

Bampfield's Plan for an Educated Ministry.

FRANCIS BAMPFIELD published his autobiography in 1681. He was of good county family, whose pedigree and arms were drawn out in the Rawlinson manuscript, B73 at the Bodleian Library. The ancient seat of Poltimore, near Exeter, now gives a title to the family. Francis was educated at Wadham College, Oxford, taking a long course of over seven years. He was a Royalist, but had imbibed a dislike to oaths, so was committed to jail at Dorchester for declining to take the oath of allegiance. Here he was won to Baptist principles, and thus formed one of the scanty band of highly-trained Baptist ministers who valued learning. The following extracts from the minutes of the church he founded will show how he strove to impress its value on his new associates. His marriage certificate in volume II., page 263, may be read first.

[“This account was taken” (clearly not verbatim) “out of a former Church-Book,” long since lost, “written with Mr. Francis Bampfield’s own hand, by me Jos: Stennett.”]

This Church of Christ of whose Affairs this Book contains a Record was founded on the 5th day of the first moneth. Vulgarly called March in the year 1675-6 by the Labour and Care of that Eminently Pious Minister of Christ M^r Francis Bampfield.

The persons who then Agreed to Joyn together in Church Co^munion according to the Order of the Gospel under the Conduct of the said M^r Francis Bampfield as their Pastor, Laid their Church-State upon y^e only

Sure Foundation, & agreed to Form & Regulate it by the only Certain Rule & Measure, Expressing the Nature of the Constitution of this Church in the Following Terms,

“ We own the LORD Jesus Christ to be the One
 “ & Only LORD & Lawgiver to our Souls &
 “ Consciences. And we own the Holy Scriptures
 “ of Truth as y^e One & only Rule of Faith
 “ Worship & Life, According to which we are
 “ to Judge of all our Cases.

Accordingly these Principles were Subscribed by the Pastor & Divers Brethren in the Behalf of the Rest. Whose names are as follow.

Francis Bampffield (Pastor)	James Humber
Thomas Pierce	John Belcher Jun.
William Mercer	Andrew Geddes
William Tovey	Samuel Thompson
James Warner	

[In 1677 Bampffield published a book with an extraordinary title, claiming that all useful sciences and profitable arts were taught in one book, the Bible. And he followed it up with other works, whose titles and contents are equally wonderful and abstruse. The important one for education is, “The House of Wisdom,” 1681. His activity was cut short by his arrest, and he died in prison during 1683.

[Into his church, however, had been attracted another pundit, and in 1685 Jehudah Stennett, Philebreus, advertised a Comprehensive Grammar; containing the most material and necessary Rules for the reading and attaining the Hebrew Tongue: whereunto was added, An English Interlineation of Psalm 29, and a grammatical Exercitation thereupon.

[On 14 October, 1686, the church reorganised, spending a day of prayer; Jehudah and Benjamin Stennett were members. Their father, Edward, pastor of the church at Wallingford, was invited to visit them. On

the 25th he administered the Lord's Supper to them, and his son Joseph joined the church. On 6 November Samuel Thompson and Joseph Stennett were asked to write out a record of recent proceedings. On the 28th they produced their record, which was signed, and drew up further minutes, whence it appears that Edward Stennett promised to come and help occasionally: he never was asked to be their pastor, and never was. Then follows this minute:—]

6) The Church, being informed that Mr Bampfield their late Pastor in his Last Will and Testament had given all his Books, both Written & Printed to them, to be employed & Used (as far as might be) to promote a Design of Training up Young Men in Scripture-Learning, spoken of in a book of his Intituled, the House of Wisdom, &c. With this Proviso, that if M^{rs} Bampfield his Wife wanted a Competency to maintain her, she Might Sell any or all of those books to Supply her Wants; but if otherwise, y^t they are wholly left to this Congregation for the Use above-mentioned: They thereupon Appointed Jehudah Stennett, William Mercer, Richard Denton, & Samuel Thompson, to go to M^{rs} Bampfield, & to Enquire further of her about the Matter, & to take Care that all Due means be Used to have the aforesaid Will fulfilled.

