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OF THE

# HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH,

TEWKESBURY.

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*By Thomas Wilkinson, sometime Pastor.*

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The origin of the Baptist Church at Tewkesbury is not known. It is lost in the obscurity of the far past. Its recorded history stretches back two hundred and thirty-six years, reckoning from the present year 1891. As at the beginning of that time it is found a regularly constituted Society, with its Elders, Pastors and Teachers, Deacons, and a considerable membership, it is but reasonable to conclude that it had existed some, perhaps many, years previously.

Tewkesbury is placed in the middle of the district which was largely the scene of the great religious movement in which Wickliffe bore so noble a part. His ashes cast into the Swift at Lutterworth, may—as has been eloquently suggested—have sped down the Avon, past Tewkesbury, into the Severn, and so to the sea, furnishing an emblem of the wide course of his doctrine in the world; but whatever may be said of the poetry of the emblem there can be no reasonable doubt that, as a fact, the doctrine of Wickliffe was borne hither.

It is well known that Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, whose ancestral seat lay at Almeley, beyond the Malvern Hills, himself a follower of Wickliffe, and eventually a martyr for the truth, employed many emissaries of the new faith who traversed this whole region. It would be strange if Tewkesbury, then an important and prosperous town, were unvisited by them. Doubtless these ardent Evangelists found their way here, and of the

inhabitants, Wickliffites and Lollards were not a few. This is the more likely, as one of Wickliffe's adversaries testified, in a somewhat exaggerated style no doubt, that of the people of England generally, one half were Lollards and the other half followers of the arch-heretic Wickliffe. One wonders what the Monks of the Abbey thought of them and of their preaching. It is imaginable that they felt a little uncomfortable, for these Gospellers were neither nice nor complimentary in their allusions to monkery.

The great Protestant died in his bed; but after his bones had lain thirty years in the chancel of his church, they were dug up, burnt, and the ashes cast into the stream hard by Sir John Oldcastle, his disciple and friend, was hung in chains over a slow fire and burnt to death on Christmas Day 1417. Thus the Monks had their revenge.

If it be true that "the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the church" it is not unlikely that the truth taught in Tewkesbury and thus confirmed by the martyrdom of its heroes took deep and abiding root, and propagated itself on the same spot, through successive generations, till the Reformation, and Puritanism gave it substantial and historic form. Possibly, by this clue, we might thread our way up through the obscurities of time to the days when the "Morning Star" of the Reformation began to shine, and connect ourselves with these early Nonconformists. Certainly, if we cannot trace our ecclesiastical succession to this dissenting apostle it were easy to establish a moral relationship to him. Much of his distinctive teaching is embodied in our beliefs. Although we cannot claim him as a Baptist, yet the Church Polity he favoured is that which as a denomination we have fixedly maintained, while his love of spiritual liberty, and his incessant appeal to the Word of God in all matters of Christian faith and practice, are the very inspiration and leading characteristic of our church-life. Many Lollards were Baptists and our early fathers in the Church at Tewkesbury may have counted their descent from these. The origin and continuity of our congregation may have been thus; and while no certainty attends the suggestion, no fatal improbability accompanies it either I think.

Our oldest Church Book (we have three) now in my custody, has been handed down to me by my predecessors in office through many successive generations. [These are now in the hands of the present Pastor, Rev. J. E. Brett.] It is to be hoped that with like reverent care it will be preserved through generations yet to come. It is an interesting volume alike in its outward appearance, its unique hand-writing, and its curious records. Its first date is "the 2nd day of the 3rd month, 1655." Under this date are set forth certain "articles of faith," sixteen in number, to which the Church at Tewkesbury gave its adhesion. Confessions of faith were somewhat the order of the day in those times. Already in 1611 the Baptists, with refugees in Holland from the tyranny of the English State Church, had published their faith comprised in 26 articles. Again in 1644 the rapid growth of Baptist opinion and the virulent attacks made on it occasioned another confession. This took no fewer than 52 elaborate articles to define. This confession was succeeded by several others down to the date of the "General (Baptist) Assembly" of 1689. By this time the Baptists of both sections of the denomination—general and particular—seem to have succeeded in getting their "views" fairly expressed, and with the publication of a Baptist Catechism at this latter date—together with 32 articles of faith and an appendix—the effort finally, in this form, ceased. The truth is these confessions were apologies. They were called for by the persistent attempts of opponents to credit, or discredit, them with the most monstrous notions and practices. They served to refute the calumnies which unscrupulous writers heaped upon Baptists, and to set forth their beliefs in a true light. "They were not creeds compulsorily imposed on the members of Churches. No one was required or bound to subscribe to them, and if adopted by any Church as the expression of its sentiments, all others were left free, and even a considerable latitude of judgment allowed in the bosom of the Church itself. They sought to reflect the existing harmony of sentiment, and the Scriptural orthodoxy of the communities whose pastors signed them; they left the phantom of uniformity to the unavailing search of an establishment." *Underhill.*

The Church at Tewkesbury was content with a confession of 16 articles. These are succinct and comprehensive and well studded moreover with references to the Scriptures. To the best of my belief they have never been published, and if I thought anybody would read them I would willingly transcribe them here; but I am afraid that in these days when "the old order changeth and giveth place to new"—when loose thinking and slippery theology form the "larger hope" of so many people, it would be useless trouble. At the risk nevertheless of their being sniffed at as musty I will give a sample of them in those articles which express our distinctive denominational conviction.

