TRANSACTIONS

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*CHAPELS IN CRISIS

MEN AND ISSUES IN VICTORIAN EASTERN ENGLAND

On the morning of Wednesday, 22 November 1871, there was an ordination service in Salem Chapel, York. Such occasions were habitually described as at once solemn and delightful, it being a tendency for Dissenters to turn their grandest functions into jamborees. On this occasion the ordinand was an alumnus of Spring Hill College, Birmingham. He was 'a free lance among men—whose point was always sunk before God', and his name was John Hunter.[1] The preacher was John Hunter's principal, Dr. Simon. James Parsons, Hunter's predecessor, and a vastly different sort of man, who had made York and Parsons synonymous in nonconformist eyes, was associated in the laying on of hands. A contemporary of Hunter, James Ward of Cambridge, gave an address which added to an already controversial reputation. Shortly afterwards, in the summer of 1872, the chapel was the setting for a Victorian scene: James Ward announcing his sermon subject, 'The Name of Jesus—the name which is above every name', and then, by way of pointed introduction, adding 'Jesus Christ—a perfect gentleman': and at that a rustle of silks as the wife of the Liberal M.P., who was also Lord Mayor and Senior Deacon of Salem, sailed out, horrorstruck at her Saviour being placed so firmly in a class of society which she had reached with difficulty.

Savour the contradictions in this: Dr. Simon whose college was riddled, so it was feared, with religious liberalism; James Ward a former senior student who later, as Fellow of a Cambridge College, would help to mould an undergraduate called Bertrand Russell;

*This paper was delivered to the Society at its Annual Meeting on 22 May 1968.

[1] P. T. Forsyth, quoted in L. S. Hunter, *John Hunter, D.D.: a life*, 1921, p. 289.

John Hunter, a kindred spirit, but strong enough to remain an Independent churchman, a man who had known childhood conversion when showers of blessing fell upon Scotland in 1859; and Salem, York. Six hundred of its people asked Hunter to their pulpit when he was only 22, yet it was a fellowship still dominated by Parsons, whose antique rhetoric was the chapel's only ornament; it would be the chapel where Moody would preach his first English sermon, Sankey sitting in the choir. But John Hunter, its pastor at this time, would be able in later years to persuade his Glasgow congregation to tolerate a memorial window commemorating Bishop Colenso, among others, with the figure of Isaiah whose face was the face of George Macdonald; he almost convinced his London congregation that a rood beam with a cross on it would look nice, particularly when he had a male choir in surplices, and a chancel where the table was strangely like an altar.

We have here a miniature of a theology which is becoming kindlier and more imprecise, of externals which are becoming richer and more fashionable. When these things are set in the context of Congregational churches, which of them plays the larger part in such development? What is the effect of a firm and dominating personality? What is the effect of that perennial conflict between social position and religious prejudice, in which religion is seldom the ultimate victor? How many chapels suffered the outraged rustling of the silks of a Lady Leeman? The mere historian is loth to ascribe change to the Holy Spirit; and he is sceptical of the precise effect of theological controversies upon men in the pew—to what, then, may he ascribe the change?

Forsyth, paying a funeral tribute to Hunter, noted 'his great master Maurice' and commented 'He did not always get quite alongside the religious mind of his own communion because he had found his soul outside it, *as it then was*'.[2] Silvester Horne, in his *Popular History*, underlines this development when he affirms that no churchmen were so permeated with Broad Church principles as Free Churchmen.[3]

It is doubtless unadventurous to attribute the changes within our churches to the influence of the great Broad Churchmen, and yet there was something in the warm and woolly nature of what good men thought F. D. Maurice and his disciples were trying to get across to them, that could seep through the chinks and crevices

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[3] C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* 1903, 5th ed., p. 390.

even of Independent churches. A rediscovery of the Incarnation was something at once disturbing and alluring for Independent churchmen in an age which treasured the 'responsibilities and the prerogatives of the individual life'.[4]

I wish to illustrate this by considering certain congregations in eastern England in the later part of the nineteenth century. They were in turmoil. There was in them a more or less clear theological division, and somewhere in the troubles, it so happens, there figures Spring Hill College. I do not really wish to trace a pattern, because this is selective history—I have chanced upon certain churches and have selected sufficient material from them to enable me to prepare a paper. Moreover, unless the evidence is crystal clear,—and it seldom is—it is dangerous to make too precise a distinction between *odium theologicum* and the pious fancies of good taste.

