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The Life of Baptist Noel: Its Setting and Significance

“AMONG the English middle classes, thanks to the existence of old Catholic families whose social status was unimpeachable, it might be eccentric or immoral to be a Catholic, but it was not infra dig like being a Dissenter,” writes the poet W. H. Auden of the period immediately before the First World War. “When I was young,” he goes on, “for an Anglican to ‘go over to Rome’ was . . . an unfortunate event but something which can happen in the best families. But for an Anglican to become a Baptist would have been unthinkable: Baptists were persons who came to the back door, not the front.”¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, long before Auden’s boyhood, the secession of a member of one of the nation’s “best families” from the Established Church to the Baptists was no less unthinkable. When in 1848, the year of revolutions on the continent and the year of the Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common, the Honorable and Reverend Baptist Wriothsley Noel, brother of the earl of Gainsborough, left the Anglican Church, a hostile commentator tried to illustrate that Noel’s action was of a piece with the revolutionary doings of the “democrats”.² Secessions of non-aristocrats from the Church of England to various groups on the edge of Baptist life had occurred, chiefly in the early 1830s, but they had attracted little attention since they had usually been provoked by what seemed theological niceties and since the seceders had never been men of national reputation.³ Noel’s action, on the contrary, was determined by convictions on a widely canvassed issue, the establishment of religion; and he was an eminent Churchman. For his Evangelical friends in the Established Church, Noel’s departure was a great loss. Edward Bickersteth, the venerable Anglican Evangelical, noted in his monthly journal for December 1848, that “the triumphs of the Jubilee [of the Church Missionary Society] are accompanied by one humbling lesson to us all. Mr. Baptist Noel has left our church . . .”⁴ *The Baptist Reporter* in February 1849 warmly commended Noel’s secession, “the leading ecclesiastical event of the past year in this country”. “Is Mr. Noel a Baptist?” it asked. Though it could cite several passages favouring believer’s baptism from the book that Noel published to explain his action, there was no firm indication of where his principles would lead him.⁵ But in August Noel was baptised and by the end of the year he was acting as pastor of a Baptist church. If his secession from the Establishment caused a great sensation, his adhesion to the Baptists was of more practical significance. Into the denomination came a man of deep Baptist conviction, but of broad Evangelical sympathies, whose influence, partly derived from

his aristocratic status, helped to mould the tone of Baptist life over the next fifteen years.

Noel was not quite unique as an aristocratic Baptist, for in 1842 a Baptist minister became Baron Teynham by inheritance; but on succeeding to the peerage he left the regular ministry.⁶ Noel, by contrast, dedicated all his aristocratic gifts to his work as a Christian minister. The very name "Baptist Wriothlesley Noel" is rich with aristocratic associations. The surname Noel was that of the earls of Gainsborough. The title had become extinct in 1798, but the estates of the Noels had passed to Baptist Wriothlesley's father, nephew of the last earl.⁷ In 1841 the earldom was revived in favour of Baptist Wriothlesley's eldest brother, who had already inherited the barony of Barham from his mother in 1823.⁸ Baptist Wriothlesley was styled "The Honorable" as the son of a peeress in her own right. His father was M.P. for Rutland for nearly fifty years,⁹ and one or two Lord Lieutenancies had normally been in the family since the seventeenth century. The Noels seemed to possess a hereditary right to power. The name Baptist does not imply that Noel's parents intended at his birth that he should become a Baptist: it was a traditional family name, first borne by Baptist Hicks, first Baron Campden (1551-1629), who made a fortune by supplying Elizabeth I with silk and mercery, gained a peerage, and married off his daughter into the Noel family with a dowry of £100,000.¹⁰ Wriothlesley was originally the family name of the earls of Southampton: a Noel in 1661 married a Wriothlesley coheirss on the way to obtaining the earldom of Gainsborough some twenty years later.¹¹ The family drew a large income from its lands, and Noel himself was able to expend £2107 14s. 1d. on the upkeep of two households in 1840.¹² It is not surprising that in mid-nineteenth-century society, still dominated by aristocratic families, Noel's ancestry gave him a high status in the eyes of the world. "Next in estimation in this great democratic country to a real live lord," wrote a popular journalist of Noel in 1858, "is a real live lord's relative."¹³

Noel was equally highly regarded as a Christian minister. Born in 1798, the sixteenth of a family of seventeen children, Noel was brought up in an atmosphere of Evangelical piety.¹⁴ His father, Sir Gerard Noel Noel, was one of the body of "saints" in parliament.¹⁵ His mother, Baroness Barham, acted as patron of Calvinistic Methodists in Gower, much in the fashion of the countess of Huntingdon.¹⁶ Noel was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where, as the son of a peeress, he was allowed to proceed M.A. without examination in 1821.¹⁷ Already at university his generous and spiritual character had developed: his mother had to rebuke him for giving away too much money, and a friend wrote to request his prayers soon after leaving Trinity.¹⁸ During the Long Vacation of 1820 he was engaged in establishing a National School for girls at Keswick: he applied for a contribution to William Wilberforce, a friend of his grandfather's, who duly sent £5.¹⁹ Yet he decided against entering the

ministry, for which he had been intended, and began training for the law at the Middle Temple.²⁰ It was probably the example of three brothers who were already clergy, and particularly that of Leland, who was specially close to Noel, that led him, in 1823, to change his mind again.²¹ Despite family opposition, Noel was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England.²² He spent about a year as curate of a sister's brother-in-law, the Reverend John Babington, at Cossington in Leicestershire.²³ Then Noel was thrust into prominence. He was invited to become minister of the Anglican proprietary chapel of St. John's, Bedford Row, Holborn.²⁴ As the pulpit of Richard Cecil, "the most cultured and refined of all the Evangelical leaders,"²⁵ from 1780 to 1808, and of Daniel Wilson, subsequently vicar of Islington and bishop of Calcutta, from 1810 to 1824, this chapel had become the headquarters of the Evangelical party in London: William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay were frequent attenders.²⁶ There Noel started preaching at the beginning of 1827. The chapel had been neglected at the end of Daniel Wilson's ministry, and under his successor, Charles Jerram, who lacked both good health and the ability to command the loyalty of non-parochial hearers, numbers had dwindled; but, with the help of R. W. Sibthorp (who subsequently gained notoriety for twice submitting to Rome) as evening lecturer, Noel soon drew together a "large and sympathetic" congregation.²⁷ A controversial sermon delivered on behalf of the British Reformation Society in a series by prominent Evangelical clergy shows that even before the end of the year Noel had attained a considerable reputation as a preacher.²⁸

In the late 1820s, London Evangelicalism was dominated by what contemporaries called "Catholic Christianity". Anglicans and Independents, Wesleyans and Baptists, cooperated for the propagation and defence of the gospel which as Evangelical Protestants they held in common. In the capital the undenominational spirit that in the 1790s had given rise to the London Missionary Society maintained its vitality, although in the provinces, where it had been the force behind the Sunday School and village preaching movements, it had been largely superseded by denominationalism.²⁹ Noel's first appearance in public life, in 1824, was on behalf of the London Missionary Society, a body uniting Churchmen and Dissenters who, according to its first treasurer, Joseph Hardcastle, "consented to lay aside, or rather keep out of sight, on this occasion, the distinctive principles of their respective sects, and unite in one body to promote, throughout the world, the great interests and principles of the religion of Christ in which they are all agreed".³⁰ This spirit animated Noel; he had known no other. A second lecture delivered for the British Reformation Society early in 1828 was an exposition of "Protestant Unity in Fundamental Doctrines".³¹ His third son, born in 1835, was named "John Wesley".³² In 1836 he argued in a popular pamphlet, soon reprinted in Welsh, that Churchmen and orthodox Dissenters should be "one in profession, in action and in heart".³³ In the late 1830s he was

reporting to Merle D'Aubigné, the great Reformed pastor of Geneva, on events in all the English Evangelical denominations.³⁴ Part of his work was done in cooperation with Churchmen alone, but amongst them he was continually attempting to propagate an irenic temper and to maintain Evangelical cohesion. With his brother Gerard, sixteen years his senior, he took the initiative in trying to heal the divisions that sprang up in 1831 over millenarianism in the ranks of the Evangelical clergy; he acted as chief pamphleteer against the speaking in tongues that was associated with Edward Irving's followers, largely because the first London "manifestations" of 1831 were in a member of his congregation; and he spoke regularly at meetings of the Church Missionary Society, the Hibernian Society, the Colonial Church Society, the Parker Society and the Evangelical Continental Society.³⁵ Noel was among the best known orators of the Exeter Hall.

