whose contribution to missionary work can be assessed, seem to have given about one tenth of their gross income to overseas missions. For example, Southwell sent about five pounds a year in the 1870s, rising to fourteen pounds twenty years later, in each case a tenth of its income. Derby Road gave a rather higher proportion, being three hundred and sixty pounds in 1883 out of an income of £2,800 and two hundred and forty pounds in 1910 out of £1,400. When Miss Anna Maria Wells of that church went to Delhi in 1882 an extra sum of two hundred and sixty pounds was contributed toward the extension of the school to which she went. Successive Derby Road ministers served on the committee of the missionary society for the latter half of the nineteenth century and continued to do so after the union of the missions in 1891.

Nottinghamshire Baptist Lay Preachers

As in Baptist life generally, laymen have played a prominent part in Nottinghamshire Baptist life. As has already been shown, most of the early pastors were originally lay preachers who were invited to undertake a pastorate. In some cases they became full-time ministers, in others they continued to do secular work as well as pastoral work. In addition to these there were many lay preachers who had no intention of becoming pastors, but who regularly conducted services in the smaller churches, and who also in some cases took the first steps toward founding new churches. Under these circumstances it was to be expected that a body of recognised lay preachers would come into being. Among the Nottingham General Baptists this happened early in the nineteenth century. There were also Particular Baptist lay preachers, but no indication of a preachers' association among them has been traced.

As the Stoney Street General Baptist Church expanded its evangelistic work an organisation called "The Stoney Street Itinerant Society" was formed. The obituary of one of the leading lay preachers in 1870, Thomas Plowright,²⁶ says that he had preached for fifty-five years, i.e. since 1815, and was one of the founders of the "Stoney

Street Preachers' Plan". The obituary of Samuel Dewey in the second volume of the Nottingham Baptist Preachers' Union minutes, says he joined the "Itinerant Society" in 1823. (The preachers association was referred to indiscriminately as "The Stoney Street Preachers' Plan", "The Stoney Street Itinerant Society" and "the Itinerant Meeting".) The outside limits for the formation of the association are therefore 1815 and 1823. There is little information about the size of the Itinerant Society until 1850 when the *Baptist Reporter*,²⁷ evidently referring to the association as it was in 1849, says that the preaching plan included twenty-one preachers and twelve preaching places. Its members belonged to various local General Baptist churches. The standing it enjoyed among the churches is indicated by a minute of the united Bulwell, Basford and Hucknall Church²⁸ which shows that it looked to the Itinerant Meeting automatically to supply preachers and possibly also a pastor. Fourteen years later the (now separated) Basford Church decided that preachers should not be invited without the consent of the church, apart from those on the Stoney Street plan.²⁹ By then, however, Stoney Street had divided and the Stoney Street plan contained only half the names it had formerly contained.

The disruption of the Stoney Street Church in 1849, which has been described elsewhere, resulted also in the division of the Itinerant Society. Ten of its members resigned and formed "The General Baptist Itinerant Preachers' Union". The complete minutes of this Union have survived and much of the information which follows has been taken from them. Several attempts were made in the next few years to reunite the preachers in a single union, but without success. The first was in 1854 and the last in 1860. The new Union, however, quickly became the more dominant society, and although the Stoney Street society lingered on for a few more years, we hear no more of it after 1860. In August 1892 the General and Particular Baptists having united, the name "General" was dropped from the Preachers' Union and it was thenceforth known as "The Nottinghamshire Baptist Preachers' Association". The Preachers' Union grew from ten preachers, serving seven churches to twenty-four preachers serving fifteen churches in 1856, forty preachers and twenty-one churches in 1885, and forty-four preachers and twenty churches in 1898.