In the 1870's and 1880's there was unease even in the thickened countryside of the East Anglian towns. The shadow of agricultural depression was never far away, yet many of the congregations had entered an heroic age in which any disruption could be regarded as a natural complement to healthy rebuilding. These were strong congregations, even when allowance is made for the legendary chairs in the aisle. In an England where Liberalism was rampant and where foreign travel under the supervision of Thomas Cook, the General Baptist, or Henry Lunn, the Wesleyan Methodist, was luring deacons away from the boarding houses of Torquay or Barmouth, it might be expected that social tensions would find expression. And where were tensions more likely than in chapels whose apses, or trefoil-ended pews, or five-lighted Early English windows encased in Caen Stone, or Lombardic campaniles stood in permanent memory of holidays abroad?

Naturally, these tensions occurring where they did, the reasons for them were ascribed to doctrinal strangeness. Ritualism and Rationalism, those un-English, un-Evangelical 'isms', were tarred with the same brush. After all, both began with the same letter. Renan the rationalist had once been a priest of Rome. For few in any congregation could Renan or Strauss or Colenso or Darwin, or John Henry Newman, be much more than a wicked name to be hurled at a wicked brother; but if you must vilify difficult brothers at church meetings it is seemly to call them by doctrinal names, since doctrine plays some part in church life—for a few, indeed,

[4]The phrase was used by Henry Allon in his Jubilee Address to C.U.E.W., at Manchester in October 1881. *Jubilee of the Congregational Union, Manchester, October 1881*. pp. 38-9.

the deepest part. And then, of course, smoke usually needs a fire : if, in Chapel, you call externals by deeper names, are they still externals ?

* * *

'We . . . believe that all man's life and work can be dedicated to heaven.' Those are the words of a man who, from 1858-1867, ministered to some Baptists at King's Lynn, preaching the non-conformity of soaring spires and Robert Browning. Man compared the 'rarely beautiful' sermons of this Baptist with those of Robertson of Brighton and felt that they read like a poem of Tennyson's.[5] (Up in Aberdeen in 1865 John Hunter was hearing Tennyson quoted in the pulpit for the first time.) At East Dereham, in the same county, the antics and pretensions of local Congregationalists in the 1870's aroused the mingled amusement and admiration of the High Church parson. At St. Neots in 1870 the minister protested his 'great longings of heart to bring you all as best I could through the God man, Christ Jesus, into fellowship with the humanly Divine and infinitely compassionate heart of God' : for which modern vagueness his Church thanked him kindly and he left the ministry to concentrate on his school for girls and little boys, Prospect House, where 'French is taught by a resident Parisienne'. At Braintree in 1883 the minister called on his teachers in protestation that he preached indeed in accord with the word of God. At Beccles in 1876 the congregation believed that their pastor preached 'contrary to the fundamental Doctrines held by the Church'.

So men spoke as the sands of their faith shifted. At the Autumnal Meetings of 1870 every aspect of religious life was debated.[6] The Chairman considered modes of admission and deprecated 'experiences'. Another speaker outlined the religious man of the day. Guinness Rogers and Curwen of Plaistow reiterated their pleas for the fellowship of music and the community of liturgy. All speakers witnessed to the stresses of daily living and asked boldly why the religious man should fear to succumb to the best of all worlds ; why should he not use the gifts of refinement and education ? And perhaps for such men the gifts of refinement and education had already become adequate substitutes for doctrine. Vagueness—and reticence, its gentlemanly counterpart—was a Victorian virtue and good for Congregationalists who could now sing hymns from

[5]E. Luscombe Hull, *Sermons Preached at Union Chapel, King's Lynn*, 2nd Series, 1869, p. 153 and 3rd Series, 1874, for press opinions quoted on cover.

[6]*C.Y.B.*, 1871 passim.

T. T. Lynch's *Rivulet* and revel in fragrant rose petals and Alpine sunsets and blue skies without bothering their heads about the heresies that the anodyne words concealed. The Devil ? Eternal Torment ? Election ? Or, the Incarnate Christ, the Christian gentleman, the patriotic Christian soldier, hero, guide and captain for children everywhere ? This was the faith for which Congregationalists everywhere, even in Eastern England, hailed the Revision of the Bible, sought to improve the creaking machinery of their colleges, and prepared to wrestle with the opportunities of wider University education. It was a fresh and heady climate, naturally given to invigorating squalls, more wind than weather.