The vindication of undenominationalism led Noel into further controversies. The basis of Evangelical cooperation, Noel believed, could only be orthodoxy. In 1831, with Gerard, he advocated the exclusion of Unitarians from the committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, withdrew from the organisation on the failure of their efforts, but returned after experience of the early frustrations of the rival Trinitarian Bible Society.³⁶ Subsequently Noel wrote a refutation of Unitarianism, which drew forth a reply from the secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association.³⁷ Of all the societies to which he belonged, though, Noel put most effort into the London City Mission. The biographer of David Nasmith dedicated his book to Noel, since he had done "more than any man of his class,—more, indeed, than all of them united, to assist that devoted man in founding and establishing the London City Mission".³⁸ Noel's published letter of 1835 to the bishop of London on the spiritual destitution of the capital provided the stimulus for the Mission; Noel was chairman at its first public meeting; and he joined in promoting the Ragged School movement that started under the Mission's aegis.³⁹ More than once he had to defend the Mission against the charge of disloyalty to the Church of England, because from the late 1830s, partly in the face of the beginnings of political Dissent, Anglicans were closing ranks against the indiscipline of undenominationalism. The London City Mission, one of a national (and even international) network of City Missions promoted by Nasmith, seemed manifestly subversive of "Church principles", for it employed lay workers in preference to clergy, and paid scant respect to parochial boundaries. Hence *The Record*, a popular bi-weekly organ for Anglican Evangelicals, could claim in 1838 that the Mission was "materially, and in effect, a *Dissenting Society*".⁴⁰ It was Noel who publicly repudiated the charge, stressing nevertheless the desirability of working with Dissenters. He argued the same case in his correspondence. In 1843 he urged Samuel Wilberforce, soon to be bishop of Oxford, to adhere to his father's position, and not to be betrayed into Anglican exclusiveness. Wilberforce, who took offence at the tone of the letter, declared in reply that there were

real points of difference between them. "To me," he wrote, "your fraternizing with Arians and encouragement of division, appears [*sic*] to be eminently unscriptural: That which seems to you the narrowness of bigotry, I esteem the will of the God of Order."⁴¹ The emphasis on the need for order and efficiency in the Church of England that Wilberforce shared with C. J. Blomfield, bishop of London, was to be the undoing of undenominationalism.

As the leading champion of Evangelical cooperation in the metropolis, Noel was one of the first men to detect the non-Evangelical tone of the Oxford movement. In 1839 he published a tract against the Tractarians, claiming, in the words of its sub-title, that "the Early Fathers" are "no safe guides" for faith or practice. "Few serious persons," he ventured, "now believe in baptismal regeneration."⁴² This sentence drew down on him the censure of Bishop Blomfield, who pointed out that although Noel might think baptismal regeneration unscriptural, "the clergy at large" admitted it at least in some sense.⁴³ Blomfield's Charge of 1842 declared that, even if the denial of baptismal regeneration could possibly be reconciled with the twenty-seventh article of the Church of England, it could hardly be harmonised with the Church's order for baptism and confirmation.⁴⁴ Noel replied with a series of sermons against the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in 1843.⁴⁵

His attempt to expound the Anglican formularies in terms of his Evangelical views meant that, by March 1845, he was thought to be in some danger of being requested by Blomfield to resign his licence to preach, just as, at the same time, Frederick Oakeley was courting the same peril (though far more blatantly) by interpreting them in a Roman Catholic sense.⁴⁶ Oakeley went over to Rome; Noel, for the time being, remained. But by now he was marked out as one of the "extreme persons" on the Evangelical wing of the Church of England.⁴⁷

One of the principles of "Catholic Christianity" was avoidance of political subjects, lest the government should think that Dissenting cooperation with Anglicans was politically subversive. This did not mean, however, that cooperating Evangelicals could have no political position. Joseph Hardcastle, for instance, in defending the London Missionary Society against the charge of radical associations, claimed that "no Society in the world is less acquainted with the political principles of any of its members than ours".⁴⁸ Its members had political principles; but they were not canvassed. Politics was not to be introduced into religion, but religion could be (and should be, as the respect for William Wilberforce illustrates) the foundation of politics. Noel was encouraged to participate in national affairs not only by the commitment of his family to the Whigs, but also by the attitude of undenominational Evangelicalism to politics. In 1836 he undertook a tour of inspection in Ireland on behalf of Lord Melbourne's government, and afterwards published a plea that help should be given to the Irish poor.⁴⁹ In 1840 he investigated the condition of various

elementary schools for the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, reporting that government help would be required for necessary improvements.⁵⁰ The climax of his contribution to national affairs during his years as an Anglican was the publication in 1841 of an anti-Corn Law pamphlet that achieved a wide circulation.⁵¹ This was a remarkable action for a Churchman, even though the repeal of the Corn Laws was recommended on humanitarian grounds, for, as Dr. Kitson Clark has put it, "the line which best marks the division between the two societies" that confronted each other over the issue of the Corn Laws was "the line between the Church of England and Protestant Dissent".⁵² The Tories inevitably opened upon him "their batteries of abuse", and Noel's congregation declined.⁵³ On the other hand, the pamphlet found favour with the outgoing Whig government, which successfully recommended Noel for a chaplaincy to the queen at the same time as his brother received the earldom.⁵⁴

Since Noel was not in harmony with Anglican trends—over cooperation with Dissenters, over baptismal regeneration, and over party allegiance—it is not surprising that he came to call into question the principle of establishment. As early as 1838 the lectures delivered in London by Dr. Thomas Chalmers of Edinburgh on the desirability of the establishment of religion provoked Noel into speaking of the evils of the English system, although in the following year he still argued that the English Establishment should be retained, since its removal "would have disastrous influence upon the country".⁵⁵ Then in 1843 Dr. Chalmers led the Evangelical secession from the Church of Scotland to form the Free Church, precipitating a new stage in Noel's thought. Chalmers still held establishments in general to be lawful, but had come to believe that the Scottish Establishment was inimical to the progress of true religion. Noel expressed a degree of sympathy unparalleled in the Church of England, and wrote a book to publicise the Free Church case, adopting its principle "that every lawful compact between a Church and a State, must secure to the Church Officers [the] liberty of obeying Christ, and of governing the Church according to his will".⁵⁶ He was publicly avowing a position which to some seemed inconsistent with his membership of the Church of England.⁵⁷

In 1845 the Maynooth question united Evangelical Churchmen and Dissenters against the prospect of a permanent state endowment for Roman Catholicism in Ireland. Noel threw himself into the agitation, receiving a place on the executive of the Central Anti-Maynooth Committee, proposing the chief motion at the first conference on 18 March and seconding a motion during the greatest Anti-Maynooth Conference on 1 May.⁵⁸ Noel had again advanced in his views. Although his speeches argued entirely from the religious premise that the Bible shows Roman teachings to be erroneous, they encompassed the constitutional argument that the government bill to endow Maynooth College was the start of a reprehensible trend towards the establishment of Roman Catholicism in Ireland.⁵⁹ Such a position implied the

recognition of the duty of the state not to support erroneous religion, but now Noel did not hold that it also implied the duty of the state to support true religion,⁶⁰ for in June he produced a book arguing that the Church of Ireland should be disestablished since an overwhelming majority of the population did not conform to the Established Church.⁶¹ He went so far as to leave open the question of whether an establishment could be defended on any grounds.⁶² As a result of a desire to conciliate the Irish that he shared with Robert Peel, Noel was more than half way to becoming a Voluntarist. If the Scottish Disruption revealed practical anomalies entailed by establishment, the Maynooth agitation led Noel to reject much of its theoretical basis.

As the Anti-Maynooth movement developed into the Evangelical Alliance in 1846, Noel maintained his involvement: he held a communion service at St. John's for the members of the initial conference, including non-Churchmen.⁶³ "Catholic Christianity" on the defensive adopted an institutional form that gave new hope to its adherents. Noel's bitter disappointment at the fewness of the Anglican clergy who joined the Alliance moved him further against the structure that restrained them.⁶⁴ In April 1848 he had personal experience of such restraint: Bishop Blomfield prohibited him from attending a meeting in the Exeter Hall to express sympathy with the Reverend J. Shore of Totnes, an Evangelical who was being harried by the redoubtable High-Church Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter.⁶⁵ The Church of England could hardly contain Noel much longer. Professor Best has written that the early nineteenth-century Evangelicals "felt a kind of love-hate relationship towards the Church of England": their desire for united action for the spread of the gospel conflicted with their recognition of church order as a means to national righteousness.⁶⁶ Events of the 1840s brought Noel to the point where his love for the Church of England, though not for Anglicans, was extinguished. He recounted on 23 November 1848, the final stages of his mental debate:

" . . . I have long had doubts about the propriety of a connexion between the Church and the State. I have struggled against these doubts, and have read the best writers on both sides, and more especially the Word of God, and being in a Proprietary Chapel I flattered myself that I had little to do with the subject; but I have come to agree with a writer, that a man is responsible for the sins of a communion to which he belongs; that he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, . . . etc., etc.; and, therefore, I have determined that I must leave . . . the Established Church."⁶⁷

Noel's conviction that a man is responsible for the sins of his communion was the decisive issue. In 1844, when considering whether Evangelicals agreeing with the Scottish Free Church should leave the Church of England, he had maintained the opposite contention, that no practice in a church which seems to be a violation of the will of God is a reason for leaving it, "so long as we are not called to sanction the violation".⁶⁸ In 1848 he could no longer accept the principle of estab-

ishment; adhesion to the Church of England now seemed to entail acquiescence in an erroneous arrangement; for conscience' sake, therefore, he must leave the Established Church.

