

## The Origin of the General Baptist Missionary Society.

*By the kindness of Mr. F. C. Carter, antiquarian book-seller of Middle Lane, Hornsey, we have been able to obtain possession of the Minute Book of the Committee of the General Baptist Missionary Society, containing the Minutes from 1816, the year of its inception, to 1861. The first secretary was J. G. Pike, who, at the instruction of the Committee, prefaced the Minutes with an account of the Society's origin. We print the substance of his account. It will be seen that he was ignorant of the work done in Jamaica about 1793, for which see pages 168, 169 of this volume.*

THE Society arose in 1816. Some members of the New Connection of General Baptists had long felt a desire to see a society for propagating the gospel among the heathen established by churches of that Connexion. The writer of these lines has little acquaintance, from personal observation, with what passed in the Connexion previously to 1809; but thinks that he has seen a statement, that a case respecting Foreign Missions was sent from the church at Castle Donnington to a Conference or an Association before that time. If this were the case no visible effect seems to have followed. In 1809 an anonymous letter on the subject of establishing a Missionary Society was read at the Association at Quorndon. This letter appeared to excite some attention. Mr. Freestone spoke of it in terms of high commendation, and Mr. B. Pollard observed that he could almost have sold the coat from his back for the Missionary cause, or to that effect. The letter was printed in the *Repository* No. 17.

In 1813 a question to the following effect was presented as from the Church at Friar Lane, Leicester, to the Conference at Derby: "Ought not the General Baptists to exert themselves as much as they can in establishing, though on ever so small a scale, a mission of their own?" It must not, however, be inferred from this circumstance that that church was very hearty in the cause, which does not appear by any means to have been the case. It is rather believed that the question was brought forward by the desire of an intimate acquaintance

of the minister of Friar Lane. In 1813 two letters appeared in the *Repository* on the importance of a mission to the heathen. About 1812 the present secretary of the Society applied to Mr. Fuller, the venerated secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, to know if that Society would employ as a missionary a person who might be a member of a church belonging to the General Baptists. His answer amounted to a negative. About 1814 and 1815 the Independents formed a Society for the counties of Derby, Nottingham, and Leicester, auxiliary to the London Missionary Society. The same person again applied to Mr. Fuller suggesting the formation of an auxiliary Baptist Missionary Society which should include both the bodies of Baptists, denominated General and Particular. . . . The answer to this proposal was most decidedly unfavourable. It now remained for the friends of the heathen among the General Baptists to see a little done among themselves for the support of the missionary cause as carried on by others, or to make a fresh attempt at the formation of a missionary society in their own Connexion.

In the early part of 1816 another letter, calling for the establishment of such a society appeared in the *Repository*. This letter, which it is conceived came from the same hand as those already mentioned, seems to have had some effect. The subject of a missionary society was taken up by the Lincolnshire Conference. The letter alluded to was read, if the writer does not much mistake, at a church meeting of the then undivided church at Stoney Street, Nottingham, and a case from that Church was presented to a full Conference at Wimeswold, June 4, 1816, requesting the Conference to take into consideration the propriety of undertaking a foreign mission. After some discussion of the subject, which gave an unusual degree of interest to the meeting, it was resolved that the Conference recommended it to the most serious consideration of the Body at the next Association. It was also determined that a copy of the resolution should be sent to every Church previously to the Association.

The subject was according taken up at the Association at Boston, and though the design met with some opposition, yet the following was the result.

[Here follows a newspaper cutting, apparently from the *Repository*, saying that at a meeting held on June 26, 1816, at Boston, the Society was formed, giving the resolutions defining membership, etc., and the names of the committee then appointed, as follows:—All ministers of subscribing Churches, together with John Ashwell, Esq., and Messrs. F. Boot, James Smith, Joseph Saunders, Thos. Bennett of *Nottingham*, John Heard of *London*, Thos. Small of *Boston*, Wm. Stranger Jr. of *Fleet*, Butters of *Spalding*, Ewen of *Tydd*, Rd. Clarke of *Wisbech*, Jerrom of *Diseworth*, John Pegg of *Melbourn*, Ashdowne of *Louth*,