Such a squall was the Leicester Conference of 1877, with its concern (voiced with 'singular literary beauty' and 'singular intellectual vagueness'[7]) for widening the basis of religious communion. If it provoked most men, like Joseph Parker, into overloud denunciation ; it strengthened some, like Baldwin Brown, into an attractive defence and explanation ; and it touched all hearts. That was the point. Allanson Picton, the leader of the Leicester heretics, was the fellow student and the leader of pastors even in Royston, Braintree or Beccles. At their most innocent the troubles which concerned such men involved a contemporary rephrasing of eternal truths, which served their churches right for being so suspicious of creeds. What is above all things significant is that so often the offending ministers secured the support of many, sometimes most, in their congregations. Their churches were sufficiently established to expect, and attract, the service of educated young men like themselves. For eastern England they were town churches, but with a firm element of farmers and their labourers, and of agricultural tradesmen. Whatever the nucleus of doctor, bank clerk or shopkeeper, these churches also touched the heart of rural nonconformity, and whether the farmer and the miller rejected it or not, they were nonetheless touched by the daring learning of Spring Hill. They could not get away from it.

In February 1856 (the year when Allanson Picton failed to find his first church because of the heresies clinging to him) John Street Church, Royston, not quite unanimously invited to its pastorate a fellow student of Picton's, David Worthington Simon. John Street was a pretentious place. The fellowship was a curious mixture of the straight-laced and the relaxed. The descendants of Crabb Robinson's delightful circle of friends still attended it ;

[7]D. W. Simon accused Allanson Picton of this, F. J. Powicke, *David Worthington Simon,* 1912 p. 99.

some of them liked to send their sons to Mill Hill School. One of them, Charles Beldam, wrote in 1854 that he found Royston 'a jolly place and I drink port wine finely'. Foxhunting, a good dinner and play in town, 'some new lancers', holidays in Malta or Madeira and eventually a measure of schooling at Harrow or Eton all, after 1854, made an appearance in these families, who yet with touching and surprising faith kept something of their Nonconformity. This was a not unimportant aspect of the church which invited Simon.

He was in his middle twenties. His education at Silcoates School and Lancashire College suggested safety; save that he had been a favourite pupil of Samuel Davidson who was, in 1857, removed from his teaching post on the grounds of doctrinal laxity. Worse still, Simon had studied at Halle. Indeed, he married a German.

His pastorate was brief and rumour surrounded its closing. Simon's biographer, F. J. Powicke, understood that he attended a party at which there was dancing.[8] 'W.T.W.', son of the chapel's builder, later recalled for a local newspaper 'a young gentleman named Simon . . . I think it was one of his fair hearers who once asked Mr. Simon whether he thought it was right for Christians to go to the theatre. The minister answered thus—

> I have been there and still would go,
> 'Twas like a little heaven below.'

Neither of these distant recollections is improbable, but in looking more closely at the events, it seems that one discovers a more intricate pattern. Royston was a place with uncomfortably recent memories of heresy. It had influential adherents who might still, when doors were locked, subscribe to it. It is not easy to confront such people, but large pretentious families of flimsy financial security are quarrelsome, and the interrelated Royston dissenters were prone to lawsuits with each other, in which religious differences seem to have reflected legal differences. In 1841, doubtless in just such a spirit, 'W.T.W.'s' father had asked the chapel solicitor to compose the trust in such a way as to keep it from Unitarians. Sixteen years later, Simon's inexperience, his breadth, his apparent love of enjoyment amongst those families who could afford enjoyment, perhaps revived old suspicions; and men straight from college are easily removable.

In 1869, Simon became Principal of Spring Hill. In the years which followed, there came from that place a group of ministers

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

who, settling in rural churches, unsettled their congregations. Samuel Davidson was vindicated—as, of course, were his opponents. Physically, Spring Hill was a suggestive place. John Hunter found it ' very large and beautiful ' in 1868, with ' two spires at each end and a large tower in the middle '. The library betrayed something of the ambiguity with which Englishmen, particularly Free Church Englishmen, regarded such places—it was ' the size of an ordinary church ' and it contained ' a fine organ '.[9] For a library to possess an organ, suggested breeding; the library at Blenheim Palace has an organ. The atmosphere of such a place, the dry, critical, influence of Simon, and the exhilarating promise of R. W. Dale's Birmingham—which had just become Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham too—conditioned a man for lofty spheres of usefulness, at a time when nonconformist pulpits were just such places, and which important churches were more willing to consider men straight from college.