The secession of "the most important member of the evangelical low Ch[urch] party," as an anonymous but well-connected Manchester correspondent addressed Noel, could not fail to be a shock to a nation deeply interested in ecclesiastical affairs.⁶⁹ Noel first gave notice to Daniel Wilson of Islington, in whom the lease of St. John's Chapel was vested, on 17 November 1848.⁷⁰ Edward Bickersteth heard of Noel's intention from Wilson, and wrote immediately to entreat his friend to change his mind since his action would compromise the Evangelical Alliance; but the decision had been taken.⁷¹ Noel told the heads-of-families' meeting of his congregation on 23 November that he would leave them the following midsummer, by which time a successor would have been found.⁷² The first public intimation appeared in *The Times* next day, and on 28 November Bishop Blomfield summoned Noel to a private interview at which he was forbidden to preach beyond the following Sunday.⁷³ Consequently Noel left St. John's on 3 December.⁷⁴ He rushed through the press a half-finished book explaining his reasons for secession.⁷⁵ The whole of the first edition of this *Essay on the Union of Church and State* was sold on the day of publication.⁷⁶ *The Glasgow Post* drew an interesting parallel with no less a figure than Macaulay. "Both of them published in December last," it commented in the following year, "and their respective works (Macaulay's *History* and Noel's *Church and State*) have been more extensively read, and been more rapidly sold, than those perhaps of any other living authors."⁷⁷ Over a dozen pamphleteers joined in what one publisher called "the Noel controversy". Attacks on Noel's position ranged from the telling argument of the Reverend W. Tilson Marsh that Noel was upholding a fallacy in claiming that true Christians can be distinguished sufficiently to form gathered churches, to mere scurrilous invective by one Reverend Clotworthy Gillmor; they were balanced by defences under picturesque titles like *A Watchman's Cry* or *The Voice of Events*.⁷⁸ Other writers exploited Noel's evidence for their own ends: the Anglo-Catholic *Christian Remembrancer* rejoiced in an Evangelical admission that the Book of Common Prayer teaches baptismal regeneration, while the Broad-Church *Prospective Review* persuaded itself that Noel had shown that "dogmatical uniformity" should no longer be the aim of state religion.⁷⁹ Nonconformist ministers held weeknight readings of Noel's book: B. S. Hollis, an Islington Independent minister, remarked on the "very large and attentive congregations" on these occasions.⁸⁰ The Protestant Dissenting Deputies drew up a petition in January 1849 expressing their hope that the connection of church and state would soon be ended, their first explicit consideration of the issue since the Maynooth agitation.⁸¹ Noel's activities were noted regularly by British periodicals, and even by *The New York Observer*.⁸² Throughout the winter of 1849 there was immense public excitement.

The *Essay on the Union of Church and State* suffered from the haste of its completion. "A very lumbering affair," was the verdict of the fair-minded and sympathetic Quaker William Lucas of Hitchin, "full of repetitions and not likely to add much to his reputation as an author at least".⁸³ Yet the book is a systematically argued consideration of the question, "Whether it is the will of Christ, as deducible from the word of God, that the Christian congregations of this country should receive the salaries of their pastors from the State, and be consequently placed under its superintendence?"⁸⁴ The answer is an emphatic no, for the book is an unqualified statement of Voluntarism. J. P. Mursell, the Baptist minister from Leicester who cooperated with Edward Miall in founding the Anti-State Church Association, had listed at its first meeting in 1844 the likely arguments for the establishment of religion: they could be "from Scripture, from precedent, tradition, expediency, the moral obligations of rulers".⁸⁵ W. E. Gladstone had formulated a similar list of courts of appeal in his early book *The State in its relations with the Church*: "It is written; it is natural; it is expedient; it is customary".⁸⁶ Apart from the conflation of Mursell's "precedent" and "tradition" under Gladstone's heading "customary", the lists are identical. Noel treats each of the four arguments separately. Like Gladstone, Noel dismisses the argument from custom: a historical section shows how, even if the custom of uniting church and state had sometimes been observed, its effects had commonly been bad.⁸⁷ The argument from what is natural Gladstone had made his own. Noel explicitly meets Gladstone's contention that the State, like a parent, has a moral duty to educate its charges in what it perceives to be theological truth, by pointing out that in practice this meant that church questions were settled by the party system in parliament, which sometimes allowed the votes of "a few members of the most irreligious character" to decide the issue.⁸⁸ It was on the similar ground that the state could not in the nineteenth-century climate of opinion claim to discern theological truth that Gladstone himself came to abandon his position.⁸⁹ The argument from scripture Noel urges as the only decisive one, so long as the Bible gives clear guidance—which, he claims, it does.⁹⁰ Though, like Chalmers in 1838, admitting that the Old Testament dispensation is no longer applicable, Noel goes beyond Chalmers in declaring that the New Testament provides principles, of which Christ's declaration that "My kingdom is not of this world" stands first, for the right ordering of church and state.⁹¹ He therefore reaches a conclusion opposite to that of Chalmers. Finally, Noel appends a lengthy catalogue of the evil results of the establishment of religion, and so moves on to the argument from expediency. He may fairly be criticised on the grounds that, if the argument from scripture is final, all argument from expediency is superfluous and merely blurs the issue. Yet this Noel saw: considerations of expediency, he writes, are included for the benefit of those who succumb to a characteristic English fault and "test every principle by its results".⁹² He describes almost exclusively

the results for the church, and eschews all consideration of the standard Tory argument that the establishment was good since it helped to secure social and political order.⁹³ This omission is symptomatic of Noel's style of argument: he remained an Evangelical of broad sympathies and a conscientious Whig, concerned to use solely religious premises and dedicated to moderation, even at this critical juncture in his life. Noel contributed to a persistent strand in Nonconformist arguments for disestablishment—a distinctively religious apologetic for the principle of the gathered church, exercising its own discipline and paying its own pastor.⁹⁴ He continued to be quoted half a century later in a Liberation Society handbook, *The Case for Disestablishment*.⁹⁵ Noel's book was the classic Baptist presentation of the disestablishment cause in the nineteenth century.

Church and State can be claimed as a Baptist work because in it Noel charges the Church of England with failing to observe biblical teaching on the restriction of baptism to believers.⁹⁶ Yet on his departure from St. John's he had not yet decided to join the Baptists; and he certainly did not secede because he had come to accept the rightness of believer's baptism, as some Baptist works would suggest.⁹⁷ There was speculation that Noel might participate in creating a Free Episcopal Church.⁹⁸ For some time he worshipped at Hornsey Parish Church, but in March 1849 he preached at the Regent Square Scottish Church.⁹⁹ In that month he seems to have contemplated joining the Independents, since he attended a meeting for the admission of members at Surrey Chapel; and in May he preached at the Weigh House Chapel.¹⁰⁰ Two days later prayers for Noel's guidance were offered at the annual assembly of the Congregational Union.¹⁰¹ Although he was present at a baptismal service in March, it was not until August that he himself was publicly immersed at the John Street Chapel, where he was shortly to become pastor.¹⁰² He had come to the conclusion, by reading nothing but scripture and paedobaptist works, that believer's baptism was right in principle, and, further, that it was right for him.¹⁰³ Noel's address at his baptism, published as a tract, was distributed to the many in London who were eager to learn about the event; and he wrote a 320-page *Essay on Christian Baptism*, soon followed by an additional *Essay on the External Act of Baptism*.¹⁰⁴ Once more, though for a much briefer period, Noel caused a public stir.