"Article 13—That all who profess faith in Christ and make the same appear by their fruits are the proper subjects of baptism.—Acts viii, 37.

(It is evident the "Revised Version" was not in vogue then)

"Article 14—That baptism is not by sprinkling but dipping of the person in the water representing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ."—Romans vi. 3-4, Col. ii. 12.

"Article 15—That persons so baptised ought to walk together by free consent as God shall give opportunity, in distinct Churches or assemblies of Zion, continuing in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayers as fellow members, caring one for another according to the will of God."—Acts ii. 42-46

In the 3rd month of 1655, this confession was formulated at Warwick and "unanimously agreed to by all the messengers of the Churches" then and there met. In the next month of the same year the assemblage was held at Moreton-in-the-Marsh, and the Churches represented and the object of their union are thus recorded.

"The agreement of certain Churches at our meeting together at Moreton-hin-Marsh (*sic*), the 26th day of the 4th month, 1655, for as much as the Churches at Warwick, Moreton-hin-Marsh, Bourton-on-the-Water, Twexbury, (*sic*), Hook Norton, Darby, and Alcester doo mutually acknowledge each other to be each Churches of Christ, and that it is their duty to hold a close communion one with another, according to the rule of His word, and for to be

helpful each to other as God shall give opportunitie and abilitie; and those Churches are now ——— (word undecipherable) to consider that they acknowledge each other, and are faithfully to hold such communion each with other, and to endeavour to be helpful each to other.”

- 1—In giving of advice after serious consultation and deliberation in matters and controversies doubtful to any particular Church, as plainly appeareth in the Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch.—Acts xv
- 2—In giving and receiving also in case of poverty and wante of any particular Church, as appeareth in the approved and due acting of the Churches of the Gentiles towards the Church at Jerusalem.—Romans xv. 26—27
- 3—In sending their gifted brethren to use their gifts for the edification of the Churches which need the same, as they shall see it seasonable, as the Church at Jerusalem sent Barnabus to Antioch.—Acts xi, 22
- 4—In a joint carrying on of any work of the Lord that is common to the Churches as they shall have opportunity to join therein to the glory of God as appeareth in 2nd Corinthians viii. 19
- 5—In watching over one another and considering one another for good in respect of purity of doctrine, exercise of love, and good conversation; they being all members of the same body of Christ, 1 Cor xii. 12, who therefore ought to have care one of another, 1 Cor xii. 29, especiall considering how the glory of God is concerned in their standing and their holy conversation”

And yet it is of such men a Presbyterian writer said “their spirit is clearly devilish”

In addition to the seven churches already mentioned, the Church at Cirencester is also named as being joined in this union. It is a long stretch from Derby to Cirencester, and presumably these were all the Churches of “like faith and order” then existent in that wide district. The meetings seem to have been held half-yearly, and then, as still, Whit-week and October were the seasons favoured for Association assemblage. Chapels or meeting houses, to use the more common and suitable term, had not then been generally erected, and accommodation for the

Association was found at old English hostelries or inns. Thus I find the King's Head at Moreton, and, at a later date, the Swan at Tewkesbury specified as the place of assembly. This, their necessity, was imputed to them by their enemies as a crime. In truth, they had no delight in ecclesiastical buildings, or in anything else that savoured to them of Popery, and had a grim satisfaction in expressed aversion to "steeple-houses." They would rather meet in a public-house.

We must imagine these primitive fathers of our churches mounted on horseback, exploring the winding lanes and cross-roads which intersected our broad Midland-shires to gain their appointed place and time of meeting. They were not whirled through space, as are their degenerate sons at the tail of a mad steam horse; nor even were their sober nags startled by the blare of the horn of a mail-coach rattling at demon speed along the highways; for mail coaches and highways were not yet invented. Their pace was sober, as their business certainly was serious. They came as they said "to do God's work," and there was neither perfunctoriness nor over-hurry in doing it. Their invitation specified "two days or three days" or "till the business be ended;" and I do not fancy that men who could preach for two or three hours at a stretch would curtail discussion or cut short the meeting. I can imagine few things more delightful than those long rides through the fragrant English land in sweet spring time or mellow autumn with the long godly confabulation in store or retrospect. Nor could they easily forget the scenes which these central Counties of England had witnessed in the few years previous, and in which it may be they had borne a part. It was a heroic age, and the men who ranged themselves on either side in the great civil strife which had just closed, were men of heroic type. Some of these now peaceful "Messengers of Churches," may peradventure have crossed swords with cavaliers on Marston Moor, or preached in camp at Newbury, or shared in the "crowning mercy" at Worcester. There is no unlikelihood in this, for it is well-known that Baptists—officers and men—formed a large part of Cromwell's Ironsides. Men they were, equally apt in cutting off heads in a cavalry charge or in adding heads

to an interminable sermon. They had aided Cromwell in laying the foundations, as they believed, of a lasting civil Commonwealth, and they now met together to lay in firm solidity, in studied order, in fair Christian simplicity, the foundation of those Free Churches—spiritual republics—in which we now spiritually dwell, and which, it is not too much to say, are the safety, honour, and hope of our country. The civil Commonwealth vanished, the spiritual remains; the one human, the other divine.