It is customary now to undervalue the power of the Victorian pulpit—just what it meant to those listening and those listened to. Preaching was an art which lured great men. Preaching Sunday by Sunday and three times a Sunday to a chapel filled by your own efforts and swayed by the tricks of your trade, must have contributed greatly to the self-consciousness of that new Liberal Party which so many good men now considered to be Christianity in practice. How intolerable that such hallowed enthusiasm in God's house should be rebuffed when it extended into God's world. Yet the march of progress, under preachers who were scholars and gentlemen, guided by deacons who were princes of commerce and men of the world, meant that the enthusiasm of God's house *could* be taken into God's world : they knew they must conquer.

The Free Church pulpit demanded only one hard quality : firmness of character to the point of insensitivity. The ministry tends, above most callings, to attract sensitive men.

In December 1874 a Spring Hill student, J. H. Robison, accepted the call to the church in Beccles. Beccles was firmly and prosperously puritan. The Martyrs' Memorial Baptist Chapel possessed in George Wright a gritty pastor, rare among strict Baptists in his ability to take his flock outside themselves. At the Congregational Chapel, John Flower had been equally energetic. Flower's forty years' pastorate closed in 1873. It was a situation requiring delicate adjustments, and three years of difficulty ensued before his church recovered the extrovert leadership which it craved. At the core of

[9]Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

the difficulty was Robison. It was his first pastorate, and he was 30. It was also his last pastorate, because when in 1876 his resignation took effect, he turned to teaching.

The reasons for his failure are clouded. He aroused the opposition of members of the Flower family. Yet in the troubles eighty members had voted for him despite the criticism that his preaching was 'contrary to the fundamental Doctrines held by the Church'. That was the rub ; he preached Spring Hill.

Rather more than a year after Robison left Beccles, another Spring Hill man received a unanimous invitation to London Road, Braintree. He was a namesake and kinsman of Principal Simon as well as being his pupil. He was four years younger than Robison. He was an attractive and balanced man from a persistently ministerial family ; later that persistence would emerge more questionably in his nephew, Lord Chancellor Simon. Although his first pastorate ended unhappily, he remained in the ministry. He was unlike many of his Spring Hill generation in this.

The church to which he went was strong and it was growing. It was a challenging and important charge. Braintree and Bocking were as firmly puritan as Beccles. The church at Bocking End was entrenched in Seventeenth Century tradition. London Road was newer (it had been formed in 1789) and it was altogether stricter and less opulent. For the first half of the 19th century the two churches had been dominated by two ministers of very different character. Thomas Craig of Bocking ministered to the Unitarian, Samuel Courtauld, and had a passion for children. John Carter of Braintree was more fiery.

Latterly London Road had mellowed. A. N. Goodrich, whose removal to Elgin Place, Glasgow, was the occasion for Thomas Simon's call, was a man who, within seven years, would be considered with John Hunter for the succession to Baldwin Brown's pulpit in Brixton. Goodrich's pastorate at Braintree was apparently a successful one, but Simon's candidature brought certain tensions to the surface. When his name was first proposed, in November 1877, there was much discussion and an equal number of members preferred a rival candidate. Simon, therefore, was asked to preach conditionally, an unsatisfactory but not untypical arrangement which issued in an unanimous invitation. On 31 January 1878 it was minuted 'That Mr. Simon is hereby elected a member of this Church and the pastor thereof'.

London Road is lucky in its copious records ; it is also fortunate in the light which a volume of reminiscences sheds upon the

tensions within it.[10] F. H. Crittall was the son of one of the deacons. In 1878 he was in all the turmoil of late youth. In after-life he achieved position with the manufacture of metal window frames, but he was unable to recall his chapel youth with much pleasure. The church was over-burdened with activity, admirably, dauntingly so. Fully committed members could have needed little employment outside it, yet the activity within was sufficiently varied for life there never to be narrow or circumscribed. Crittall, however, did not feel this, and beyond the suggestive comment that his sisters were fully at home in it all (and one in fact became a missionary in India), he paints a picture in deep grey tints.