Noel's secession entailed major sacrifices—of friends and associations, of influence and position. He and his family had many personal connections in the Established Church. His niece, Louisa Noel, for instance, was the closest friend of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.¹⁰⁵ Noel's own relationship with Wilberforce could hardly survive his entry into Dissent. No longer could Noel use the Anglican liturgy, as his daughter Mary remarked sadly in a letter to her mother.¹⁰⁶ The influence that he had previously enjoyed with Whig governments was minimised; and even "the religious world made much more of Baptist Noel". as an observer wrote in 1858, "when he was in the

Church than now".¹⁰⁷ He forfeited the opportunity of a bishopric which would almost certainly have been offered him, as one was given the equally undenominational-minded but younger Hon. and Rev. H. M. Villiers (the friend of William Brock), during the period of Palmerston's patronage of Evangelicals.¹⁰⁸ Nor did Noel have a firm future, although there was no question of financial insecurity. Negotiations over a possible pastorate in an ex-Anglican chapel on the Gray's Inn Road collapsed when the court of chancery ruled that the owner, a lunatic, might not approve of a Baptist preaching there if he were in his right mind.¹⁰⁹ However, Noel's path was smoothed by the impending retirement of James Harrington Evans, minister of John Street Chapel, close by his own old chapel of St. John's. Evans had himself seceded from the Established Church in 1815 and had adopted Baptist views, but his friendships were generally with Anglicans, not Dissenters. When he needed to find a successor, his old neighbour Noel, now without pastoral charge, was the obvious man.¹¹⁰ The ownership of the chapel, which had been vested for life in Evans, was eventually secured to the congregation from its builder, Henry Drummond.¹¹¹ There, in a chapel second only in prominence among Baptist buildings in London to the new Bloomsbury Chapel, Noel was able to begin a ministry in November 1849 that was to last until July 1868.¹¹²

There were hopes and fears in some quarters that a large number of seceders would copy Noel.¹¹³ During the first six months of his ministry, Noel baptised nearly a hundred members of his old congregation from St. John's.¹¹⁴ The Reverend I. Dodson of Cockerham, Lancashire, was certainly convinced by Noel's arguments, and left the Church of England,¹¹⁵ but no other clergy seem to have followed his example—not least because Noel had given *Church and State* a characteristically moderate tone. "The reasons for separation appear to me clear," he had written in the preface, "but I do not expect others to think as I do".¹¹⁶ At least two clergymen reached Noel's convictions about the relations of church and state, but did not act on them: the Reverends T. Spencer and G. H. Stoddart appeared at the annual meeting of the British Anti-State Church Association in May 1849 to advocate disestablishment, but expressed the belief that the Church of England could best be influenced toward their goal from within.¹¹⁷ Any clergymen who were thinking of imitating Noel were probably deterred when he was baptised: some might have followed him in one decisive step, but not in two.¹¹⁸ Edward Bickersteth was largely right to have "the fear, not that Churchmen would be led to copy Mr. Noel's example, but that they would be repelled from the cause of Christian union".¹¹⁹ Udenominationalism suffered: Anglican suspicions that the Evangelical Alliance was directed against all establishments seemed vindicated.¹²⁰ *The Record* carried a column or more rebutting the arguments of *Church and State* in each issue from 28 December 1848 to 5 February 1849. In 1847 the publication of *The Christian State*, a work of Evangelical apologetic for the

Establishment by T. R. Birks, the son-in-law of Edward Bickersteth, had attracted little attention; but Birks, who was to become perpetual curate of Holy Trinity and Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, had presented a carefully reasoned case. He was a convert to the establishment principle after an education at the Dissenting Mill Hill School: his book was the result of his own mental struggles. On Noel's secession its argument from scripture that the state had a divinely imposed duty to promote biblical Christianity was eagerly assimilated by Evangelical Anglicans.¹²¹ Paradoxically, Noel's departure helped propel them towards their characteristic position later in the century of eager advocacy of the Establishment.

It was no doubt fear of the consequences for undenominational Evangelicalism that led one of Noel's Independent friends to advise him, when he was considering leaving the Establishment, to remain within it.¹²² The man was almost certainly either George or John Clayton, ministers respectively at Walworth and The Poultry, who shared the conviction, as John wrote in 1845, "that all forms of godliness are *only* forms . . . some are the offspring of human wisdom, or a legitimate expediency; but there is not any mode of church government which can be adopted, which does not combine both".¹²³ Noel's decision to secede involved admitting that, on the contrary, church polity is ordained by God in scripture and so far severing himself from the ethos of "Catholic Christianity".¹²⁴ Since he also held that the proper practice of baptism is biblically defined, his commitment to the distinguishing marks of Baptists, and therefore to a measure of denominationalism, was deep. Unlike his predecessor at John Street, J. H. Evans, who never regarded himself as a Baptist, Noel identified himself with the denomination; and unlike the best-known seceders of the 1830s, William Tiptaft and J. C. Philpot, Noel threw himself not into Strict Baptist circles but into the Baptist mainstream.¹²⁵ Only a year after his assumption of the John Street pastorate, his portrait appeared as the frontispiece of *The Baptist Magazine*, and in the autumn of 1851 he joined Samuel Morton Peto and others in creating the Baptist Metropolitan Building Society.¹²⁶ When in 1852 the Bathurst Street Church, Sydney, the first Baptist cause in Australia, wanted a new minister from England, it was to Noel that its committee wrote, asking him to confer with William Brock, J. H. Hinton and the church's first pastor in order to select a suitable man for their pulpit.¹²⁷ About ten years later a new Baptist arrival from Australia would attend Noel's services as a matter of course.¹²⁸ A man of Noel's distinction in society and the Evangelical world was inevitably prominent in the denomination. In 1855 Noel became chairman of the Baptist Union. Yet his chairman's address emphasised not baptism, the denominational badge, or even Voluntaryism, for, he declared, "we are tempted to exaggerate the value of our special tenets, freedom from state control, congregational independence, and the baptism of believers. . . ." ¹²⁹ There was the danger, he explained, of making baptism rather than conversion the basis of Christian

communion. At heart Noel was still committed to the undenominationalism of his youth.

When he became a Baptist, Noel eschewed the vituperation of ex-Anglican Dissenters of the 1830s like R. M. Beverley and R. B. Sanderson, and eagerly cooperated with Anglicans for the furtherance of the gospel.¹³⁰ He joined Lord Shaftesbury in organising evangelistic services on Sunday evenings in the Exeter Hall and in theatres, in order to transplant the revival of 1859 from Ireland into London.¹³¹ He was the chief speaker at an interdenominational meeting in the Sussex Hall on 23 January, 1861, from which grew the East London Special Services Committee, and, from that in turn, the Salvation Army.¹³² Noel continued to take a prominent part in the Evangelical Alliance: even in 1849, the year he became a Baptist, he found time to join Sir Culling Eardley and the Baptist Edward Steane as a delegation from the Alliance to intercede with the French government for Dr. Achilli, an ex-Roman Catholic priest who was apparently imprisoned in Rome for Protestant activities and who later became notorious when Newman sued him for libel.¹³³ Noel was active at the Geneva Conference of the Alliance in 1861, and three years later at a Calvin commemoration gathering in London.¹³⁴ The London City Mission and the Ragged School movement enjoyed his continuing support.¹³⁵ Noel avoided non-essential lines of thought that might provoke disagreement at all times, even in controversy with Roman Catholics and even in private.¹³⁶ This trait perhaps detracted from the cogency of his oratory, which was characterised by Joseph Parker as "plaintive and gentle".¹³⁷ In preaching, it was said, "he aims at your heart, not at your head".¹³⁸ His moderation was dictated by a desire to avoid obscuring his main emphasis on calling sinners to repentance. The proclamation of the gospel was ever his overriding concern; "the distinctive doctrines of the gospel", it was written, "are the topics on which he almost invariably dwells"; he was the author of many tracts; and at the end of his ministry he not only appealed for 5,000 men in the Baptist denomination to enrol as evangelists, but also set himself to evangelistic work round the country.¹³⁹ "He was always," declared *The Times* obituary, "an eloquent and earnest advocate of vital and personal religion, and never degenerated into a mere controversialist."¹⁴⁰ In close cooperation with Edward Steane and J. H. Hinton, secretaries of the Baptist Union, Noel exerted all his influence to direct denominational effort into interdenominational evangelism.¹⁴¹ It is no wonder that in the 1850s and up to 1863 Baptist denominational agencies remained weak.