[After a meeting on 4 December.]

(Vulg.) The 12th Day of the 10th Moneth. A Church-meeting was held, wherein the following Matters past. . . .

3) Jehudah Stennett acquainted the Church, that he (with others appointed for that Purpose) had been with M^{rs} Bampfield to Enquire further about Mr Bampfield's Will, that she produc'd it to them, that the Purport of it was as they had been before Inform'd; & that they thought meet to Write to Mr Thomas Bampfield, he being Concern'd in the Will, to afford his Assistance

for the fulfilling of it, as he was therein Desir'd; that he had wrote a Letter to this Purpose, a Copy of which here follows.

London, Decemb 2^d 1686

Honored Sr,

By the Last Will of your Late Honored Brother, Mr Francis Bampfieid it dos appear, that upon Consideration that M^{ris} Bampfieid his Widdow shall be provided for with a Competency During her Natural Life, then that his Study of Books, both Printed and Written shall be a more Publick Use for the Benefit of Young Students; & that the Deceased Mr Bampfieid doth make it his Request, that you, & two more of his friends here in Town Chosen out from among the Rest, would Consult how this Good work might be promoted, as More at Large may be seen in the Will, a Copy of which M^{ris} Bampfieid tells me she thinks you have.

The Reasons why this work has not been hitherto gone about I shall not now Trouble you with; Only I presume to acquaint you that the Circumstances of Mr Bampfieid's Freinds are at this Time in better Order than ever since his Death, & now they do intend (God Willing) not to Leave any thing in their Power, Unattempted, to accomplish the Will of their late Honored Friend. And therefore, Sir, upon Conference with M^{ris} Bampfieid, and others, we Judge requisite to write to you, Intreating that, if your Occasions serve you not to come to Town, at least y^u would please to Contribute w^t assistance you can by Writing, y^t y^e will of y^e Testator may be accomplished. We defer the making any progress in the matter till we hear from you, w^{ch} we wish may be forthwith, for y^e thing has too long Lain Neglected. This, Sr, wth M^{ris} Bampfieid's & other Friend's service, is from

Y^r Humble Serv^t

JEHUDAH STENNETT.

4) He further inform'd the Church that he had received an Answer to this Letter, which is Inserted at the end of this Book [whence it was lost long since].

5) The Church after having Consider'd Mr Tho: Bampfild's Letter, Agreed to Write to him again, to press him to give his Assistance to Accomplish the Will of his Deceased Brother, & to acquaint him, that they waited only for his Concurrence therein, and that they did think themselves Oblig'd to Endeavour it with Diligence; & Appointed Jehudah Stennett to Draw up a Letter to this purpose.

[Thomas Bampfild had been Recorder of Exeter, member of the Commonwealth Parliament, Speaker of Richard Cromwell's Parliament. He lived at Dunkerton near Bath, & about 1663 blossomed out in extraordinary costume considering himself commissioned to found a new sect. Francis won him to Seventh-Day Baptist principles, & he subsided into quieter life.

[After a meeting on 26 December, the matter of the books came up again on 9 January.]

3) A Letter to Mr. Tho: Bampfild being prepar'd, was read, signed, & ordered to be sent, a Copy of which here follows,

London, Vulg. the 9th day of the
11th Moneth.

Honored Sir,

After Reading & Duly Considering the Letter you were pleas'd to send our Brother Stennett, We Judge fitt to make this Reply, that what progress he made in the affair he wrote to you about, was by the Consent & approbation of this Congregation; That the Principal Reason why no more Care has hitherto been taken in that affair, has been because of some Divisions, which are now happily in a Great Measure Composed, & we in a Likely way to answer Mr