Our first authentic date—1655—gives, as a bare date, but little information. To some of our readers, perhaps, it is little more than just four figures. To those acquainted with the history of the period, its mention will produce a rush and throng of historic suggestions. It may be well, for the sake of the less informed, leaving for a little the direct history of the Church, to give some *indices* of the stirring and notable age in which it fairly emerged into light.

The year 1655 marks the middle of the undisputed rule of Cromwell, the zenith of his power, just as his rule marks, as we think, the highest point which the greatness of England has yet touched. His "crowning mercy," as he himself styled it, had been given him four years before in the victory of Worcester (September 3rd, 1651) won over the forces of Charles II; and Cromwell had yet three years of life before him. He died in 1658.

The war in which he and the Parliament unsheathed the sword was undoubtedly a war for civil freedom, but yet, even more, it was a war for religious liberty. The Bible produced it, as it has produced, and may produce, many another. Already, in the days of Elizabeth, it had been given to the English people, in several versions and in many editions. It was largely circulated and eagerly read. This carried the Reformation further than the ruling powers in Church and State were prepared for. Unordained men not only read the Bible, but, regardless of authority for or against them, began to preach its truths to their fellows. Multitudes were enlightened, many were converted, some were inspired. The prophecy of Joel was again fulfilled, and there were dreams and visions and prophesyings in such sort as England had never witnessed before. As of old, so now, some mocked

and said, "These men are full of new wine." And it was true, so they were, only that it was "the fiery wine of new ideas" of which they were replete. The spirits of the prophets, it is admitted, were not always subject to the prophets; and, doubtless the grand movement was marred and endangered by exaggeration and fanaticism. Advantage was taken of the extravagancies of a few to cast slanders on all ranked and stigmatised as "Sectaries." Samuel Butler (who, by the way, was born at Stremsam, a few miles from here) when the fear of Cromwell was no longer before his eyes, vomited forth his spleen upon Nonconformists in his "Hudibras"—a satire which we can all relish for its cleverness, but which every honest man must loathe for its slander. It was much enjoyed at the Court of the Restoration, its coarseness, no doubt, commending it to the royal taste. Dr. Featly, paying special attention to the Baptist "Sectaries" thus writes in his preface to the "Dipper dippt" (published in 1647). "This new year of new changes, never heard of in former ages, namely, of stables turned into temples, and I will beg leave to add temples turned into stables (as was St. Paul's and many more), stalls into quires, shopboards into communion tables, tubs into pulpits, aprons into linen ephods, and mechanics of the lowest rank into priests of the high places . . . on such a day such a brewer's clerk exerciseth, such a tailor expoundeth, such a waterman teacheth . . . cooks instead of mincing their meat fall upon a dividing of the word;" and Dr. Featly, evidently forgetting that his Master and the Master of us all, was a *mechanic of the lowest rank*, rails on, with the high scorn of a Judean Pharisee, much to the like effect. He might have added that a tinker, by the name of Bunyan, guilty hereafter of these disorders would write the "Pilgrim's Progress" directing thereby innumerable souls to heaven. The provision, however, that the tinker lad, then playing and cursing on the village green at Elstow, would write this divine classic, was given to no man in that day, least of all would it be revealed to the mocking spirit of an intolerant Anglican.

I have given the foregoing sample of the libellous literature of the day, to show with what mind the "generation of vipers" regarded the wonderful work of God



revealed before their eyes. Yet there can be no doubt that the age, which witnessed the Puritan Civil War, was the most religious which England has seen before or since. An eminent living author, writing with no theological bias, has said—"Landed proprietors, farmers, shopkeepers, nay apprentices and farm labourers, cared more about [even] abstract theological propositions than people now care about a big loaf or a free breakfast table." He also says—"Since the world began, there never was a time or place in which the word corresponded more closely to deed (or profession to practice), than in England, in the days of Cromwell;" and Hallam, the historian, has put on record his opinion that that generation "was more eminent for steady and scrupulous conscientiousness in private life than any, perhaps, that had come before it or has followed." This is but to say that practical godliness prevailed in social and in national life.

The Spirit of God indeed wrought mightily, and Churches of holy men and women were newly planted up and down the land, much to the horror of sticklers for uniformity. A portion of this horror was doubtless felt in Tewkesbury, when this "new-fangled and pestilent sect" arose in it, for it was in such times the Baptist Church assumed notable form, and of such persons it was composed

Persecution dogged them at every step—a petty, sneaking persecution. The Anglican Church, under the Stuarts, had not the robust cruelty of Rome to stamp out the movement with fagot and axe, but pursued Nonconformists with mean malignity. Branding, whipping, standing in the pillory, slitting of noses, grubbing up ears by the roots, were the choice punishments commended by that High Churchman and superfine Ritualist Archbishop Laud, sanctioned by the apostate Strafford, and their mutual master and friend Charles I. This did not crush, it only irritated, the high-minded English race; and in short time the retributive sword of a galled and outraged nation sheared off, on the scaffold, the heads of all three of them—Priest, Courtier, and King.