Two churches owe their formation substantially to the Preachers' Union. These were Kimberley and Netherfield. Kimberley "a populous village of 4,000, the centre of a vast coal field, on the Great Northern Railway" was the scene of an attempt to establish Baptist work in 1867 when the Rev. J. J. Alvey of Hucknall found several Baptist families living in Kimberley and suggested that services should be held. They were held for a time in the British Schools under the oversight of the Newthorpe church. A site for a chapel was bought in 1880³⁰ and a chapel costing three hundred pounds was opened and vested in ten trustees, members of the Preachers' Union. The Netherfield church was founded in 1883 when the lay preachers, realising

that there was a rapidly increasing population in the neighbourhood, decided to co-operate with the Carlton church in establishing work there, or, if Carlton were unwilling, to proceed without them. A chapel was built in 1887, also vested in trustees from among the preachers.

Most of the lay preachers seem to have been men in humble circumstances. The addresses given in the various plans which have survived show that very many of them lived in the working class areas of Nottingham. When John Plowright died in 1870 he had been twenty-seven years a toll keeper at Cinderhill and incidentally, had walked 80,000 miles to preach 5,000 sermons—an average of about two sermons and thirty-two miles a week for over fifty years. When E. Stevenson died in 1874 the preachers took up a collection among themselves amounting to £2 5s. 0d. and also gave the widow the balance in the benevolent fund. The Stevensons were so poor that “it is said that there was not a candle in the house and Bro. Stevenson died in the dark”.³¹ Among the names of the members of the Preachers’ Union are none who attained wealth and prominence in the town. They were mostly General Baptists and most of the Baptists who were prominent in the life of nineteenth century Nottingham were Particular Baptists. Of the wealthy and prosperous families only the Bayleys, who were Scotch Baptists seem to have taken part in lay preaching, and this they did for three generations. The prosperous laymen among both General and Particular Baptists would serve as deacons, make generous donations, engage in civic and charitable work, but they would seldom be lay preachers. It may be that they had too many demands on their time and energy in other directions. A speaker at the Leicestershire General Baptist Conference in 1859³² called attention to this fact. “Some with superior talents and education”, he said, “should also become lay preachers, Mr. A.B., manufacturer, Mr. C.D., solicitor, Mr. E.F., grocer, Mr. G.H., draper, as well as William Brown, shoemaker, John Jones, stocking maker, James Smith, warehouseman and Henry Robinson, porter.” It is tempting to comment in passing, that William Carey, shoemaker, was a preacher of no mean attainments.

On the whole, the formal education of the nineteenth century preachers was meagre. The description of James Smith of Hose,³³ a Baptist lay preacher, would have been typical of many of them. He had no schooling, was converted under a Baptist minister, taught himself to read and write, became a deacon of his church and an acceptable preacher. Preaching would normally attract men of a more studious nature than the average, and the preachers would include in their number men, who if they had lived today, would have been able to take advantage of the educational opportunities now available. In any case the preachers were always able to find a secretary able to keep the minutes in clear and concise language with few spelling or grammatical errors. In 1850 the only training required of a member of the Preachers’ Union was to have been an occasional preacher for two years³⁴ and even that was waived if the preacher could produce a

recommendation from his church. The churches themselves were in the habit of providing opportunity for a potential preacher to practise in one of the weeknight or even Sunday services. For example, in 1835, Broad Street permitted Edward Brown "to exercise his gifts"³⁵ by preaching on certain Sunday nights, while in 1854 at Kirkby Woodhouse, Aaron Brittain was "encouraged to exercise his talents in a more public way and officiate occasionally with visiting lay preachers in our pulpit".³⁶ In later years a candidate was expected to undergo a simple course of study and to answer orally certain questions. Lists of them have survived. They seem to be more a test of orthodoxy rather than a test of learning. Some of the questions used in 1870 are:

Do you think the moral law is binding upon man now, and if so, in what sense?

What is your opinion of the Person of Christ?

For what purpose did Christ suffer?

Are all men saved by the death of Christ?

Do you believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit?

Is it your opinion that it is the duty of all believers to be baptised?