Bampfield's Will, than Ever since his Death, if you please, according to his Will, to joyn with us in a Work, not only Laudable in it self, but Reasonable, as it is the Last Request of so Dear & Honourable a Friend. We do therefore Renew our Desires to you to Contribute your Assistance in the matter, For our parts we are Ready to do what we Can, & so far we shall be accepted of God, & acquitted of all Reasonable men. We wait for nothing but to be advised by you, & then we shall, according to the Will, set Time apart, & appoint Persons who may with your Assistance, be considering how to promote this Great & Good Work. This, Sir, with our Hearty Respects to you,

From the Congregation Gathered by Mr Francis Bampfield, deceased,

Signed, in the Name & by the Consent of the Whole, by us

THOMAS DOMINEL
WILLIAM MASON
WILLIAM MERCER
JEHUDAH STENNETT

[After a meeting on 15 January.]

(Vulg.) The 23^d Day of the 11th Moneth.

²) John Belcher jun, Damaris Bampfield [widow of Francis], Martha Squibb & [blank] Smith, Persons that had been formerly Joyned to this Congregation, manifested their Desire to walk therein in full Communion as now Reünited; and were accordingly Received.

[The church was not invited to the Assembly of Particular Baptists in September 1689. Meeting on the 29th, it noted with pleasure the steps taken] for the bringing up of Hopeful Young men in Learning Usefull for the Understanding of the Holy Scripture, in Order to their being set apart for the Work of the Ministry (such of them as should be thought

accomplish'd for it) & Defraying the Charge of Ministers Designed to be sent to preach the Gospel in several places of the Nation &c. . . .

This Church Hereupon appointed Thomas Dominel, John Jones & Joseph Stennett to go to the Place of Meeting of the afores^d Managers appointed by the Late General Assembly, & to acquaint them from this Church, That, Whereas in the Year Last past several of the Elders of divers Baptized Churches in London had Met to consult about the same things in substance w^{ch} had lately been resolved upon in the Late General Assembly, those afores^d Elders did then send a Letter Directed to this Church, desiring them to Assist in so Good a Work, and for that End to Depute some Person or Persons to meet with them in Order to Concert Measures for the Carrying it on; This Church did accordingly Depute Persons who from Time to Time met wth them as they had Desired; But the Great Distractions of the Nation occasion'd by the Late Great Revolution through [?] the Descent of the then Prince of Orange into England &c. putting a stop to the afores^d proceedings; This Church expected upon the Revival of the same Work again, to have been invited to Joyn their assistance again, Especialy when they heard so General an Invitation had been given to so many Baptized Churches in many parts of y^e Nation.

That, notwithstanding this Invitation has not been given to this Church, they see Good to Testifie their Readiness now again to Joyn in the s^d Good Work w^{ch} the above s^d Messengers of many Churches had resolved on, & to do w^t in them lyes for the Promotion of it, if their Assistance may be acceptable.

[On 13 October the deputation reported that the overtures were declined, and that no invitations had been issued to any Seventh-day-Sabbath church.

[On 4 March 1690-1 Joseph Stennett was ordained

as Teaching-Elder by the imposition of hands of John Belcher, Senior, characterised in the negotiations "as a Publique Messenger to all the Sabbath-Churches"; Hanserd Knollys spoke some words of exhortation, and Isaac Lamb preached a sermon. He proved to be a most able pastor, raising the church to great prosperity. On 25 June, 1692, he mooted the question of the library again, shortly after another assembly had been held, at which, however, he had not been present as a member.]

2) The Church . . . being further Inform'd y^t M^{ris} D. Bampfield was Likely to be Necessitated speedily to sell y^e s^d books, if not otherwise provided for. And that M^r Tho: Bampfield was willing, y^t these books should rather become y^e propriety of this Church, & of that walking wth M^r John Belcher Sen^r & y^t wth M^r Henry Soursby, provided these 3 Sabbath-keeping Churches would allow M^{ris} Bampfield a Competent Annuity during her Life, that the s^d books might be put to y^e publique use of promoting Scripture Learning amongst y^e s^d Churches. And y^t y^e s^d M^{ris} Bampfield approved of this Method very well. This Church approv'd also of y^e s^d Expedient, & Appointed Jo: Stennett Ben. Stennett & W^m Mason to Confer wth some principal men of y^e 2 above-nam'd Churches in y^e Name of this Church, about y^e s^d Matter, & to make y^e above-s^d offer to them.