This King Charles I., with the conscientious and formal piety of the dullest bigot—yet cold-blooded, morose, cruel, relentless, treacherous, false—sought to

impose the rule and service of the Episcopal Church upon all his subjects (and afterwards canonised as a martyr because he blunderingly perished in the attempt) has, in the English monarchy, no resurrection, and even his memory has dropped from the calendar of saints; but Laud, who sought to make that same Episcopal Church the mere shadow of the Papacy, has a resurrection. He is now the model, and the praise, and the inspiration of modern Ritualists. They, like him, are seeking, in their sham finery and mock celebrations, and bastard ceremonies, to bring back into a Protestant Church—whose bread they eat—alike the grandeur and the darkness of mediæval Rome. These traitors are in no danger, now-a-days, of the axe that took off the head of Laud; but, if I am not mistaken in the mettle of Englishmen, when the death struggle between Nonconformity and Sacerdotalism, which with fateful certainty comes on (they are already dividing between them the moral forces of the nation), *then*, as in 1649, liberty of conscience will win. No more—although, following their true genius and bent, the Priesthood (of whatever Church) change their tactics of mean spitefulness for the yet meaner arts of back-stairs bribery and proselytism—no more will the English people with the Bible in their hands come under their intolerant and intolerable sway.

Before our fathers achieved their freedom the land was deluged with blood. Civil War, the most terrible of wars, especially when waged with the passionate obstinacy of the English race, raged over the three kingdoms for nine years. In that time were fought the great battles of Marston Moor, Newbury, Naseby, Tredah, Wexford, Dunbar, Preston, and Worcester, beside skirmishes, engagements, and sieges innumerable. The object was gained. Civil and religious liberty was secured. Cromwell—rightly styled Protector—stood the firm defender of liberty of conscience for all, frowning only on Papists, whom he regarded (and truly) the enemies of all liberty whatsoever. As he stood defending all Churches and sects from usurpation by one over the other, so his eagle eye swept the Continent of Europe to mark, and, if need be, to punish any infringement of the grand right of liberty which it was as his own life to uphold, a genuine

conqueror of Christian freedom and an invincible Protector of his conquest

When Cromwell died in 1658, our little Baptist Association in the Midlands ceased to meet, and the fortunes of the Church at Tewkesbury underwent a sudden change.

“Then had the Churches rest. . . . and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.” This might be said of the Churches throughout England for the few years immediately preceding the death of the great Protector. The season of quiet, and of silent growth was, however, quickly over. The feeble hands of Richard Cromwell had no sooner grasped the reins of government, in succession to his father, than his incompetence to rule was manifest, and he retired into private life with the pity rather than the contempt of the nation. A few unscrupulous men with the army at their back, changed at once the destinies of the country. A revolution took place. The English Republic, or Commonwealth, became again a monarchy. The profligate son of the late beheaded King was recalled from exile. The promises of religious liberty for all his subjects which he readily made he as readily broke. No sooner was Charles II. seated on the throne, surrounded by the ribald crew who flocked to him, than he let loose all the furies of religious hate, vindictiveness, and revenge, which the iron hand of Cromwell had kept pent up during his time; and these, not tamed, but rather incensed by their long restraint, burst forth to desolate the Church of God. Not only Nonconformity, but religion and even virtue and common decency were threatened with extinction.

There came now an end to the pleasant peregrinations of the Messengers of the Churches to consult together on the interests of their Zion; and there is an end also to the minutes of association in our Church Book. The last meeting for the time being was held at Gloucester “on the 5th and 6th days of October, 1658.” (Cromwell died in the month previous.) The next meeting was apparently in 1698, 40 years afterwards. Meanwhile came the long struggle of the State Church with Nonconformity in an attempt by force to strangle it—a struggle in which endurance and suffering prevailed, and in which the

Establishment, as such, received by its own hand, its death-wound. The pressure to enforce uniformity was accompanied throughout by an ever widening breach, and ended, so far as it may be said to be ended, in forcing out of uniformity the bulk of the nation. It is now seen by all parties that the force and the form of pressure used—which indeed constitute *oppression*—must be not merely relaxed, but wholly taken away from the Church, and that the rift and displacement in religious society must be closed and straightened by inner attraction and not by outward compulsion. In a word that uniformity, if ever attained, must be a result of unity.

The next entries in our Church Book are in cypher. The date is the 28th of the 4th month, 1663. By this time the fatal struggle had begun. The Parliament of Charles had passed a series of Acts which excluded Non-conformists from Corporations, which made public worship by them a crime, and which banished their ministers from corporate cities and parliamentary boroughs. Under the operation of the Act of Uniformity, 2,000 godly ministers were turned out of Church and home. In Scotland the dragoons of the infamous Claverhouse were endeavouring to force Episcopacy on the Covenanters.