Do you believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and to what extent?

Many of these questions clearly expect little more than a simple answer "yes" or "no", but fourteen years later the questions were re-formulated in a way which gave scope for more thoughtful and more extensive answers. Examples are:

What importance do you attach to the Holy Scriptures and how far are they binding on the believer?

What do the Scriptures teach respecting the moral law in relation to the believer?

What are the teachings of Scripture relative to Christ's work for man's salvation?

What does the New Testament teach respecting the ordinance of baptism in its mode, its subjects and its designs?

It is just possible that, for example, question one may indicate some liberalisation of opinion, but this is not likely. The questions, as a whole, clearly expect answers based upon an evangelical interpretation of the New Testament.

On several occasions the Preachers' minutes record instances of candidate's applications being deferred. An example of this is "Bro. John Marlow", who in 1870, was

"affectionately recommended . . . not to further attempt at public speaking at present, but for twelve months at least to read and improve his mind".

John Marlow presented himself for examination again in 1872 and was allowed to go out preaching with a senior preacher for six months. He was never finally accepted. "Bro. C. Gunn", also in 1870, had a similar experience. In 1890 G. McCree "preached before the brethren" who recommended "to give himself to a closer study of God's word" for three months. After that he was "again respectfully

(recommended) to qualify himself for the work if he wishes to engage in it". Some candidates were refused completely. In June 1852 Mr. Hodges was rejected because "the meeting thought he might be more useful in some other way than preaching". "Bro. Wilkinson" was likewise refused in May 1871.

Courses of Study

There seems to have been little serious attempt to provide any detailed course of study for lay preachers. Now and then, toward the end of the century, a lecture on a specific subject might be given. Mr. W. Richardson, a member of the Preachers' Union, delivered lectures of quite an academic nature. Some of his subjects were: "The Reformation in England and its Results" and "Nonconformity, what it is. What it has done". In 1893 Dr. T. Witton Davies, principal of the Midland Baptist College, Nottingham, lectured on "The Modern Jew and his Synagogue" and offered to institute classes at the college for lay preachers. The classes were tried for a session but were then abandoned. In 1896 Dr. Paton of the Congregational College offered a course of lectures for lay preachers but the offer does not seem to have been taken up. In 1904 Mr. H. Fox, president of the Union, made a similar effort to organise lectures with the help of Dr. Bowser of the Midland Baptist College, with a similar lack of success. In 1872⁸⁷ Dr. Jabez Burns, a well known Baptist minister, president of the Baptist Union in 1850, who was trying to raise a thousand books "for our village preachers", gave a gift of a hundred and twenty books to the Union and tried to establish preachers' libraries at Nottingham, Derby and Leicester. The gift was welcomed and a room found for it at the Mansfield Road Church and for the next year or two, other books were added, but the library did not long survive. In 1894 the books were divided among such members of the Union who desired to have them.

These facts suggest that in this period the preachers felt that up to a certain point, biblical study was desirable, but beyond that, they were not prepared as a body to go much further in attempting to improve their ability to serve the churches. This, of course, takes no account of what study each man did privately. The information available suggests that some, Richardson and Fox, for example, did pursue study beyond the minimum point necessary for joining the Preachers' Union.

Discipline

Discipline was exercised over preachers by the Union, though it will be remembered that preachers were also all under the discipline of their churches. Non-fulfilment of a preaching engagement called for an explanation. W. Bush of Nottingham in 1870 missed an appointment at Hucknall in 1870 and Samuel Dove in 1904 failed to keep an appointment at Kirkby Woodhouse and both put forward reasons the Union considered satisfactory. It is surprising that more such

cases did not arise as the only means of transport most of the men had was to go by train or to walk. In 1867 "Bro. Cooper" was censured for attending the theatre and G. Proctor, in 1882, "for inconsistency of character". He was again censured in 1896 for selling intoxicants and the preachers passed a resolution that no one engaged in that trade could be a member. Proctor is listed as an auxiliary preacher in 1898 so evidently he had given up selling liquor. In 1893 the vice-president resigned having been accused of borrowing money under false pretences and in 1910 a member was disciplined for a sexual offence. A few changed their beliefs. Two joined the Christadelphians in 1871. W. Marshall "changed his theological views" in 1898 and in 1910 H. W. Booth "departed from the principles of our belief". Probably none relinquished religious faith, though the latter may be an exception.