His predicament is understandable. His family was typical in its middle-class pretensions, and it shared fully the Victorian middle-class fear that life was a knife-edge, with financial disgrace dropping sheer from either side. The circumstances of his early life were sufficiently comfortable to make him aware—as any active boy should be aware—how intolerable it was that so much which lay just beyond his reach should be so clearly visible. His life seemed in the light of retrospect to consist of daily thrashings at an inferior private school, or pudding before meat because meat was dear and pudding was filling. And then, weekly, ' the gloomy horror ', the Victorian Sunday, ' carrying with it an appropriate and distinct attire for us all, and my mother, in the dress she wore in the afternoon, seemed, as it were, the formidable high priestess . . . '[11] Could he not see that his mother's Sunday afternoon dress was part of a middle-class make-believe transforming her, once a week, into what real gentlefolk were, every day ? Perhaps not, since life was too full of temperance recitations, conversaziones, amateur theatricals (but never, or almost never, professional), spelling bees and prayer meetings ' to which the respectable youth of Braintree went in a body '. Above it all there was—ghastly responsibility—the knowledge that mother prayerfully intended him for the ministry.

The boundary between a full life and an intolerable one is slight, and momentarily Crittall considered that Thomas Simon crossed it for him. He had just left school and entered the family ironmongery business and to please his mother and because it was pleasant under Tom Simon, he even taught in the Sunday School which was then of great size. This was a small sign of the freshness of Simon's ministry which lingers today in the church books, if only in the accounts of annual teas and subscribers' dinners.

[10]Mr. and Mrs. F. H. Crittall, *Fifty Years of Work and Play*, 1934.
[11]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

At the turn of the year in 1882, Simon received an invitation from a new church in Leicester. To his surprise and hurt the deacons at Braintree showed eagerness to be rid of him in this honourable way. There could be no doubt of the popularity of much of his ministry, but equally strong ran the undercurrents of distrust and when, in his letter of resignation, 25 January 1883, he vindicated his orthodoxy, the nature of them becomes plainer. Of the deacons who themselves resigned a month later he wrote :

> I am sure these Brethren did what they felt right but such is the fact and I know not how to account for it, for to the best of my ability I have performed my ordination vows and my teaching is in strict accord with the confession of faith I then made in the presence of many witnesses among whom were men of theological and pastoral standing who accepted my statement as being in accord with the word of God. The congregation too, is as large if not larger than when I came amongst you and all the organisations and classes in connection with the Church are more vigorous than I have known them.

The sequel was happy. In December 1883 W. Johnson Cole of Cheshunt College (a safer place) was invited almost unanimously. He remained until 1922. Simon himself returned to eastern England and between 1897 and 1919 he sustained a ministry at Stowmarket, a town whose Dissenting Decorated Cathedral demanded a triumphant witness from all its servants.

Perhaps only F. H. Crittall was the loser, but he had his fortune to make.

* * *

Many in the 1870's and 1880's must have found the experience of their first pastorate strangely like the hell in whose disbelief lay their undoing. The history of the Cambridge Congregational Church shows the extent to which these controversial men found support amongst their flock.

Plainly situated in Downing Place, it was an old and respectable fellowship. It ceded pride of place in the Cambridge dissenting community to its offspring, St. Andrews Street Baptist Church, the charge of Robert Robinson and Robert Hall. For much of the century its membership was nearer 100 than 200, and for the first half of the century it was a declining church. From 1848, however, its character changed. Between 1848 and 1854 the minister was a man in his late twenties, G. B. Bubier, who attracted more than a town congregation. It was increasingly suggested that his chapel might be rebuilt with a view to attracting the growing number of

Free Church undergraduates. In 1854 Bubier removed to Salford where he was close to the controversy which pushed Samuel Davidson from Lancashire College. Bubier sympathised with Davidson. The dissenting world is a pleasantly small sort of world and in 1864 he became a tutor at Spring Hill. Of his pupils, James Ward would in his turn move to Cambridge, and in 1869, the year of Bubier's death, when Ward was senior student and John Hunter was in his second year, an invitation to the college principalship went to, and was accepted by, D. W. Simon, formerly of Royston, once Samuel Davidson's favoured student.