I have deciphered the entry in the Church Book of 1663, and find it is the list of the names of the members of the Church at that date. There are 35 men and 68 women (103 in all) with 2 elders and 3 deacons. I imagine that these are put in cypher for the purpose of concealment, for persecution raged with especial violence at that time.

A great part of the interest of the "Broadmead Records" is in the detail of the measures taken by spies, informers, and magistrates to suppress the meetings of the Church; and of the ingenious and sometimes amusing devices of the Church to maintain them. Our Church Book has no such detail, but it contains melancholy proof that such persecution was suffered in the recorded exclusion of some who fainted under the trial. Here is an instance.

"Edmund Jennings, of Hanley, having been in com-

munion with us for several years, not only profest but preacht separation from the world . . . did also when persecution arose for truth's sake depart back again to the world's assemblies, and sat down under their ministry to the denying of his former profession and preaching, and also slighted and neglected the Church assemblies, and being oft exhorted continued stubborn and went worse and worse under admonition, refusing to return so that after three years' waiting we were necessitated to cut him off from the congregation of the Lord's people which by a joint consent of the Church was performed on the 6th November, 1664."

Some other instances of apostacy, in the case of both men and women, are recorded in the Church Book, visited in like manner by exclusion. When we remember the terrors of the Conventicle Act, passed in this very year of 1664, we need feel no surprise that some went back and walked no more with the disciples, but we may rather admire the fortitude of those—the large majority—who continued stedfast. "It was enacted that if any person should be present at any assembly, conventicle, or meeting under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion in other manner than is allowed by the liturgy or practice of the Church of England; or if any person shall suffer any such meeting in his house, barn, yard, woods, or grounds, they should for the first and second offence be thrown into jail or fined; for the third offence transported for seven years or fined a hundred pounds; and in case of returning or escape after such transportation, death without the benefit of clergy." How the lower clergy felt and acted in that time may be surmised from the avowed wish of one of their Bishops (Peterborough) that Nonconformists instead of being fined should be sold as slaves. The Primate (Sheldon) issued a circular commanding that all offenders should be brought to punishment. Church and State acted well together in the holy crusade. Troops, both horse and foot, patrolled the country to break up religious meetings and arrest worshippers. Spies and informers multiplied like the frogs of Egypt, and like

them, were to be found everywhere. Magistrates were kept unwontedly busy, and sheriff's officers were ever alert for their prey. The jails were filled, and not fewer than sixty thousand prisoners—godly men and women—perished in them. Cold, starvation, fever, and plague transmitted them quickly to heaven. Thousands of families were ruined by excessive fines and by distraint on their goods. Thousands more fled across sea, joining in America the colony of the May Flower, which twenty-five years before had fled from the same shores and under the like compulsion.

—“They sought what there they found \*  
Freedom to worship God.”

What befel the Church at Tewkesbury, during the next twenty or thirty years of desolation, I cannot tell, except that it continued steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. That it adhered to the exercise of a wholesome discipline of its members, is in evidence; and it must therefore in spite of all efforts for its dispersion, have held its meetings—probably in great fear and secrecy. Of its ministers or elders during this period I find no trace. In 1655 its messengers to the Association were John Fluck, Thomas Smith, and William Haines. Whether any of these were elders, *i.e.*, ministers, does not appear; but in 1663, eight years later, John Cowell and John Brian held that office, and at the same date it is recorded that “John White was called to the exercise of his gift”—the gift of preaching probably. Not till the time of the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 do we come on the name of another minister. The “Five Mile Act” had meanwhile done its work. That infamous statute, passed while Parliament sat at Oxford, for fear of the great plague in London, banished all Non-conformist ministers five miles from any city, town, or borough that sent members to Parliament, and five miles from any place whatsoever where they had at any time, in a number of years past, preached. This savage law would of course take effect in Tewkesbury, and if the Church had a minister he was either lying in prison for disobedience, as was John Bunyan and hundreds of other pastors, or he was banished from the place and somewhere concealed. From his concealment he may have stolen into

Tewkesbury at the dead of night, preached, baptised, observed with the Church the Lord's Supper, and have ridden off twenty or thirty miles before day-dawn. This was no uncommon freak of those humorous men who thought it right to obey God rather than men. The danger they ran must have given zest to their adventure, and some piquancy to their preaching. The services, one would say, would likely be interesting to all concerned. The minister would not drone, and the people would not sleep. Their purpose was serious. They gathered in eagerness and awe to feed on hidden manna. Their service could be no frivolity, or entertainment, but solemn, and grand, as a passover supper, eaten with haste, and with the staff in their hand.

In the year 1663 mention is made in the Church Book of "Sabbath Keepers" in the Church.