A number of preachers served smaller churches in the capacity of honorary lay pastor, though the custom of making such appointments did not develop in the latter nineteenth century to the extent it has since done. Thomas Watkinson served the Newthorpe church in that capacity from 1878 to 1880. A. Copley of Beeston served the Stapleford church for a period beginning in 1896 and A. Gibson led the Netherfield church for six years beginning 1898. Babbington was served by H. Bush for a period commencing 1909 and C. Bowler led the Prospect Place church for a few years from 1916 at the request of the East Midland Baptist Association. A number entered the professional ministry, five during the nineteenth century, of whom the best known was Henry Townsend who eventually became principal of the Manchester Baptist College and was president of the Baptist Union in 1936.

The General Baptist College

The General Baptist College, which trained ministers for the New Connexion for over a century, disappeared many years ago from Baptist life. However, as it was located in Nottingham for half its life some reference to it in any account of the Nottinghamshire Baptists is necessary. Unfortunately the original minutes of the college have been lost and information about it must be compiled from various references in the General Baptist periodicals and from the earlier Baptist "Histories". A small booklet by R. C. Carter, *A Popular Sketch of the Midland Baptist College*, was published in 1925 and some of the information given here has been taken from that.

In 1770 Dan Taylor produced a plan to assist young men in their training for the ministry, but nothing came of it. He did not abandon the idea and Adam Taylor⁸⁸ tells of a manuscript dated 1779 found among his papers laying out a scheme for an institution for this purpose. Nothing developed until 1797 when Robert Smith of Stoney Street, Nottingham opened a discussion at the Association meetings that year in Kegworth and it was decided to found an "academy". Donations amounting to a hundred and seventy pounds were made and promises

of annual subscriptions were received. A committee was formed, Robert Smith was appointed secretary and Samuel Heard, also of Stoney Street, was appointed treasurer. Dan Taylor was appointed tutor and the work began in his house in Commercial Road, London in 1798. The charges per student were fifty pounds a year which included tuition, lodging and "an ample but not luxurious board". The subjects taught were English, the Bible, History, Geography and Moral Philosophy. A library was available to which students were each expected to contribute half a guinea a year. The college remained in London until 1813 during which period nineteen students were trained and passed into the ministry of the denomination.

Until then the college had been a semi-official organisation administered by a committee but in 1812 the committee resigned and the college passed to the direct administration of the General Baptist Association. It was then decided to remove the college nearer the Midlands where most of the General Baptist churches were located. Dan Taylor was unable to leave London so the college was placed under the superintendency of the Rev. J. Jarrom at Wisbech. Jarrom was also minister of the General Baptist church at Wisbech and conducted a small boarding school. Robert Smith continued to act as secretary. While at Wisbech the college trained twenty-five students, but by 1825 some dissatisfaction about the college began to reveal itself.

