

Transactions

of the

Baptist Historical Society.

Benjamin Stinton and his Baptist Friends.

IN 1697 the Particular Baptist church at Goat Yard Passage, off Goat Street, Horsleydown, published certain articles of faith, signed by the male members. These include Benjamin Keach, the pastor, Thomas Stinton, and Benjamin Stinton the teacher. It is apparently the first time that Benjamin Stinton appears in any public act; five years earlier he was not one of the delegates to the Assembly. At this time, despite the office he held in the church, he was but twenty-one years of age, having been born on 2 February, 1676-7. At that time Benjamin Keach had for nine years been pastor of the church, and we may guess that Stinton senior named his son after him. The ties of friendship between the families evidently were close, for Thomas Stinton married Elizabeth Keach on 29 May, 1690, George Barrett (late of Jessey's church) officiating; and Benjamin married Susanna, another daughter of Benjamin Keach in 1699, Richard Adams officiating at Devonshire Square (Rippon, III, 453). As the youngest daughter, named Rebekah, married another member of the church, Thomas Crosby, who incorporated biographical notices of his father-in-law and his brother-in-law in the fourth volume of his history, we are exceptionally well informed on some personal matters.

Benjamin Stinton had had no advantages in education, which indeed were hardly available to Baptists under the Stuarts; but the example of Keach was before him to encourage private study, and with tuition he made some progress in language and literature.

As early as 1697, after some previous attempts, the London Particular Baptist churches formed an Association, remodelled in 1704, and thus Stinton was in contact with all the metropolitan leaders. He may possibly have known the venerable William Kiffin, whose course was not run till 1701, or Thomas Harrison of Loriners' Hall and Hercules Collins of Wapping and William Collins of Artillery Lane; he must have known Samuel Mee of

Flower-de-Luce Court, a split from his own church; all these died in 1702. From 1704 he was in regular touch with all the Calvinistic Baptist ministers of Southwark and London. Among them may be mentioned Richard Adams, colleague and successor of Kiffin at Devonshire Square, with Mark Key; these men like Keach had begun as General Baptists and had changed their views soon after coming to town. The venerable Hanserd Knowles had died when Stinton was but fourteen years old, and his church was at this time just about to call David Crosley, a famous evangelist in Yorkshire and Lancashire. At Pinners' Hall every Saturday a church gathered under the learned Joseph Stennett, fast making a name in literary and court circles. At Joiners' Hall lingered another veteran of the persecution period, Joseph Maisters, who once had ministered in Cheshunt. In Alie Street, Elias Keach had been followed by John Nichols. At Little Wild Street, John Piggott was pastor; and at Paul's Alley, Richard Allen; two more recruits from the General Baptists. In Shadwell, Nathanael Wyles was pastor; and in Limehouse, Leonard Harrison. On his own side of the river, Edward Wallin was at Flower-de-Luce, Richard Parkes at Collier's Rents, where, as at Limehouse, Keach had promoted the building of the meeting; and there was a cave of Adullam at Winchester House near St. Mary Overies Dock, apparently with a weaver named Midlane as the chief.

Although there were other Baptists in London, the ecclesiastical differences between the Particulars and their older brethren the Generals was too deep for any official co-operation at this time, especially as the General Baptists were in the throes of a severe doctrinal controversy. Nevertheless we know that Stinton did maintain friendly relations with some of them: about 1705, he helped at Hart Street, Covent Garden, and at Glass House Yard off Goswell Street; a butcher named Nathanael Foxwell was pastor of another church close by Stinton's own church at Horsleydown, and the two shared the use of the same baptistery.

On 25 March 1706 an important meeting was held of the Association, whose original Minutes have been perused for this information. Amongst other matters, it was agreed that a Baptist History was badly needed, and the meeting commended the matter to Joseph Stennett. He was at this time 43 years old, had been well educated at a grammar school, and was acquainted with several languages both European and Asiatic, so that he had for some time earned his living as a schoolmaster in London, and had acquired some reputation for his translations, both in prose and verse, and for his proficiency in a new line, the writing of

hymns to be sung at sacramental services. In controversy, both oral and written, he had made his mark, and his thanksgiving sermon on the victory at Blenheim had procured him a gift from Queen Anne.

