

Notes.

Baptists and Jews in East London.

Just north-east of the Tower of London is a district which once swarmed with Baptist Churches. Tower Hill, East Smithfield, Pennington Street, Broad Street, Commercial Road East, Church Lane, Lambeth Street, Rupert Street, Little Alie Street, Great Alie Street, Commercial Street, Goodman's Fields, Mill Yard, Prescott Street are names which mean much to lovers of the old Baptists. It would be a delightful experience if the pastor of a surviving church would organise a personally-conducted tour round this district, and finish with a tea in his schoolroom for the pilgrims. To-day the Jewish invasion is depleting ancient buildings of their Christian worshippers, and they are being converted into synagogues or sold for secular purposes. Three Baptist Churches have lately suffered in this way, and in this crisis of their fate they claim respectful notice and sympathy.

The Oldest Baptist Church.

The most ancient of English Particular Baptist Churches is that which has just quitted Commercial Street. It claims 1633 as its date of origin—a reference to the fact that about that time John Spilsbury is known as pastor of a little company who renounced their parish baptism and pledged themselves anew. They met in Wapping, and presently obtained a home near the Coal Harbour, to which members resorted from as far away as Watford. At Broad Street they built a meeting-house, where John Norcott ministered, then Hercules Collins, Edward Elliott, William Curtis, Clendon Dawkes, and Samuel Wilson. During his pastorate, new premises were occupied in Rosemary Branch, Goodman's Fields—better known to-day as Prescott Street—though a few lingered in the old building for a year or two. From this new site went out a stream of ministers to other churches, such as Benjamin Beddome, the writer of hymns; Josiah Thompson, the wealthy historian; and others of less fame. In 1752, trouble arose as to a new pastor, and those who favoured James Fall left to establish a new cause in Little Alie Street. To the parent church presently came Samuel Burford from Lyme, who held the fort till 1768. His successor was Abraham Booth from Nottinghamshire;

having been a General Baptist and having changed, he naturally adopted extreme views and became the great champion, not only of Baptist principles, but of exaggerated Calvinism. When the influence of Andrew Fuller was leavening the denomination with more evangelistic views, the tradition of Booth was upheld, and the church limited itself to supporting the educational movement, which resulted in the academy at Stepney, now housed in Regent's Park. Another home was found in Commercial Street, where a stately building testifies to the prominence of the church last century. A little faithful band has kept the flag flying, and friends in the Metropolitan Association were invited lately to the final meetings before the ancient church went forth, like Abraham, not knowing whether it should rest.

Are Sinners and Jews to be preached to ?

Little Alie Street has been the home of a high Calvinistic Baptist Church for a century and a half. James Fall was succeeded by William Dowars in 1757, and when he died in 1795, the cause was so low that the doors were presently closed. A member from Prescott Street exerted himself till William Shenstone from Eagle Street took charge in 1798. Within ten years a few rigid hyper-Calvinists, who were shocked at preaching to sinners or praying for them, founded a short-lived secession. Shenstone seems to have varied greatly in his doctrinal views, for he had apparently been associated with the General Baptists as late as 1795, and in 1826 he added to his duties the pastoral care of the Calvinistic Sabbatarians, whom he removed from Devonshire Square to Eldon Street in Finsbury. Five years later, Philip Dickerson joined him at Little Alie Street, remaining in sole charge on Shenstone's death in 1833. In 1871, Dickerson relinquished the charge to his co-pastor, Mr. Masterson. On his change to Brighton in 1883, Mr. R. E. Sears succeeded for eleven years. After further care from Messrs. McKee and Banks, the opportunities for usefulness in the neighbourhood seemed to be so scant, that the expiry of the lease led to the cessation of work. To-day the Jews are in possession of the site.

Another Church from Wapping.

Great Alie Street housed Baptists as early as 1698, when the son of the famous Benjamin Keach brought a church that he had gathered in Wapping; on his death, John Nichols succeeded and, about 1714, we find that the exact home was in Angel Alley. Here Mr. Ridgeway succeeded, and because there was no imposition of hands at his ordination, the church divided—one party retiring to Glover's Hall, the other to Petticoat Lane. There is an amusing uncertainty about his Christian name—John, Thomas, and Edward being all given by his friends. William Collins succeeded at Petticoat Lane on Ridgeway's death in 1749. He was followed by Thomas Davis, a stone-mason; and in 1763, John Allen came, a linen-draper. This last minister was

a voluminous author of a high Calvinist type, but his church found it necessary to expel him for his conduct. Under his successor, Christopher Hall, brother of the elder Robert Hall, the church migrated to another district.