Criticisms arose that although the college was nearer the Midlands that it had been when in London, it was still too far from the main concentration of General Baptist churches. There was criticism of Jarrom, too. His approach was felt to be too staid and formal. Churches wanted a more lively, evangelistic ministry. A group of General Baptists therefore formed a new "Education Society" and the Repository of 1825³⁹ published a prospectus of a new institution founded in 1824 by delegates from Barton, Ibstock and Austrey. It was not at first intended to be a college at all but a scheme for the private instruction of students who were expected to receive help from their own or some other neighbouring minister. The subjects taught were English, Sermonising, the Art of Delivery, Church History and the Bible. The object was not to take men out of business but to provide village preachers who would "preach with their tongues, walk with their feet and work with their hands". The institution however quickly became another academy for training ministers and in 1826 Thomas Stevenson of Loughborough became principal. His son, John Stevenson, an M.A. of Glasgow, the first General Baptist minister to hold a university degree, assisted him for a time as classical tutor.⁴⁰

In 1837 Jarrom resigned from the Wisbech college because of ill health and the two institutions combined at Loughborough. Thomas Stevenson resigned in 1841 and John Stevenson succeeded him. John Stevenson then held a pastorate in London and the college returned to the metropolis until 1843 when he, too resigned. In this period

there were thirty-six students including three who became doctors of divinity, John Goadby, a future principal, John Buckley of India, and Richard Ingram. The college now moved to Leicester under the headship of Joseph Wallis who remained as principal until 1857. In 1856, J. C. Pike suggested that General Baptist students should be trained at the Particular Baptist College at Regents Park. There were many educational advantages in such an arrangement, he claimed. Dr. Angus, the principal, claimed that the difference between the General and Particular Baptist points of view could be taught in a month. The Association, meeting at Loughborough in June 1857, however, decided that the college should move to Nottingham. In this period at Leicester there were seventy students of whom one, John Clifford, received the degree of D.D., William Underwood became a Ph.D. of Leipzig, five were M.A.s and three were B.A.s, indicating the rising standards of education in the denomination.

In 1857 premises were rented in Sherwood Rise, Nottingham, at a hundred pounds a year and William Underwood was appointed principal on a full time basis, that is, he had no pastoral charge as well. W. R. Stevenson, M.A., minister at Broad Street, was appointed classical tutor. Soon larger premises were required and when Thomas Hill, a working man of Old Basford, brought to Underwood the sum of thirty pounds, his savings over many years, it seemed that the time had come to move forward. A subscription list for £1,600 was opened and negotiations commenced to buy the Sherwood Rise premises. The premises were offered for £2,100 and a further three hundred pounds would be required for necessary alterations. On the day the sale was to be completed Underwood heard of a house for sale at Chilwell which seemed a good deal more attractive. It was a building into which the most prominent of the nineteenth century Nottingham private schools, the Standard Hill Academy, had moved. An effort had been made to turn the school into a boarding school but it had not been successful. The Chilwell premises were approached by a winding drive through a grove of trees and included a garden, an orchard and a recreation ground. The owners had paid £5,000 for the building but were offering it for £2,950. It seemed ideal for the purpose so the college moved there in 1860 and remained in occupation for twenty-one years.

Dr. Underwood continued as principal and his sister became matron, while W. R. Stevenson remained on the staff, travelling to Chilwell to carry out his duties. There were times when there seemed a lack of sufficient students, but later the situation improved. The brief reports in the denominational papers indicate that the Chilwell College usually had ten or eleven students. In 1878 the accommodation was enlarged to take fifteen. The course of study was three to four years and the college was entitled to give certificates qualifying for London matriculation. There were up to six Pegg Scholarships offered worth forty-five pounds, with the help of which a student who had completed the Chilwell course could spend two years in either an English

or a German university. The annual income of the college in those years was about £700.

In 1873 Thomas Goadby, M.A., became principal with Charles Clarke, B.A., of Ashby-de-la-Zouche as tutor. Goadby had gained prizes at Glasgow in logic, philosophy and classics. After his death two American doctorate diplomas which he had never used were found among his papers. During the college vacations Goadby spent periods at the Universities of Halle and Leipzig; he studied German theological thought and translated Ewald's *Revelation—its Nature and Record* in 1884 and *Old Testament Theology* in 1888.⁴¹ In 1881 Nottingham University College was founded and Goadby felt that it would be advantageous to return to Nottingham so that students could take advantage of University classes. The following year therefore, the Chilwell premises were sold for £4,550, and a house, "Sandy Knoll", 89 Forest Road, was bought for £3,400.⁴² The sum of £750 was spent on adapting the house for fourteen students and building a tutor's house and the college moved back to Nottingham, not without many regrets at leaving the pleasant house at Chilwell, and was affiliated to the University College. Henceforth it was known as the Midland Baptist College.