The weary years of persecution rolled slowly away. With scarcely thinned ranks, and with undaunted front, the Church held its own. The "merry monarch" had died, his death presenting a scene in pitiable but consistent contrast to his gay and reckless life. James II., his Papist brother, had fled from his angry subjects, and the "glorious Protestant Revolution" took place. This was just 30 years after Cromwell's death in 1688. Immediately we find another recognised Baptist minister at Tewkesbury. Mr. Eleazer Herringe, a yeoman of Apperley, held that office. He, with Mr. Edward Canter, represented the Church in the famous "General Assembly" in London, held in 1689. Mr. Herringe died in 1694, and his tomb in the old graveyard in Church Street "remains with us to this day." He was succeeded by Mr. Joseph Price. He was dismissed to the Church at Tewkesbury, from that at Leominster, in the year 1695. During the term of his pastorate, if not before, association meetings appear to have been resumed, and I find that the Association met at the Swan in Tewkesbury on June 1st, 1699. The Swan thus seems to be an old establishment among us. This, let me remind my readers, was two years before the accession of Queen Anne—seven years before the union between England and Scotland, four years before the birth of John Wesley. Milton had lain in his grave, St. Giles' Church, only 25 years; Marlborough had to wait three years for

see letters from Thos. Lewis  
herewith

*See  
letters  
referred to  
his  
tomb.*

the victory of Blenheim; Dryden had yet a year of suffering life before him; and it would take Sir Christopher Wren yet ten years to finish St. Paul's Cathedral. In this general setting this Baptist meeting at the Swan may be fixed; and we may easily imagine the honoured Pastor of the Church, very busy about the Inn, on that first day of June. In 1721 Mr. Price died, and in the next year, his successor, Mr. Thomas Perks, was ordained. The service of ordination (a very solemn, and a very formal matter in those times) was celebrated by Mr. Thomas Holder, of Leominster, and Mr. Isaac Pointing, of Worcester. Mr. Perks died in 1750. The next Minister was Mr John Haydon. He was dismissed by letter from the Church at Horsley in 1752. He went to Westmancote in 1771, resuscitated that ancient Church, built a Chapel and Minister's house, and endowed the ministry there by his will. Two or three of his sermons were published, and some copies are still extant. He appears to have been a good and able man. He died at Pershore in 1782.

From the first a branch of the Tewkesbury Church existed in Cheltenham, then a small hamlet. In the year 1738 Mr. Benjamin Barnes was called, by the Church at Tewkesbury, to preach the gospel, and to supply that part of it which met at Cheltenham. The record is curious, as shewing the view the Church held, of its claim on the gifts, and service of its members, and of its right to direct, and control, them in their spiritual work. It runs thus: "Memdm Oct. 13, 1738—that Benjamin Barnes, of Cheltenham, was at ye Church-meeting in Tewkesbury, after seeking the Lord by prayer, solemnly called to preach the Gospel in the Church he belongs unto, and also to preach elsewhere if providence permit, but with this restriction not to go any whither without advising the friends at Cheltenham before he go, nor to leave the people without their consent.

Under date, June 20, 1753—the year after Mr. Haydon's settlement—the following record is made—"It was agreed some time since, that the following members of this Church, should have liberty to form themselves into a distinct Church, viz., [Here comes a list of 21 names, 4 men, and 17 women]. It was likewise agreed, that our friends at Cheltenham, should have that part of the estate belonging



to this Church, which lies in or near Cheltenham, for their own separate use, so long as they apply the profits arising from it to the use designed by the donors." The deed of the property, bearing date 7th December, 1742, was handed over to the Cheltenham people, and a paper writing was made, dated April 9th. 1753, and also handed over to them, which relates that "the Trustees and principal members of the Church at Tewkesbury, of the Denomination of Baptists, meeting at Tewkesbury, aforesaid, so far as in them lay, did promise for themselves and their successors, that the rents and profits to arise from the estate so granted by the above-mentioned Deed of the 7th December, 1742, should be, from time to time, received, and applied, by the Trustees and principal members of the Baptist Church constituted, or which should be constituted at Cheltenham, and publicly meet there as a Church and congregation for the use, benefit, and the relief of the poor belonging to such congregation." *Vide* Report of the Charity Commission for 1829. This property greatly enhanced in value by the increase of the town, is now in the hands of the "Old Bethel" Church, which is the mother Church of all the Cheltenham Baptist Churches.

The Church at Cheltenham thus formally established, and somewhat irregularly endowed, maintained for some years a feeble and precarious existence. They had no pastor, and the few members of the Church were used to walk over from Cheltenham to Tewkesbury (eight or nine miles) for the monthly observance of the Lord's Supper. Their first regular minister, Mr. Dunscombe, came to them from Bristol College in 1765. Thenceforward although struggling with adversity, and weakened by some internal discords, the Church prospered. Still so late as the year 1818 the then Pastor wrote (see *Baptist Magazine* for that year). "The Baptist interest at Cheltenham has always been small, although it has existed considerably more than a century. Its present place of worship is by no means favourable for a respectable congregation, either as to dimensions or appearance. It would be very desirable if any measures could be adopted for the revival of the Church, especially as Cheltenham is become one of the most fashionable watering places in the kingdom, and its inhabitants, in consequence thereof, most rapidly increasing." This pious wish has been ful-

filled. There are in Cheltenham now (1882), I believe, four or five Baptists Congregations, with perhaps one thousand members, and chapel accommodation of four thousand sittings, with several out-stations and large Sunday Schools. "The little one has become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation."