Noel also made a contribution to the public issues of the period, often standing as a representative of the Evangelical Alliance. He published his views on the best way towards an honourable peace in the Crimean War; he wrote privately to expostulate with Sir Robert Peel, son of the one-time Prime Minister, for the bad public example he had set by losing a reputed £50,000 at Doncaster races; he advocated action for the rehabilitation of prostitutes; he published a reproof

of the fashionable set who attended a gruelling boxing match; and he protested against the summary execution of G. W. Gordon, an alleged rebel, by Governor Eyre in the Jamaican troubles of 1865.¹⁴² During the American Civil War, Noel had a potent influence in swaying public opinion in favour of the Northern States. When the London Emancipation Society was founded early in 1863 to support the North on the grounds of its opposition to slavery, Noel sat alongside J. S. Mill and Professor Goldwin Smith of Oxford, on its general committee.¹⁴³ He was a chief speaker at the Society's public meetings — on 29 January at the Exeter Hall in London and on 3 June at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester.¹⁴⁴ At a conference of ministers in the Society called to discuss an exhortation from French Protestants to make a public stand for the North, it was Noel who took the chair and drafted an address which, with modifications, was eventually signed by more than 4,000 ministers and despatched to the churches of Federal America.¹⁴⁵ He also wrote two large works and a popular pamphlet on behalf of the North.¹⁴⁶

Noel's new convictions about church polity found political expression in sympathy for agitation in favour of disestablishment. "With the aim of the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control", he declared as chairman of the Baptist Union in 1855, "no candid advocate of the establishment can find fault". An Anglican's duty is to support the union of church and state, but a Dissenter must advocate their separation. "It is no less clear," he went on, "that political objects may be sought by political means. Since churches have come under state control by the action of the state, they must be released by the same action".¹⁴⁷ He was prepared to allow a section of *Church and State* to be reprinted in tract form by the Liberation Society, when, in 1866 as it was preparing for the struggle over Irish disestablishment, it was trying to influence "a higher class of mind than before".¹⁴⁸ In supporting Liberationism Noel was clearly moved by principle, not interest: unlike Edward Miall, the leader of the campaign, he had not been provoked into adopting his views by the need to pay church rates.¹⁴⁹ Miall noted in a review of *Church and State* in his journal *The Nonconformist*, that "Active Anti-State-Churchism will cease, ere long, to be regarded as the off-scouring of Dissent".¹⁵⁰ Noel's standing made the movement for disestablishment seem less disreputable.

Noel had carried forward his political activism into his Dissenting days. Religious principles were urged as the basis of sound politics. "But," as Noel continued in his address to the Baptist Union in 1855, "political action is always dangerous to Christians, and to pastors it is peculiarly so". He issued a caveat against concentration by ministers on association with "worldly politicians" rather than on the cultivation of "eminent piety".¹⁵¹ J. P. Mursell, it seems, had gone too far for Noel's satisfaction in following the example of political involvement set by his predecessor at Harvey Lane Leicester, Robert Hall. Noel's attitude was also a legacy of undenominational Evangelicalism. Religion

could be taken into politics, but not politics into religion. Noel was helping to mould Nonconformity's approach to politics in the period immediately before the 1867 Reform Act, when so many Dissenters were enfranchised. The public issues on which Noel stood out in the 1860s, support for federal America and the prosecution of Governor Eyre, were those over which Nonconformist businessmen in the Commons were most active.¹⁵² It was the appeal to religious principle, untaunted by considerations of political expediency, that gave Gladstonian Liberalism its moral foundations.

About 1860, Noel was still one of the Baptist celebrities of London, standing first, for instance, in an 1858 survey of Nonconformist preachers of the day.¹⁵³ His policy of not emphasising baptism for the sake of Evangelical cooperation was still dominant in Baptist Union circles. At the second autumn session of the Union in 1864, he read a paper without denominational reference on "Individual Effort for the Conversion of Sinners".¹⁵⁴ However, in 1864-5 his position and policy were alike eclipsed. C. H. Spurgeon, already famous in the metropolis for his preaching, made a vigorous attack on Evangelical clergy, claiming that in using the Book of Common Prayer yet rejecting baptismal regeneration, they were being dishonest. Noel, who had undergone struggles of conscience on this very issue, rushed into print with a pamphlet criticising Spurgeon's charge as a breach of an Evangelical Alliance resolution.¹⁵⁵ Spurgeon was undermining undenominationalism. Another rising man among London Baptists, William Landels, who in 1855 had been installed at Regent's Park Chapel by Morton Peto, came to Spurgeon's defence, rallying many of the younger Baptists who had never known "Catholic Christianity" in its prime. "Mr. Noel talks of love and unity," lamented Spurgeon in a letter of gratitude to Landels, "and then forsakes me when I only echo his own former utterances".¹⁵⁶ The brisk controversy brought together Spurgeon, the champion of Calvinism, and Landels, a zealous Morisonian, who hitherto had been more conscious of their theological differences than of their denominational unity. Its fruit was the London Baptist Association, founded, in cooperation with William Brock, in 1865.¹⁵⁷ Spurgeon had been compelled to resign from the Evangelical Alliance in the controversy;¹⁵⁸ but more important was the exclusion of Noel from the group founding the L.B.A. Following shortly after the retirement of Hinton and Steane from the active secretaryship of the Baptist Union and their replacement by J. H. Millard, who was dedicated to the promotion of denominational agencies, this meant that those Baptists who were enthusiastic for the Evangelical Alliance were passing from leadership.¹⁵⁹ The 1865 chairman's address to the Baptist Union, delivered by Joseph Angus, reflects the new denominational emphasis. "Of late years", he said, "we have been placed in the singular position of having to depreciate the ordinance that distinguishes us from our brethren".¹⁶⁰ The whole address was then devoted to the exposition of a high doctrine of baptism. The future was with denominationalism. When Landels attained the

chair of the Union in 1876, he remarked that "our distinctive principle enters into the very essence of Christianity", which is exactly what Noel had denied in 1855.¹⁶¹ Although the Baptist Union meetings were held at John Street from 1867 to 1870,¹⁶² Noel was little more than a senior statesman in the denomination. It was in that capacity, rather than as a leader, that he was a second time made chairman of the Union in 1867. Shortly afterwards, to commemorate his retirement from the John Street pastorate, a valedictory address signed by sixty prominent Baptists was presented to Noel. The address recalled the relinquishment of his position in the Established Church "in behalf of evangelical truth and holy Christian fellowship", and his services to the denomination, "as well as to other bodies who we rejoice to believe are seeking to honour the same Lord".¹⁶³ It was the homage of a denomination with a new degree of self-consciousness to a man whose social position and early sympathies had committed him to a wider ideal.

After Noel's death in 1873,¹⁶⁴ denominational historians soon lost sight of a man who spent his life in advocating undenominationalism.¹⁶⁵ Nonconformist authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarded Noel as not having gone far enough into politics: C. S. Miall, writing in 1891, laments his recommendation of piety rather than politics, "a very illogical and unsound conclusion".¹⁶⁶ Those with inter-church sympathies, like the writer of an article in *Sunday at Home* for 1868, did him no more justice, since they were embarrassed by his firmly held principles on issues separating Christians.¹⁶⁷ For Churchmen he was, by preference, unthinkable; but if mention was essential, he was represented as (at best) an exceptional lapse or (at worst) a traitor.¹⁶⁸ Noel's mature position pleased nobody. It was his belief that a man should be in fellowship with a church whose polity was ordered by scripture, and yet that he should cooperate with all Evangelical Christians whose faith was ordered by scripture. If Baptists did both, he believed, the gospel would be propagated in the world, and Baptist principles among the churches.¹⁶⁹ His temper was a remarkable combination of depth and breadth, conviction and moderation. In all his career he tried to practise the motto-text he chose for *Church and State*: "speaking the truth in love".

NOTES

¹ W. H. Auden in introduction to A. Fremantle, ed., *The Protestant Mystics*, London, 1964, p. 36.

² *The Christian Remembrancer*, Vol. XVII, Apr. 1849, p. 298.

³ cf. H. H. Rowdon, "Secession from the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Vox Evangelica*, 3, 1964. The best known seceder was probably Henry Bulteel of Oxford.

⁴ T. R. Birks, *Memoir of the Reverend E. Bickersteth*, 3rd ed., London, 1852, Vol. II, p. 406.

⁵ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Feb. 1849, pp. 45, 75.

⁶ *The Complete Peerage*, ed. The Hon. Vicary Gibbs, London, 1910, Vol. XII, Part I, p. 688.

⁷ E. F. Noel, *Some Letters and Records of the Noel Family*, London, 1910, p. 32.

⁸ *The Complete Peerage*, ed. V. Gibbs, Vol. V, pp. 601f.

⁹ 1788-1808, 1814-38. *The Rutland Magazine and County Historical Record*, Vol. V, No. 2, Apr. 1911, p. 51.

¹⁰ B. H. Blacker, "Baptist Hicks", *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1st ed., Vol. XXVI, p. 358f.

¹¹ *Complete Peerage*, ed. Gibbs, Vol. V. p. 599.