The report of the College in 1888 in the *General Baptist Magazine* indicates that the curriculum then included Natural Philosophy, Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, Optics, Heat, Electricity and Magnetism—all of which would today be included under the title Physics. The teaching of some of these subjects was however hindered through a lack of "philosophical apparatus". The report in the 1889 *Magazine* includes a more extended list of subjects. There had been lectures on various subjects including the Atonement, Homiletics, the Preparation of Sermons, Philosophy of Religion, Butler's Analogy, Moral Philosophy, Hebrew, Greek, Church History, Logic and on 1 Peter. The University College lectures had included Greek, Latin, French, German History and Literature, Logic, Philosophy, Mathematics, Mechanics, Chemistry, Physiography, Botany, Practical Economy and Psychology. Science was obviously studied, though only certain students attended the University College lectures in scientific subjects.

It had never been easy for the denomination to maintain the college financially and in 1890 voices were beginning to ask whether it should be continued. A letter to the *General Baptist Magazine*⁴³ claims that the college had excellent premises capable of accommodating sixteen young men, that there was a house governor and four professors but only three students, of whom two were studying independently of the staff for matriculation. There were four or five candidates so that the next year there should be five or six students, but there was already a deficit of £750 and out of sixty-six students passing through the college between 1866 and 1886, twenty-two had not found a permanent home in the General Baptist ministry and some had not even been given the chance to serve the denomination. The remedy was

to remove the debt, guarantee an income of a thousand pounds, find a president capable of filling the house with students and find a pastorate for each of them. The alternative was to amalgamate with some other college. This is a serious indictment of the college, yet it managed to continue for another quarter of a century, securing more or less its full complement of students, as the Baptist Handbooks show. The picture of four professors teaching one student is, of course, quite misleading. The "professors" were visiting lecturers, ministers of local churches, and when the other two students matriculated they would continue to be students. Furthermore it was a critical period in the life of the college. Thomas Goadby had died the previous year and had not been replaced.

The college received a new lease of life when Dr. T. Witton Davies was appointed principal in 1892. He served until 1898 when he was succeeded by the last principal, S. W. Bowser, who continued until 1913. Three local ministers assisted him, among whom was J. H. Rushbrooke, who taught Old Testament theology. In 1899 a system was introduced under which the Midland College and Rawdon College exchanged students. Two years were spent at Nottingham studying Arts subjects and three years at Rawdon studying theology.

At the outbreak of the 1914-18 war the college building was taken as a hostel for soldiers. No more students were enrolled and the college ceased to exist. When peace returned an effort was made to raise a capital sum of £10,000 to set the college on its feet again. The response was small and the building was therefore sold and the capital sum placed in trust for the provision of scholarships for the colleges at Bristol, Rawdon and Manchester. Thus ended the life of the second oldest Baptist college in the country and the only college of the General Baptists. It had lasted almost a hundred and twenty years and had trained some outstanding ministers. Its outstanding principals were Drs. Underwood and Goadby. When the General Baptists and Particular Baptists united the need for a separate General Baptist college disappeared, and as the twentieth century advanced it became obvious that it was better to support a smaller number of colleges adequately than to have a larger number of small institutions each having a precarious existence.