The vicissitudes of Christian Churches correspond very much with the growth and change of the populations among which they are placed; and in few instances are these vicissitudes more striking than in the contrasted case of the Church of Tewkesbury and its original offshoot at Cheltenham. Tewkesbury has declined from its ancient importance, as a seat of considerable manufacture and traffic to a mere relic of antiquity, with decayed prosperity, and dwindling population. Once on the main road between Bristol and the North, with twenty or thirty stage and mail coaches clattering daily through its streets and changing horses and bustling passengers at its numerous inns, it is visited now—if at all—by people curious in old houses, or by stray pilgrims to its old battle-field or venerable Abbey. Cheltenham, meanwhile, has emerged from a hamlet into dimensions beyond the capital of its county, and the little river Chelt on each bank of which rustic cottages and gardens sat and smiled has become the *cloaca maxima* of a population of 40,000 people. Correspondingly the Church at Tewkesbury, the parent and stock of other Churches, with lessened relative influence and resource, holds on, as it can, the tenor of its way, whilst the tiny branch at Cheltenham (which first met in a malt house) has sprung into vigour, and multiplies its fruit and seed. In this divine order of change and progress there is much cause for admiration and thanksgiving. If our Lord sometimes, in displeasure, removes the candlestick out of its place, because of the lack of conserving oil, He sometimes also, in love, transfers the light, for its wider diffusion, and in commendation of the faithfulness by which it has been kept alive.

The number of members of the Church at Tewkesbury, diminished by the separate formation of the Church at Cheltenham, was in Mr. Haydon's time, about sixty. In the pastorate of his successor, Mr. Thomas Hiller, it received considerable increase. Mr. Hiller was dismissed from the Church in London under the pastoral care of Mr.

Booth on the 17th September, 1771, and was ordained Pastor of the Church at Tewkesbury on the 26th of the same month, Mr. Hugh Evans and Mr. Thomas, of Bristol, with Dr. Ash, of Pershore, taking part in the service. He was a Sabbath-keeper, and served the Church at Natton as well as the Church at Tewkesbury. He died universally esteemed and greatly regretted on June 27th, 1790. He left his library for the use of his successors in the ministry. This library, which consists chiefly of theological works now for the most part superseded, was at a subsequent date divided; part of it being placed in the Chapel at Natton, and the remaining part left in the custody of the minister for the time being of the Church at Tewkesbury. So clumsily was the division made that parts of the same works were divided to each lot. The several portions are now re-united in my possession. [This library has been again divided. The part allotted to Natton has been replaced in the Chapel there, and the part allotted to Tewkesbury is in the possession of the present minister. This latter part has been augmented by a number of volumes formerly belonging to the Rev. Daniel Trotman, presented by the late Miss Trotman. These are marked "D.T."] Not, however, complete as when first bequeathed; for it is known that, owing to the carelessness, or something worse, of the presumed custodians of one of the sets, some rare volumes have been lost. I would willingly give a reward for the restoration of "Canne's Bible" and the old Natton Church Book. Among the books is one bound in vellum, which is Mr. Hiller's record of all the texts he preached from during his ministry both at Tewkesbury and at Natton. Some other personal relics of him are extant in the town.

The next minister was Mr. John Davis. He was received as a Member of the Church by letter from the Church at Moleston in Pembrokeshire, and was ordained Pastor of the Church May 29th, 1792. I have conversed with some old people, who attended his ministry, in the old Chapel in Church Street. He was not a discreet man; and in October, 1802, he was removed from office, for some improprieties of conduct. Some of the members of the Church, however, clave to him on his dismissal, and were themselves, in consequence, excluded communion.

Some of these were afterwards restored. In these untoward circumstances, the Church was happy in obtaining the ministerial and pastoral services of Mr. Daniel Trotman, whose high character and prudent behaviour, together with his devoted labour, were for 40 years thereafter, a source of strength and wholesome influence to the Church he served. The following I copy from an account in Mr. Trotman's own handwriting, "Mr. Daniel Trotman came in January, 1803, and was received by letter from the Church at Crockerton, Wilts (late under the pastoral care of Mr. John Clarke, of Frome, Somerset), and was ordained pastor of the Church September 8th, 1803. Dr. Ryland, of Bristol, delivered an important charge from Eph. iv. 15. Mr. Morgan, of Birmingham, affectionately addressed the people from Rom. xv. 29. Mr. Williams, of Cheltenham, read the Scriptures, and gave out the hymns; Mr. Butterworth, of Evesham, delivered the introductory discourse, asked the questions, received the confession, and offered up the ordination prayer; Mr. Osborne, of Worcester, closed the whole in prayer. The services were profitable." This took place in the old Chapel in Church Street, where Mr. Trotman began his ministry. The regular services of the Church were, however, not much longer to be held there. Mr. Trotman writes:—"Our meeting-house being very old, much out of order, and too small to accommodate those who would attend, a purchase of ground was made in Barton Street, and a new meeting-house begun September, 1804, was opened June 21, 1805. Mr. Jay, of Bath, preached in the morning from Math. xviii. 20; Dr. Ryland, of Bristol, in the afternoon from Hag. i. 14; Mr. Belsher, of Worcester, in the evening from Heb. i. 8-9. The services of the day truly pleasing and profitable." The names of the men who met with Mr. Trotman, in the old Chapel, to devise means for the erection of the new one, are not yet wholly forgotten in the town. Among them are Thomas Caddick, Daniel Merrill, Peter Oakley, Samuel Jones, John Merrill, William Straford, Abraham Harris, James Lewis. These, with others, formed the "Building and Inspecting Committee." Their numerous meetings and resolutions were duly recorded, and are still extant. They were content to build a substantial edifice down the passage of the old "Star and Garter" on the site of the stables and "cock-pit;" no other site to be had,