¹² "Account Book of Mrs. B. W. Noel of Walthamstow and The Manor House, Stanmore", Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely County Record Office, Noel Collection: R.53.7.1.1.b. This collection seems to comprise the papers assembled by E. F. Noel for her *Some Letters and Records of the Noel Family*. I am extremely grateful to Dr. S. W. Gilley, now of St. Andrew's University, for telling me of its existence, as well as for other help and encouragement with this essay.

¹³ J. E. Ritchie, *The London Pulpit*, 2nd ed., London, 1858, p. 147.

¹⁴ A. R. Buckland, "Baptist Wriothlesley Noel", *D.N.B.*, Vol. XLI, p. 89.

¹⁵ F. K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: the age of Wilberforce*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 270n.

¹⁶ Clotworthy Gillmor, *A Reply to the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Wriothlesley Noel's Essay on the Union of Church and State*, London, 1849, p. 40.

¹⁷ *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, ed. J. A. Venn, Part II, Vol. IV, p. 557. cf. D. A. Winstanley, *Early Victorian Cambridge*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 152f, 167.

¹⁸ Lady Barham to B. W. Noel, 13 Oct. 1820. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.8.2.c. J. A. Nicholson to B. W. Noel, 20 Sep. 1821. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.a.

¹⁹ B. W. Noel to William Wilberforce, 27 Jul. 1820. Bodleian Library, Oxford: MSS Wilberforce d. 14, fol. 86.

²⁰ Francis [James] Noel to B. W. Noel, 22 May 1823. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.12.a. Emma Noel to B. W. Noel, 18 Feb. 1823, envelope. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.15.a.

²¹ Gerard Thomas (1782-1851), later vicar of Romsey, Hampshire, and canon of Winchester; Francis James (1793-1854), later vicar of Teston, Kent; and Leland (1797-1870), later rector of Exton, Rutland. E. F. Noel, *Some Letters and Records of the Noel Family*, end-paper. B. W. Noel to Leland Noel, 12 Jul. 1825 and 26 Feb. 1823. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.1.b. The clerical tradition in the family was subsequently continued by Baptist Wriothlesley's great-nephew, Conrad Le Despencer Noel (1869-1942), vicar of Thaxted, Essex, and organising secretary of the Church Socialist League.

²² Lord Barham to B. W. Noel, 6 Jun. 1823. Francis [James] Noel to B. W. Noel, 22 May 1823. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.10.d. and R.53.7.3.12.a.

²³ G. T. Noel to B. W. Noel, 6 Jun. 1826. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.10.d. cf. *Burke's Landed Gentry*, London, 1886, Vol. I, p. 65.

²⁴ *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 391.

²⁵ G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, London, 1908, p. 49.

²⁶ *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 391.

²⁷ J. Bateman, *The Life and Times of the Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, D.D.*, London, 1860, Vol. I, p. 222f, 233. J. Fowler, *Richard Waldo Sibthorp*, London, 1880, p. 41. J. Jerram, ed., *The Memoirs and a Selection from the Letters of the late Rev. Charles Jerram, M.A.*, London, 1855, p. 305.

²⁸ B. W. Noel, "The Right of Private Judgment", *Lectures on Points in Controversy between Roman Catholics and Protestants*, London, 1828.

²⁹ cf. W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society, 1790-1850*, London, 1972 (forthcoming).

³⁰ *The Illustrated London News*, 25 Aug. 1849, p. 141. Joseph Hardcastle to Mr. Raikes, 7 Dec. 1802. [E. C. Haldane], *Memoir of Joseph Hardcastle, Esq., First Treasurer of the London Missionary Society*, London, 1860, p. 180.

³¹ B. W. Noel, "On Protestant Unity in Fundamental Doctrines", *Lectures*

on *Points in Controversy between Roman Catholics and Protestants*, London, 1828.

³² *Debrett's Genealogical Peerage of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1844, p. 330.

³³ B. W. Noel, *The Unity of the Church: Another Tract for the Times, addressed especially to members of the Establishment*, London, 1836. The Welsh version was entitled *Undeb yr eglwys: sef traelawd priodol i'r amseroedd*, and translated by one J. Thomas.

³⁴ cf. Merle D'Aubigné to B. W. Noel, 15 Jun. 1838. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.b.

³⁵ *The Record*, 8 Mar. 1830, p. 4. B. W. Noel, *Remarks on the Revival of Miraculous Powers in the Church*, London, 1831. cf. A. L. Drummond, *Edward Irving and his Circle*, London, [1938], p. 153. *The Record*, 21 Feb. 1839, p. 4; 2 May 1839, p. 6; 16 May 1839, p. 7; W. H. B. Proby, *Annals of the Low-Church Party in England*, London, 1888, Vol. I, p. 448; A. R. Buckland, *D.N.B.*, Vol. XLI, p. 89.

³⁶ W. Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, London, 1904, Vol. I, pp. 358, 361; *The Record*, 5 May 1831, p. 7; *The Illustrated London News*, 25 Aug. 1849, p. 149. Noel later wrote *An Appeal on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society to those who are disposed to secede from it*.

³⁷ B. W. Noel, *Christianity compared with Unitarianism*, London, 1834. Benjamin Mardon, *Christianity identified with Unitarianism*, London, 1835.

³⁸ *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 392.

³⁹ B. W. Noel, *The State of the Metropolis considered*, London, 1835. cf. J. M. Weylland, *Round the Tower: or, the Story of the London City Mission*, London, [1875], p. 8. *The Record*, 10 Dec. 1835, p. 3. *Reports of the St. Giles and St. George, Bloomsbury, Ragged and Industrial Schools . . . for 1844*.

⁴⁰ *The Record*, 28 Jan. 1839, p. 3. cf. 4 Feb. 1839, p. 4; 11 Feb. 1839, pp. 3, 4; 18 Feb. 1839, pp. 3, 4. I am most grateful to the Rev. M. M. Hennell for these and other references to *The Record*.

⁴¹ *The Letter-Books of Samuel Wilberforce, 1843-68*, ed. R. K. Pugh (Oxfordshire Record Society, Vol. XLVII), n.p., 1970, p. 28.

⁴² B. W. Noel, *The First Five Centuries of the Church: or, the Early Fathers no safe guides*, London, 1839, p. 33.

⁴³ C. J. Blomfield to B. W. Noel, 16 Feb. 1840. A. Blomfield, *A Memoir of Charles James Blomfield, D.D.*, London, 1863, Vol. II, p. 117.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁵ cf. [William Harness], *A Short Letter to the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Wriothesley Noel, M.A., on his Baptismal Regeneration Sermons*, London, 1843.

⁴⁶ W. G. Ward to E. B. Pusey, Mar. 1845. W. Ward, *William George Ward and the Oxford Movement*, London, 1889, p. 355.

⁴⁷ E. Bellasis to C. Blandy, 28 Feb. 1845. E. Bellasis, *Memorials of Mr. Serjeant Bellasis, 1800-1873*, London, 1893, p. 41.

⁴⁸ J. Hardcastle to Mr. Raikes, 7 Dec. 1802. [E. C. Haldane], *Memoir of Joseph Hardcastle*, p. 185.

⁴⁹ B. W. Noel, *Notes of a short Tour through the Midland Counties of Ireland in the Summer of 1836*, London, 1837.

⁵⁰ cf. *The Eclectic Review*, New ser., Vol. XII, Nov. 1842, pp. 491ff.

⁵¹ B. W. Noel, *A Plea for the Poor, showing how the proposed Repeal of the existing Corn Laws will affect the Interests of the Working Classes*, London, 1841. cf. K. R. M. Short, "English Baptists and the Corn Laws", *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 7, Jul. 1966, pp. 315ff. Dr. Short's statement (p. 317) that the pamphlet appeared after Noel's appointment as chaplain to the queen seems to be wrong: *A Plea for the Poor* was advertised as "just published" on 5 August 1841 (*The Record*, 5 Aug. 1841, p. 1); Noel was

gazetted chaplain on 9 August (The Lord Chamberlain to B. W. Noel, 9 Aug. 1841. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.c.).

⁵² G. S. R. Kitson Clark, "The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties", *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., Vol. IV, No. 1, 1951, p. 5.

⁵³ *A Quaker Journal: being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hichin (1804-1861), a Member of the Society of Friends*, ed. G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, London, 1934, Vol. I, pp. 258, 262. I am most grateful to Dr. E. A. Payne for this and other references.

⁵⁴ *supra*, n. 51, cf. *The Complete Peerage*, ed. Gibb, Vol. V, pp. 601f.