For Downing Place the significance of Bubier's pastorate had been that his was the first in a church which later played an honourable part in Free Church University life, to extend beyond the narrow circles of the flock. His was the first of a series of pastorates which prepared a not untypical small town congregation to accept the edgy brilliance of James Ward and the heretics of the 1870's.

The second such pastorate was that of T. Campbell Finlayson between 1859 and 1865. Campbell Finlayson was a Scotsman in his early twenties. His lifework lay at Rusholme, where D. W. Simon had also served, and there his ministry was both profound and unspectacular. Like Simon and Bubier he was a ' heretic ', rather more obviously so, since his admiration for F. D. Maurice and all his works was considered to have precipitated his departure from the conservative presbyterian body for whose ministry he had been training. James Ward's pastorate is set in the context of Campbell Finlayson and Bubier ; behind them flicker the shadows of Davidson, Simon, F. D. Maurice and of Germany.

In 1869 Ward preached at Downing Place. In every respect he seemed suited to a dissenting chapel in a university town and particularly to Downing Place, Cambridge. In February 1868 it had been reported to a Vestry meeting of the church that a finely eligible site for a new chapel (it was in fact a public house, the Half Moon) had been secured from Gotobed, a local tradesman. By May 1870 the site had been paid for and a sizeable sum was already reserved for the building. Much of this had been promised by ' friends outside '. This was the important point. Downing Place was attracting growing numbers of undergraduates as members as well as attenders. Since 1854 the older English Universities had grudgingly been opened to those dissenting youths who would be contented with a first degree. Unlike Oxford, Cambridge had always been open to the dissenter prepared to study there without

a degree. Subscription was demanded only for the degree, not for mere residence. A larger number of Nonconformists than is realised, including F. D. Maurice, availed themselves of this. The danger of subsequent conformity, as in the case of Maurice, was ever present; was it because the Establishment has peculiar claims upon educated men, or was it because the nonconformist undergraduate tended to come from a rich, and therefore socially impressionable, home? All good dissenters believed, and Gladstone's recent electoral victory reinforced the belief, that further privileges must be extended to them. The series of academic successes achieved by nonconformist young men since 1854, made their exclusion from further participation in their University exasperating, ridiculous, and surely temporary.

It was evident, therefore, that the plain and retiring Downing Place must rebuild. Its membership might not warrant this, but then any rebuilding was not for the benefit of the church, nor even for a sermon-loving auditory. It was to be a national symbol, a University Free Church, a dissenting Great St. Mary's where gownsmen would wear their gowns and from the pulpit would come the eternal (and evangelical) truths of Scholarship. Such a conception was agreeable to the members. It was dear to the heart of many local laymen. It was dearer still to northern or midland grandees who were perhaps touchingly aware that in their sons now reaching university age lay the first educated generation of a new, Free Church, Liberal, dominant class. Samuel Morley, Titus Salt, and the Crossley clan, gave the blessing—and the money—of Nottingham, Bradford and Halifax, the fruit of the largest industrial complexes of their time; so did Spicer's paper and Wills' tobacco, and from an earlier age, as if residuary legatee, John Remington Mills gave the blessing of London and all that Thomas Wilson once treasured.

Surely James Ward was the ideal for these men.[12] He was young (a year older than Robison of Beccles, five years older than Simon of Braintree) and he was clever. In 1868 he had been a Dr. Williams's Scholar and he had graduated honourably with a London B.A., and B.Sc. It was his intention, and even this showed promise, to go in 1869 to Germany, to the University of Berlin. He was, it seemed, doctrinally orthodox. Reared in a society 'whose absorbing passions were business and sermons', he could hardly be otherwise. In Sunday School he had taught of Hell Fire and

[12]The following account owes much to the memoir by Olwen Ward Campbell in *Essays in Philosophy by James Ward*, C.U.P. 1927.