it is said, for "love or money." The building, commodious in nearly all respects for its purposes, is not only behind the street, as it always was, but now also "behind the times." No doubt the Church will come to the front by-and-bye. Mr. Trotman and his friends were much helped both by the advice and money of E. Ransford, Esq., of Bristol, who although removed from Tewkesbury, showed a kindly interest in the advancement of the Church with which his family had been long and honourably associated. The "Vestry" then erected was small, and in the year 1839, the present Schoolrooms were built in its place, at a cost of about £500. Of this sum Mr. Caddick gave £300. The strength of the structure, and its uniformity with the Chapel, seem to have been more considered than its suitability for teaching purposes, leaving still a large room for the common assemblage of the children—a need to be supplied. [This need has been met, a commodious room having been built and the schoolrooms turned into class-rooms, at a cost of about £600, in the year 1883.] The Sunday School—which was the first established in the town—was originally taught in the galleries of the Chapel, and there the children sat during service as they do now. Some of our friends can remember the long leaded windows which ran up behind these galleries and the admirable way in which they let in the rain and served for ventilation through their crevices. The sight of them, and of the rows of children in the pews, and the white-headed teachers armed with canes, is present to the memory of some who were young then; and the loss of it all (their youth included probably) is as much regretted as the memory of it is fresh. These dear old windows were replaced by new ones, and other alterations in the Chapel made in 1853 at a cost of about £130.

As I have now come to times within the recollection of many persons now living, I may only further add that Mr. Trotman resigned his office of Pastor in April, 1843; that for the last six years of his ministry he was aided in his work by Mr. Jessie Hewett (whose sainted memory is still dear to many members of the Church) and by Mr. John Berg my immediate predecessor. Mr. Berg resigned his office in March, 1851, and in December of the same year I acceded to the pastorate. [My pastorate was cut short by sudden and severe affliction, and ended in June, 1885.]

## ADDENDA BY THE PUBLISHER.

On the 19th June, 1885, the Rev. T. Wilkinson sent in his resignation of the pastorate, but the Church decided that he should re-consider it, and suggested to him that a young minister should be engaged as assistant. This suggestion was fully considered, but Mr. Wilkinson thought the best interests of the Church would be served by his complete retirement. In Nov., 1885, an unanimous invitation was sent to the Rev. A. Graham, of the Pastor's College, London, and accepted by him. Mr. Graham commenced his ministry on January 3rd, 1886, and held the office of pastor four years, when he resigned, having accepted a call to Pembury, near Tunbridge Wells. In March, 1890, the Church unanimously invited Mr. E. Brett, of Eastcombe, to become their pastor. Mr. Brett commenced his labours on Sunday, May 12th, 1890.

*Trinity Chapel*

COPY OF LETTER TO THE CHURCH BY THE  
LATE ABRAHAM BOOTH.

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The Church of Christ under the Pastoral Care of A<sup>B</sup>M. Booth assembling in Goodman's-Fields, London, To the Church of Christ of the same Faith and Order, late under the Pastoral Care of Mr. John Hayden, at Tewxbury in Gloucestershire, send christian Salutations.

Beloved in the Lord.

The Lord having been pleased, by a series of providences, to remove from us to you our well-beloved brother Mr. Thomas Hiller, a member in full communion with us, and, while with us, of honourable Conversation; and he having signified to us his desire of having a Dismission to you, in order to his being settled with you as a Pastor; we do, with our warmest wishes for his usefulness and comfort among you, recommend and dismiss him to you; declaring, that when you shall receive him into your Communion, his visible relation to us, as a Church, will entirely cease. And we earnestly pray, that the great Head of the Church would make him abundantly useful in building you up in your most holy faith, and in bringing many to a knowledge of the truth. And now, commending you to God and the word of His Grace, we subscribe ourselves, and remain, your affectionate Brethren in the Lord,

Signed at our Church-Meeting, Sept. 17, 1771, on behalf of the whole Church, by

A. BOOTH, Pastor.

STEPN. WILLIAMS

RCD. TOMKINS,

WM. TAYLOR,

} Deacons

The original may be seen hung up in the vestry of the Tewkesbury Baptist Chapel.

Verse on  
the Grace Stone of  
John Cowell

His glass being run to rest  
hees gone  
Who was a labourer in the  
Ministry  
Swimmers unto Christ for to  
bring Home  
In Opening of the Gospel  
Mystery.