[On 18 December the deputation reported that the other churches were unwilling to accept the proposals.

[In 1692 and 1693 Thomas Bampfield was publishing on the Sabbath question, eliciting three or four rejoinders: in the latter year he died, & his sister-in-law did not long survive him.]

Damaris Bampfield Deceased, y^e 6th day of y^e 12th moneth, 1693 [6 February, 1694.]

At a Church-meeting on y^e 3^d day of the week, vulg. the 25th day of the 3^d Moneth, 1697.

1) This Church being inform'd that a Considerable Number of M^r F. Bampfieid's books were left by M^{rs} D. Bampfieid at her decease to be dispos'd of according to her Husband's Will mention'd pag. 7 & 8. of this book for the promoting of Scripture-Learning &c. And Considering that M^r Fr. Bampfieid their Late Rev^d [note the phrase] Pastor had for ye aboves^d End ord^d in his Last will, y^t (in case his Wife should be provided for without being necessitated to sell the s^d books) they should be Comitted to the Care of 2 persons chosen from among & by this Church, together wth his Bro: M^r Tho: Bampfieid, (since Deceased) This Church accordingly chose 2 persons among themselves, viz., Joseph Stennett, and William Mason for the s^d purpose, & appointed them to demand the said books of M^r Jos: Davis one of M^{rs} Bampfieid's Executors, in whose Custody they were, and to consider how to dispose of them to promote the Good design of Mr. Fr: Bampfieid in his above-mentioned Will.

[After five other meetings.]

At a Church-meeting held on the 5th day of the 9th Moneth, 1697.

1) Joseph Stennett & William Mason reported that they had demanded M^r Bampfieid's Books (as ye Church had order'd) of M^r Joseph Davis; but y^t he refus'd to deliver them, pretending he had ye right of disposing them to ye end propos'd in M^r Bampfieid's Will. Whereupon it was thought convenient by the Church to refer this matter to further Consideration when John Belcher who was Joynt Executor with Mr. J. Davis to M^{rs} Bampfieid's Will, should be in London, he being now beyond the Sea.

[Belcher senior had died in 1695; Belcher junior had apparently gone to Rhode Island; certainly he never reappeared, and the matter was not revived during the period for which minutes are extant, down

to January 1703. Meantime Stennett had been asked to help at Paul's Alley, Barbican, after the death of Thomas Plant in 1693. Perhaps this facilitated the removal of a Mr. and Mrs. Bampffield to that church on 18 June, 1704. Two months earlier, Stennett had taken a leading part in reviving the London Baptist Association or "Assembly," when it was agreed among other things to educate pious young men for the ministry. Next year the Barbican Church moved, and the Assembly agreed, that Stennett be asked to write a History of Baptism, for which, however, he only made preparation. In 1709 the Barbican Church granted the use of their library to the Society at the Norwich Coffee-house for encouraging the ministry. The value of this library may be guessed from the fact that John Gale was called to the ministry by this church, and that he did what Stennett was aiming at, crossing swords with Dr. Wall about his "History of Infant Baptism." It would be interesting to know whether Bampffield's books were at last placed in this library.

[It does not seem generally known that the pioneer Baptist Academy to educate young men for the ministry was established at Trowbridge in Wilts., by John Davison, who had served the church as early as 1669, and was one of the pastors in 1714 when its minutes begin. as is told by Murch in his history of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West. When Davison died in 1721, Thomas Lucas succeeded him as pastor and as tutor of the academy. On 25 September, 1737, the Barbican Church, recognising that London was apathetic as to education, resolved that since a library was being founded at Trowbridge to help the training of young Baptist ministers, their books should be sorted, and suitable ones be sent to Lucas. If any of Bampffield's were available, the West country had a special fitness for them.]