Of the men who taught at the college, W. R. Stevenson and Thomas Goadby were men of independent thought and were ready to take into account the newer trends in biblical criticism which were arising. There is no indication that at any time an extreme liberal theology was taught there or that any of the staff held views contrary to the main stream of Christian thought, unless Stevenson's belief in "conditional immortality" is considered to come within that category. Nevertheless there was a tradition of intellectual freedom associated with the General Baptist College and J. H. Rushbrooke, writing about the college in 1903,⁴⁴ when proposals for amalgamation were in the air, spoke of the "dread that the freer theological atmosphere of Nottingham might be endangered by amalgamation" with one of the other Baptist colleges.

NOTES

- ¹ *East Midland Baptist Magazine*, July 1898, p. 30.
- ² Kirkby Woodhouse Minutes, June 30 1845.
- ³ *Baptist Reporter*, 1838, p. 54.
- ⁴ *Baptist Repository*, 1842, p. 85.
- ⁵ Broad Street Minutes, Sept. 30 1835.
- ⁶ James Hopkinson, Ed. J. B. Goodman, *Memoirs of a Victorian Cabinet Maker*, 1968, p. 39.
- ⁷ *Nottingham Review*, Nov. 26 1843.
- ⁸ *Baptist Repository*, 1840, p. 22.
- ⁹ *Baptist Magazine*, 1870, p. 80; *Nottingham Review*, May 4, 1870.
- ¹⁰ *General Baptist Magazine*, 1886, p. 468.
- ¹¹ *East Midland Baptist Magazine*, 1902, p. 60; 1904, p. 40; 1902, p. 15; 1903, p. 64.
- ¹² *General Baptist Magazine*, 1882, p. 333.
- ¹³ W. M. Wylie *Old and New Nottingham*, Nottingham, 1853, p. 123.
- ¹⁴ Broad Street Minutes, Jan. 29 1836.
- ¹⁵ Beeston Minutes, Aug. 6 1812.
- ¹⁶ Southwell Minutes, Dec. 25 1838.
- ¹⁷ Broad Street Minutes, Jan. 27 1852.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, Oct 31 1870.
- ¹⁹ Beeston Minutes, May 26 1811.
- ²⁰ *Nottingham Review*, May 28 1858.
- ²¹ *Baptist Repository*, 1857 Report of Association, also pp. 310, 465.
- ²² Mansfield Road Minutes, Feb. 1 1863.
- ²³ A. S. Arnold, *Built upon the Foundations* (Church Centenary Booklet), 1949, p. 13.
- ²⁴ *Baptist Repository*, 1816, p. 182.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, 1857, pp. 310-312.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, 1870, p. 250.
- ²⁷ *Baptist Reporter*, 1850, p. 86.
- ²⁸ Basford, Bulwell, Hucknall United Church Minutes, Nov. 12, Dec. 13, 1838.
- ²⁹ Basford Minutes, Jan. 13 1852.
- ³⁰ Nottinghamshire Baptist Preachers Minutes, Sept. 3 1867.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, Sept. 7 1874.
- ³² Report of General Baptist Conference, Loughborough, 1859. W. Marshall, *The Lay Agency with Reference to the Efficiency of our Lay Preachers*.
- ³³ *General Baptist Magazine*, 1879, p. 336.
- ³⁴ Preachers' Minutes, Sept. 2 1850.
- ³⁵ Broad Street Minutes, Sept. 28 1835.
- ³⁶ Kirkby Woodhouse Minutes, Dec. 4 1854.
- ³⁷ *General Baptist Magazine*, 1872, p. 22.
- ³⁸ Adam Taylor, *History of the General Baptists*, London, 1818, Vol. 2, p. 329, footnote.
- ³⁹ *Baptist Repository*, 1825, p. 58.
- ⁴⁰ J. A. Wood, *Condensed History of the General Baptists of the New Connexion*, Leicester, 1847, p. 305.
- ⁴¹ B. and L. Goady, *Not Saints but Men*, p. 245.
- ⁴² *General Baptist Magazine*, 1883, p. 223.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, 1890, p. 223.
- ⁴⁴ *East Midland Baptist Magazine*, 1903, p. 50.

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