Stranger of *Tydd*, J. Nicholson of *Halifax*, W. Ingham of *Hep-tonstall Slack*, Joseph Ewen of *March*, Cotterell of *Birmingham*, George Wilkies of *Derby*, Joseph Claypon, Esq.; and Joseph Smith of *Boston*, Massey of *Ibstock*, Javis Miller of *Loughborough*, White of *Cotes*, J. Bennett of *Hoton Mills*, Wm. Stevenson of *Wimeswould*, John Gamble of *Quorndon*, Fred Deacon of *Leicester*, Bakewell Snr. and John Dunncliffe of *Castle Donnington*, West of *Ilkiston*, Adam Taylor of *London*, Newberry of *Hugglescote*, Thos. Green and John Noble of *Boston*, Rd. Everard of *Spalding*, Hulse of *Hinckley*, John Taylor of *Duffield*, with Mr. Pike of *Derby* to act as secretary, and Mr. Robert Seals of *Nottingham* as Treasurer.]

Soon after the meeting at which the preceding resolutions were adopted, a small tract was drawn up for publication, urging the importance of missions in general, and calling for support for the new society.

[This was adopted at a Committee meeting held at Nottingham August 22, 1816, 5,000 copies being printed.]

In September this was published as the Address of the Committee, and a great part of the edition was soon sent to different Churches. It formed a tract of twenty pages, 12mo.

Though a pleasing spirit on behalf of the missionary cause had seemed apparent at the meetings at *Wimeswould* and *Boston*, yet for a length of time after this the general appearance of things was dark and gloomy. Some who subsequently have become zealous supporters of the Society drooped in despondency from the magnitude of the undertaking. Several ministers who had spoken publicly in its favour did nothing more than speak, and two of them became its opponents rather than friends. A few Churches, however, became its supporters. The Church at *Castle Donnington* made a collection before the Society was actually formed. At *Derby*, about Michaelmas, a Missionary Association was formed which soon had an income of £30 a year. Mr. Massey of *Ibstock* exerted himself amongst his friends at *Barton* and gained a number of annual subscribers, so that at the end of the first year he paid about £18 to the Treasurer. At *Birmingham* a Missionary Association was formed about June, 1817. The produce of this Association for the first year was £20 14s. 10½d.

On June 24, 1817, the first annual meeting of the Society was held, but little had been done in the course of the preceding year, and few were present, not probably one quarter so many as had been present the preceding year at *Wimeswould*. The subjoined report was read and some observations made by different speakers, and thin as was the meeting it had some beneficent effect, as something that was then said tended to remove the fears and doubts of a minister (Mr. Stevenson), who

has since become one of the most zealous, laborious, and able advocates of the Society.

[Here is attached in print the first Report, bearing date June 24, 1817.]

The auxiliary society mentioned in this report as having been formed in London issued in nothing, and probably was never really formed but mentioned through a mistake. Those mentioned at Spalding and Wisbech were formed in the following year. The product of that at Spalding for the first year was about £42, of that at Wisbech about £30. In the first year of the Society's existence about £3 3s. Od. were raised for it at Sutterton, and £7 4s. Od. at Duffield and Shottle by a public collection. A small sum was also collected at Cauldwell. Before the unhappy dispute broke out at Nottingham about £15 was collected for the Society by Mrs. Astle and Mrs. Sands, and much more was promised, but for a time discord paralyzed exertion there. At Loughborough, in the spring of 1817 or sooner, a few young female friends began to patronize the Society, and though at first they did not meet the encouragement they deserved, yet they laid the foundation of what has since become a flourishing and productive association.

On the whole, however, appearances at this time were very discouraging. Perhaps the Lord allowed the cause to droop for a time that His hand might be more visible in any subsequent success. Nevertheless a few friends kept the Society in view. In 1817 Mr. Jarrom of Wisbech pointed out Mr. Peggs and Mr. Bampton as persons whom he thought suited for the missionary work. An extract from his letter which was afterwards published is here subjoined.

[The letter bears date November 25, 1817.]