⁵⁵ "Presbyter", *An Examination of The Record's Twelve Articles on Mr. Noel's Work*, London, 1849, p. 44. cf. Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches*, Glasgow, 1838. B. W. Noel, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Viscount Melbourne, on Church Extension*, London, 1839, p. 26. Already Noel was prepared to countenance concurrent endowment by the state of other denominations that were Evangelical. *ibid.* p. 28f.

⁵⁶ T. Brown, *Annals of the Disruption*, Edinburgh, 1884, p. 533. B. W. Noel, *The Case of the Free Church of Scotland*, London, 1844, p. 43. cf. Thomas Chalmers to B. W. Noel, 1 Mar. 1842. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.c.

⁵⁷ C. Hutcheson, *Tidings from the Mountains: A Reply to certain statements in the Hon. and Rev. B. W. Noel's Essay*, entitled "The Case of the Free Church of Scotland", London, 1845, p. 52.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the Anti-Maynooth Conference of 1845*, ed. A. S. Thelwall, London, 1845, pp. xvi, xi, xii, 178, 190, 195ff.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. xii.

⁶⁰ The motion of 18 March condemned support for popery on the vague grounds that any such support would be "calculated to bring down the judgments of God upon this Protestant country." *Proceedings of the Anti-Maynooth Conference of 1845*, ed. A. S. Thelwall, p. xii. Most Churchmen might draw the inference that they were upholding the Protestant Establishment, but most Dissenters (who in this were joined by Noel) would not. For a contrary view, cf. E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, London, 1968, p. 34.

⁶¹ B. W. Noel, *The Catholic Claims: A Letter to the Lord Bishop of Cashel*, London, 1845, *passim*, spec. p. 15.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ J. W. Massie, *The Evangelical Alliance*, London, 1847, pp. i, iii, 141. *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 393.

⁶⁴ B. W. Noel, *Essay on the Union of Church and State*, London, 1848, p. 513.

⁶⁵ T. Binney, *Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity*, London, 1848, p. 14.

⁶⁶ G. F. A. Best, "The Evangelicals and the Established Church in the early Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. X, Part I, Apr. 1959, p. 63.

⁶⁷ J. P. Bacon to Dr. Patton, 24 Nov. 1848, cited from *The New York Independent* by *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Mar. 1849, p. 122f.

⁶⁸ B. W. Noel, *The Case of the Free Church of Scotland*, p. 93.

⁶⁹ Anon. to B. W. Noel, 2 Dec. 1848. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.d.

⁷⁰ J. P. Bacon to Dr. Patton, 24 Nov. 1848. *The Baptist Reporter*, Mar. 1849, p. 123. The term of years on lease from the trustees of Rugby School, the owners of the estate, had been passed on by Daniel Wilson senior to his son. *The Record*, 30 Nov. 1848, p. 4.

⁷¹ Edward Bickersteth to B. W. Noel, 17 Nov. 1848. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.d.

⁷² J. P. Bacon to Dr. Patton, 24 Nov. 1848.

⁷³ *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1848, p. 2; 30 Nov. 1848, p. 3; 1 Dec. 1848, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *The Record*, 4 Dec. 1848, p. 4.

⁷⁵ The 631-page book was printed between 30 November and 23 December. *The Times*, 1 Dec. 1848, p. 5; *The Record*, 21 Dec. 1848, p. 5.

⁷⁶ "Presbyter", *An Examination of The Record's Twelve Articles on Mr. Noel's Work*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Sep. 1849, p. 340.

⁷⁸ W. Tilson Marsh, *The Church and the State*, London, 1849, p. 8. Clotworthy Gillmor, *A Reply to the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Wriothesley Noel's Essay. A Watchman's Cry, to the Lay Members of the Church of England*, London, 1849. "Philologus", *The Voice of Events to the Evangelical Laity in the Church of England*, London, 1849.

⁷⁹ *The Christian Remembrancer*, Vol. XVII, Apr. 1849, p. 288. *The Prospective Review*, Vol. V, 1849, p. 252.

⁸⁰ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Apr. 1849, p. 162. B. S. Hollis, *The Second Reformation: or, the Earth helping the Woman*, London, 1849, p. viii.

⁸¹ B. L. Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, ed. O. Greenwood, Cambridge, 1952, p. 393.

⁸² *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Jul. 1849, p. 279.

⁸³ *A Quaker Journal*, ed. G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, Vol. II, pp. 439f. In a second edition of *Church and State* published early in 1849 some repetitions were deleted and some statements modified, but the overall length was reduced only marginally, from 631 to 604 pages.

⁸⁴ B. W. Noel, *Essay on the Union of Church and State*, p. 11.

⁸⁵ A. Mursell, *James Phillippo Mursell: his life and work*, London, 1886, p. 86.

⁸⁶ W. E. Gladstone, *The State in its relations with the Church*, 4th ed., London, 1841, Vol. I, p. 38.

⁸⁷ Noel, *Church and State*, pp. 31-89.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 15. Noel does not miss "the point of Gladstone's distinction between the appeal to Scripture and to the moral nature of the State", as Dr. Vidler suggests in *The Orb and the Cross: A normative study in the relations of church and state with reference to Gladstone's early writings*, London, 1945, p. 34. Arguments against Gladstone's deductions from the moral nature of the state and arguments from scripture are presented separately. On the one hand, Noel holds that responsibility for religious choice rests with the nation, which is composed of adults, not with the legislature, even if it were wholly Christian (*Church and State*, pp. 24, 25-31). On the other, he has the conviction, not shared by Gladstone, that biblical principles can be applied to church-state relations (*Church and State*, pp. 90-253).

⁸⁹ A. R. Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross*, p. 97.

⁹⁰ Noel, *Church and State*, pp. 1ff, 154.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 90, 110-55, spec. 133ff. cf. Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches*, p. 116.

⁹² Noel, *Church and State*, p. 257.

⁹³ cf. G. F. A. Best, *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, The Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Church of England*, Cambridge, 1964, p. 173. Noel implicitly repudiates Gladstone's use of this Tory argument. *Church and State*, p. 124f.

⁹⁴ Noel, *Church and State*, pp. 211, 168.

⁹⁵ *The Case for Disestablishment*, New ed., London, 1894, pp. 21f, 104.

⁹⁶ Noel, *Church and State*, pp. 31, 431.

⁹⁷ J. P. Bacon to Dr. Patton, 24 Nov. 1848. Pace (e.g.) A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, London, 1947, p. 237. In *Church and State* Noel still allows (inconsistently with other passages, *supra* n. 96) that "if any infants are to be baptised, they must be the infants of saints . . ." (p. 208).

⁹⁸ "Presbyter", *An Examination*, p. 61. cf. R. W. Sibthorp to Rev. Dr. Bloxam, 8 Mar. 1849. J. Fowler, *Richard Waldo Sibthorp*, p. 104.

⁹⁰ A. R. Buckland, *D.N.B.*, Vol. XLI, p. 89. *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 409.

¹⁰⁰ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Apr. 1849, p. 162. *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 409.

¹⁰¹ *The Congregational Year Book for 1849*, p. 5.

¹⁰² *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Apr. 1849, p. 154; Sep. 1849, pp. 325-30.

¹⁰³ B. W. Noel, *Essay on Christian Baptism*, London, 1849, p. vi.

¹⁰⁴ B. W. Noel, *Personal Consecration to God in Baptism*, London, 1849. *Essay on the External Act of Baptism*, London, 1850.

¹⁰⁵ D. H. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, London, 1966, p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Noel to Mrs. B. W. Noel, 2 Oct. 1849. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.17.a.

¹⁰⁷ In 1847 Robert Candlish of Edinburgh had asked Noel to intercede with Palmerston on behalf of the Free Church of Vaud. R. Candlish to B. W. Noel, 19 Nov. 1847. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.e. J. E. Ritchie, *The London Pulpit*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁸ G. C. Boase, "Henry Montagu Villiers", *D.N.B.*, Vol. LVIII, p. 350f. cf. C. M. Birrell, *The Life of William Brock, D.D.*, London, 1878, pp. 181ff.

¹⁰⁹ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Sep. 1849, p. 361; Oct. 1849, p. 400.

¹¹⁰ J. J. Evans, ed., *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. James Harrington Evans, late minister of John Street Chapel*, London, 1852, pp. 29, xvii, 84.

¹¹¹ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VII, Apr. 1850, p. 184.

¹¹² C. M. Birrell, *The Life of William Brock, D.D.*, pp. 170f. *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Nov. 1849, p. 441. *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. LX, Sep. 1868, p. 593.

¹¹³ *The Baptist Reporter*, New ser., Vol. VI, Oct. 1849, p. 402.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, Vol. VII, Apr. 1850, p. 184.

¹¹⁵ I. Dodson, *Brief Reasons for leaving the English Establishment*, London, 1849, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ Noel, *Church and State*, p. vii.