Even Zoar is not Safe.

Great Alie Street saw another Baptist cause in 1808. A building was erected there in 1747 for a Presbyterian congregation, originally gathered in Gravel Lane, Houndsditch, by the celebrated Samuel Pomfret. It was to this congregation that David Crosley, the evangelist of Yorkshire and Lancashire, preached his famous sermon on Samson. This congregation being much weakened, John Bailey obtained possession of the building, and "Zoar" served as a little place of refuge for the Baptists for a century. For the greater part of the time there was no pastor, as when Bailey's health failed in 1824, the people relied on mutual oversight. The building was sold by auction in 1854, when Joshua Pedley, who worshipped there and was the lessee, acquired the freehold. In 1881, Eli Ashdown, once of Burgess Hill, became pastor, and soon started a school; he remained in charge till his death in 1904. This year the building was condemned by the District Surveyor, and the people have retired to St. Philip's Hall in Newark Street. Thus a third ancient building here passes out of Baptist occupation.

Baptist Churches in Blackburn.

An enquiry from the editor of the Victoria County History of Lancashire has set the Rev. Joseph Farquhar, M.A., on presenting all the facts known as to our churches there. Until a more elaborate story appears, the brief summary may be worth recording here.

Baptist work in the district was begun by the indefatigable David Crosley, once of Heptonstall Slack, then of Barnoldswick, Tottlebank, Cripplegate, Gildersome, and in 1736 of Bacup. He preached occasionally at Shorrock Green Hall, but when the church at Bacup divided on his death into two parties, differing in the intensity of their Calvinism, the work in this direction languished. In 1758, Adam Holden moved to Blackburn, and next year married Mrs. Boardman of Feniscowles, licensing their house for worship. They also bought ground at Islington Croft and began a meeting-house, whose completion he did not live to see. It was opened in 1765 by John Johnson of Liverpool, and Joseph Piccop of Bacup, and remains the oldest place of worship in the borough, though about to disappear in favour of a new building. The names of these brethren will show the initiated that the doctrines favoured are of the highest, or Hyper-Calvinist, or supra-lapsarian type. Twice in its history there have been secessions—one meeting in Ainsworth Street from 1819 to 1824, another in Exchange Street half-a-century later; both reunited with the parent church. A schoolroom, erected in 1832, was used as a day school for awhile, and was rebuilt six years ago.

The second Baptist Church began by the Itinerant Society hiring a room in Ainsworth Street during 1838. On Good Friday, of 1839, Giles of Preston, and Harbottle of Accrington, came over and formed a church by dismissing nine members from their churches—Gibbs, from Norwich, becoming pastor for a year. This also was a Particular Baptist Church, but not of the extreme section. On Good Friday, of 1840, they opened a Tabernacle on the new Branch Road, which has since been named Montague Street, and next year the church was re-formed, apparently to break the connection with the Itinerant Society. In 1848, those who desired to celebrate communion weekly seceded and met at Rehoboth in Heaton Street, with the late pastor of the church. These shifted to King Street and Fielden Street, and in 1863, listened to negotiations to rejoin the group at Montague Street. These had dissolved in 1852, and a new church had been formed in 1853, independent of the Home Mission; four ministers had been there by 1863. In 1864, Robert Cameron brought back his church, now grown very strong, and the subsequent history has been of steady increase. At present there is a project to build new premises.

The third building in the town is on Leamington road, due to the Union Church Extension Committee and the Association, opened in 1895, and occupied since 1896 by an open-membership church.

The church at Darwin, once technically in the township of Blackburn, celebrated its jubilee last year by issuing a booklet. The Baptists at Billington, Church, Enfield, and Oswaldtwistle are not closely linked with Blackburn.

General Baptist Minutes.

The first volume of the Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptists, with kindred records between 1654 and 1728, were issued in September to our guinea subscribers. As the Presbyterians of the seventeenth century did not keep up their classical and provincial synods, much less hold a General Assembly as in Scotland, these records have no rival in England. They enable us to have the history of a body organized nationally by 1654, and surviving after 250 years. Our printers and publishers have dealt with them worthily. With notes and introductions, they form a handsome volume of lxxx. and 152 pages. The minutes for the period 1733 to 1811, complete, with indexes to the whole, are in the press, and will be issued to guinea subscribers for the second year. The general public can purchase the two volumes together from the Kingsgate Press at two guineas.

William Robinson's letter of 1826, detailing his first impressions of Bristol, was contributed to our last number by the kindness of the Rev. James Stuart, of Watford.