It appeared evident at this time that the Society was greatly in want of an active Committee. The persons at first named were so scattered that it was very difficult to bring them to act together, and many of them never concerned themselves about the Society. The cause continued to languish: little was done. At length one of the Committee (Mr. Parkinson) and the secretary resolved on sending the following circular:

[The circular (1818) called a meeting of those "disposed in earnest to favour this infant cause" at General Baptist Chapel, Loughborough.]

At the appointed time a few persons assembled, and almost from that time the missionary cause began to revive.

The following resolutions were adopted:

1. That a quarterly paper, containing general missionary information and particulars respecting our infant society, be published; not to exceed eight pages, but alternately to be eight and four pages. . . .

2. That the secretary and committee obtain information respecting Malabar and the island of Borneo.

4. That the Society write to Mr. Peggs to obtain his views on missionary work.

5. That young men sent out as missionaries should receive a previous education, and that the committee were desirous of engaging some young men as soon as practicable.

No very important information was gained respecting Borneo, and nearly or quite a year elapsed before another committee meeting was held. The publication of quarterly papers to be distributed gratis to the supporters of the Society was, however, an important step. These papers were eagerly sought after in various instances. Of the first, No. 1, 2,000 were printed; of No. 2 but 1,500; of No. 3, 2,000; of No. 4, 2,000.

No. 3 contained a statement that the Society enjoyed more support than any other which had been formed in the connexion for the preceding sixty years.

[A further committee was held at Loughborough in the spring of 1819, at which a letter from Mr. Peggs was read, and also an offer of service from Mr. J. Slater of Derby.]

In April, 1819, the secretary of the Society, by desire of the Lincolnshire brethren, visited that part of the country and preached on Easter Tuesday at Tydd St. Giles, on Wednesday at March, Thursday at Wisbech, Friday at Tydd Gote, Lord's Day morning at Fleet, afternoon and evening at Spalding, Monday at Sutterton, Tuesday at Boston, Wednesday at Gosberton, Thursday at Bourne. The friends at March and Fleet had begun to come forward to the help of the missionary cause. At Boston a Missionary Association was formed in the following August. [Other associations were formed at Nottingham, Quorndon, Ilkiston, Belper, Ticknall, Leake and Wimeswold, Barton, Barleston and Hugglescote, Rothley, Woodhouse, and Archdeacon Lane, Leicester.]

This year was, in fact, the most prosperous year the Society had yet witnessed. The associations in the neighbourhood of Loughborough were much indebted to the zeal and activity of Mr. Stevenson.

The committee meeting proposed was not held at the Association in consequence of an alarming illness of the secretary, but a report was drawn up which is here subjoined, several fresh resolutions passed which, in fact, appear to have annulled those adopted at the commencement of the Institution, and a new committee was appointed. The Association this year was held at Derby, and agreed to give up the Wednesday evening to the Missionary Society. The meeting which was held was one of a very interesting kind. Various friends spoke warmly on behalf of the missionary cause, and about £11 were afterwards collected,

and so rapid was the increase of the Society that of No. 5 of the quarterly papers 5,000 were printed.

[3rd Annual Report, in print, which puts annual income at £500. The following sentence from the Report is interesting: "The almost boundless field of missionary labour which offers itself to your view will call for the exercise of much prudence and foresight, in selecting the spot on which you may with the greatest advantage commence your operations. On this account it is with real pleasure we learn that the Venerable Missionary, Ward, has recently arrived in this country, from whom your secretary expects much valuable information on that subject." At this annual meeting a new committee was appointed, holding its first meeting at Loughborough in September, 1819. Its first minute passed was, "The secretary is requested to procure a suitable Minute Book. It is desired that the information in this book respecting the history of the Society be full and explicit." It was in obedience to this instruction the secretary wrote the account which is here printed.]

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## **The Burrage Collection**

The Burrage collection of books, to which reference was made in our last issue, was acquired through Mrs. Virginia Appleton Willson, who for twenty-five years past has been, and still is, librarian of the Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Collection, housed in a fire-proof library at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York State.