Here then was a scholar, quite competent in point of learning; but like many subsequent students, he found it one thing to accept a commission of this kind, and another to fulfil it. Indeed he diverged from a history of the Baptists to consider a history of Baptism, and sketched out a portentous enquiry into the rabbins, the liturgies, the fathers before the council of Nicæa, mediæval heretics, the reformation leaders, and all subsequent controversies on baptism. The result was that he accomplished nothing, and any materials he had accumulated would probably have been useless for a history of the Baptists. Except for some matters almost within his own knowledge, to be mentioned later, we are not sure that he did anything to fulfil the wishes of his brethren. It is unfortunate that the same will-o'-the-wisp lured Robert Robinson in after days. Happily what is important to know on these points has in our own day been published by Professor Newman as a History of Anti-Pædobaptism till 1609, so that future students may be free to concentrate on what concerns English Baptists.

Meanwhile from 1706 the Association was pledged to help Stennett in accumulating historical material. Now in July of 1704 Keach had passed to his reward, and Stinton was reluctantly obliged to take up his mantle as pastor of Horsleydown. When we scan the occupations of the Baptist pastors in London, with the unfriendly light cast on them by Marius D'Assigny in 1709, we see that all but three or four earned their living by manual work; a cooper, a hatter, a journeyman shoe-maker, a tinsmith, a ribbon-weaver, a life-guards man, a tailor, a glazier, a tallow-chandler figure in his list. Of ministers presumably educated, such as D'Assigny dignifies with a "Mr." we recognise Crosley—whom we otherwise know to have been a mason, and who was just about to become a farmer again—and John Gale, who was about to answer Wall's History of Infant Baptism with effect, and Nathanael Hodges. Stennett could hardly hope for any substantial help except from these few and Stinton; for books he could have recourse to a good library collected at Paul's Alley or the Barbican, where the church formally granted the use to the Society now instituted at the Norwich Coffee House for encouraging the ministry.

Stinton of course had other friends, and when on the accession of George I, the committee of the Three Denominations was revived, he was elected to the place left vacant by the death of

Stennett in 1713. He summoned a meeting of all Baptist London ministers for this matter, and his own journal enables us to add to the names already given:—Thomas Kerby of Goswell Street, John Maulden and John Savage at Mill Yard, John Taylor at Duke Street in the Southwark Park, David Rees now at Limehouse, Edward Elliott now at Wapping, John Skepp the successor of Crosley, Abraham Mulliner at White's Alley, Lewis Douglass at Virginia Street, John Noble at the Hall of the Tallow-chandlers, Joseph Jenkins at High Hall, and Ebenezer Wilson at the Turners' Hall. Out of this meeting grew at once a club to meet monthly at the Hannover Coffee House, and the Minutes of this club have been perused lately with great interest, especially as to Stinton's doings at first. He deliberately tried to draw together all the Baptists, ignoring the theological distinction of Particulars and Generals. But in the whole group we discern no more of any literary ability.

In Stinton's new capacity as one of the three Baptist leaders he was thrown into contact with the Congregational and Presbyterian leaders, including the famous Doctor Williams, whose library was destined to be such a treasure to all Nonconformists. Dr. Jeremiah Hunt was now pastor of a leading congregation at Pinners' Hall, containing both Baptists and Pædobaptists; among the former was the Hollis family. Thomas Hollis was greatly benefitting Harvard College in Massachusetts, and fortunately had some denominational and patriotic feeling. When in 1715 he gave a hundred guineas to the poor of fourteen Baptist churches, he chose Stinton as his almoner; next year he paid most of the expenses in building a baptistery at Paul's Alley, while Stinton with Foxwell and others united in repairing the old baptistery in Southwark.

During 1717 we find Stinton with Foxwell, Hodges, and Mulliner ordaining Joseph Burroughs at Paul's Alley, also joining with Burroughs, Gale, and Hodges in a letter to Bromsgrove on a minute point of Greek scholarship involved on the question of immersion. Though he personally had a friendly feeling to the General Baptists, his church this same year took a prominent part in founding the Particular Baptist Fund.

His life, so full of promise, and displaying a geniality consistent with a firm hold on essential truth, came to an abrupt and premature close in February 1718-9, eight days before the great synod at Salters' Hall which rent every denomination on the Arian controversy. A Particular Baptist minister conducted the funeral service in an Independent meeting house, and his body was laid to rest at the General Baptist burial ground in the Park.