¹¹⁷ A. Miall, *Life of Edward Miall*, London, 1884, p. 149. *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLI, Jun. 1849, p. 359.

¹¹⁸ *The Record*, 13 Aug. 1849, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ T. R. Birks, *Memoir of the Rev. E. Bickersteth*, Vol. II, p. 407.

¹²⁰ cf. C. Jerram to W. F. Cobb, 16 Oct. 1845. J. Jerram, ed., *The Memoirs and a Selection from the Letters of the late Rev. Charles Jerram, M.A.*, p. 459.

¹²¹ T. R. Birks, *The Christian State*, London, 1847. cf. "Presbyter", *An Examination*, p. 6.

¹²² *The Baptist Handbook*, 1874, p. 287.

¹²³ T. W. Aveling, *Memorials of the Clayton Family*, London, 1867, p. 431. cf. A. Blomfield, *A Memoir of Charles James Blomfield, D.D.*, Vol. I, p. 201.

¹²⁴ cf. Noel, *Church and State*, pp. 6ff.

¹²⁵ J. J. Evans, ed., *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. James Harrington Evans*, p. 62. J. H. Philpot, *The Seceders (1829-69)*, London, 1930.

¹²⁶ *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XLII, Jan. 1850, facing p. 1. S. J. Price, "The Centenary of the Baptist Building Fund", *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. III, No. 5, Jan. 1927, p. 217.

¹²⁷ A. C. Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground*, Sydney, 1966, p. 53.

¹²⁸ T. D. Landels, *William Landels, D.D.: a memoir*, London, 1900, p. 104.

¹²⁹ B. W. Noel, *Growth in Grace, the Want of the Churches: a discourse delivered at the forty-third annual session of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1855, pp. 19f.

¹³⁰ F. R. Salter, "Political Nonconformity in the 1830s", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., Vol. III, 1953, pp. 138f.

¹³¹ E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: a short history*, London, 1959, p. 79. J. E. Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain*, London, 1949, p. 52.

¹³² J. E. Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain*, p. 100. cf. R. Sandall, *The History of the Salvation Army*, Vol. I, London, 1947, pp. 142f.

¹³³ J. W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship: A Centenary Tribute to the life and work of the World's Evangelical Alliance: 1846-1946*, London, 1946, p. 59. cf. W. O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Vol. I, London, 1966, pp. 306ff.

¹³⁴ J. W. Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship*, pp. 28f.

¹³⁵ *Annual Reports of the L.C.M. C. J. Montague, Sixty Years in Waifdom: or, The Ragged School Movement in English History*, London, 1904, p. 156.

¹³⁶ B. W. Noel, *Letters on the Church of Rome addressed to the Rev. Emmanuel Feraut, D.D. and LL.D.*, London, 1851-2. J. Stoughton, *Religion in England from 1800 to 1850*, London, 1884, Vol. II, p. 74.

¹³⁷ J. Parker, *A Preacher's Life*, London, 1899, p. 396.

¹³⁸ J. E. Ritchie, *London Pulpit*, p. 150.

¹³⁹ *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 393. H. S. Skeats and C. S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England*, London, [1894], p. 606. *The Baptist Handbook*, 1874, p. 287.

¹⁴⁰ *The Times*, 21 Jan. 1873, p. 8.

¹⁴¹ cf. E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union*, pp. 82ff. Noel's catholicity for the sake of the gospel seems to have been transmitted in an exaggerated form to another generation by the evangelist Henry Varley, converted under Noel's ministry in 1851 and strongly influenced by him later, who was responsible for the creation of the undenominational West London Tabernacle. H. Varley, *Henry Varley's Life-Story*, London, [1913], pp. 25ff, 98. cf. E. J. Poole-Connor, *Evangelical Unity*, London, 1941, p. 157ff.

¹⁴² B. W. Noel, *Thoughts on the War*, London, 1855. Sir Robert Peel to B. W. Noel, 1 Oct. 1857. Noel Collection: R.53.7.3.13.2.f. B. W. Noel, *The Fallen and their Associates*, London, 1860. cf. K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: an appraisal of their social work in the Victorian era*, London, 1962, pp. 150, 152, 161. B. W. Noel, *The Fight between Sayers and Heenan*, London, 1860; *The Case of George William Gordon, Esq., of Jamaica*, London, 1866.

¹⁴³ D. Jordan and E. J. Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War*, Oxford, 1931, p. 142.

¹⁴⁴ E. C. Mack and W. H. G. Armytage, *Thomas Hughes: the life of the author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays"*, London, 1952, pp. 136f. *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 410.

¹⁴⁵ J. W. Massie, *America: the origin of the present conflict; her prospect for the slave, and her claim for anti-slavery sympathy*, London, 1864, pp. 6ff.

¹⁴⁶ B. W. Noel, *Freedom and Slavery in the U.S.A.*, London, 1863; *The Rebellion in America*, London, 1863. D. Jordan and E. J. Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁷ B. W. Noel, *Growth in Grace, the Want of the Churches*, p. 23. cf. Noel, *Church and State*, p. 253.

¹⁴⁸ B. W. Noel, *Influence of the Union of the Church with the State upon Christian Union and the Progress of Religion*, London, 1866. cf. R. G. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent*, London, 1959, p. 20. The pamphlet was reprinted as late as 1880.

¹⁴⁹ cf. *The Eclectic Review*, New ser., Vol. XXV, Feb. 1849, p. 253.

¹⁵⁰ Clotworthy Gillmor, *A Reply*, p. 43.

¹⁵¹ Noel, *Growth in Grace*, p. 24.

¹⁵² J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party*, London, 1966, p. 38.

¹⁵³ H. Christmas, *Preachers and Preaching*, London, 1858, p. 116. Spurgeon was classified under "Eccentric Preaching".

¹⁵⁴ *The Baptist Handbook*, 1870, p. 11.

¹⁵⁵ B. W. Noel, *Letter to the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, respecting his attack upon the Evangelical Ministers of the Church of England*, London, 1864, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ T. D. Landels, *William Landels, D.D.*, pp. 272f, 274f.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 269-76.

¹⁵⁵ Payne, *Baptist Union*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Angus, *Baptists: their existence a present necessity, a conscientious conviction, a representative, and a defence of important spiritual truth*, London, 1866, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ Landels, *William Landels*, p. 223.

¹⁶² Payne, *Baptist Union*, p. 101.

¹⁶³ *The Baptist Handbook*, 1870, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Buckland, *D.N.B.*, Vol. XLI, p. 89.

¹⁶⁵ The only exception, a recent one, is K. R. M. Short, "Baptist Wriothesley Noel", *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XX, No. 2, Apr. 1963.

¹⁶⁶ H. S. Skeats and C. S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England*, p. 510f.

¹⁶⁷ *Sunday at Home*, Jun. 1868, p. 409.

¹⁶⁸ G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, p. 185. W. H. B. Proby, *Annals of the Low-Church Party in England*, London, 1888, Vol. I, pp. 336, 448, 508.

¹⁶⁹ B. W. Noel, *Letter to the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, p. 10.

D. W. BEBBINGTON.

Samuel Morton Peto: A Note

SAMUEL MORTON PETO, in his heyday one of the wealthiest of Baptists, was considered an embarrassment by many within the denomination after his firm became bankrupt during the general financial difficulties of the mid 1860s. None of our present day members has been more jealous of the reputation of Peto than the Rev. J. L. Chown of Wolverhampton.

Peto, born 4th August, 1809, at Whitmore House, Sutton, became in his youth a draughtsman of some distinction, showing in addition an ability in design. He and a cousin, Thomas Grissell, inherited their uncle's building business in 1830. In partnership they built Hungerford Market (1832/3), the Reform (1836), the Conservative (1840), and the Oxford & Cambridge (1830) club houses, the Lyceum (1834), St. James's (1835) and Olympic (1849) theatres, and Nelson's column (1843). Under Isambard Brunel they built the G.W.R. line from Hanwell to Langley and that from Reading to Goring. The foundations of the Houses of Parliament were laid in 1839 but Grissell sought the dissolution of their partnership in 1846 — before that contract was completed — because, although railway contracts brought good returns, he was uneasy about the heavy initial capital investment. In the division of their company's interests Peto kept the railway contracts — the Hythe to Folkestone section, the Ely, Peterborough and Norfolk section and the Southampton to Dorchester line.

Edward Ladd Betts was also in this line of business, having ballasted for the Reigate to Folkestone line. He married Peto's sister, Ann, in 1843 and the two contractors formed a partnership in the year that the one with Grissell was dissolved. The new association continued until Betts' death in 1872.

The years 1847 and '48 were busy ones. They built the G.N.R.