Judgement. There was chilling orthodoxy in his attitude to the deathbeds of those close to him: 'Her mind', he wrote of an aunt, 'is very dark and she is in no way fit to die . . . Her one word for God is the Almighty; of the work of Christ she knows nothing'. 'Real sorrow for sin she has none, she does not trust Christ, she does not love God, at least as far as I can see.'[13]

In another respect also Ward was well tuned to his new charge: his background. It was respectable but financially erratic. His father was a periodically bankrupt Lancashire merchant: one particularly ill-timed bankruptcy prevented the lad from being educated at Rugby School. The father was a man who amassed knowledge without learning; who relished facts without application and who—cardinal sin—possessed commercial imagination without financial acumen. For his son, as later for Francis Crittall in Braintree, the edge between bankruptcies was painful, the glimpses of paradise equally impossible of realization. Was any dissenter free of this burden? No wonder that Calvinism was so long-lived when daily life itself witnessed to its truth. No wonder too that as dissenters learned more of limited liability so the precepts of Calvin, so precise where this pitiful world was concerned, faded pleasantly into simple examples from a more manly and inspiring world. The Vaudois mountaineers were preferable to Calvin in his Geneva, the cross was lost amidst flowers; and in chapel the table pew and the penitential seat became lost in the carved oak and pitch pine of the Sanctuary, and if Oliver Cromwell was the first to appear in stained glass, he gave way to Galahad, *Sir* Galahad, after the style of Sir Edward Burne Jones.

The tensions in Ward's life were reflected in the lives of his people in Downing Place. By Ward's own account the congregation

> was a very peculiar one—many of the people are just those you meet with in any country town, narrow, ignorant and old-fashioned—others have come into contact with the thinking of the time, know what is stirring in the minds of men and have brushed against University people . . . then we have all the Scotch in Cambridge with us, and there are a good many of them, travelling tailors for the most part . . . some poor people, a few disaffected Baptists and a sprinkling of students complete the medley . . . How am I to cement such a picture?[14]

For Ward the task was impossible. The Church which so keenly desired his services was not, could not be, aware of a hyper-

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

sensitiveness which unfitted him for the pastoral ministry. Neither could it know of the morbid introspections which afflicted him at Spring Hill; and at Berlin and Göttingen his intellect found dubious nourishment. From Berlin a college friend had written '. . . I believe that the intellectual expression of faith in the prevailing philosophy and theology is behind the times and one *must* be shaken.'[15] At Berlin Ward was indeed shaken. He was a natural puritan; he thought in evangelical terms—his problem was, after all, how best 'to be an instrument in a possible spiritual awakening.' But there the difficulty began: his self-knowledge pointed to seclusion yet all the strength of his nonconformist upbringing urged him on to more positive activity.

So he renounced orthodox interpretation of biblical inspiration and he found difficulty in defining his views of individual immortality. 'Dr. Simon tells me I am a pantheist, Dorner has said to me, "you are on the best way to Rome", a Unitarian student here has invited me to preach for his people in England . . . in fact I am everything in the wide world but Evangelical.'[16]

In his torment, Dr. Simon was an understanding man because it was now, in May 1870, while looking into the Cambridge prospects, that he mentioned to Ward the attractive possibility of an assistantship to George Dawson of Birmingham. Dawson was a great example to Spring Hill men in their college days and his Church of the Saviour ran dangerously close to the winds of heresy. Nothing came of this wise and broadminded suggestion.[17]

Thus, in October 1870, James Ward preached powerfully and controversially for a month of Sundays in Downing Place. His subject was 'God is Love'. In January 1871 he commenced his stated pastorate. He was never ordained—in this he reflected certain of Principal Simon's own pragmatic views on the matter. The tensions of his flock gathered upon him. 'Now mind', wrote a certain post-master or gas-fitter . . . 'you are invited on the distinct understanding that you believe that the death of Christ was for the purpose of expiating the sins of men'.[18] Inevitably the accusations of Unitarianism gathered force: 'I narrowly watched all your sermons and prayers and there was nothing in them (except an occasional allusion to Christ's sonship) which might not have been said by a Unitarian.'[19] This was bad. What was worse was that the

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 20.
[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
[17]Powicke, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-5.
[18]Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[19]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

new chapel could not materialize without the support of wealthy Congregationalists throughout England, who would hesitate to strengthen a suspect cause. The ferment of Ward's mind was ceaseless. 'I am like a man who has got a right formula and finds it serves him well, but he cannot work out the proof '[20]: certainly not in Downing Place. What was the solution? He rejected the Unitarians who were cold and worldly; he was unwilling to subscribe to the 39 Articles, even for Maurice's sake; but he despaired now of finding breadth in his own denomination 'whose watchword is Progress'. He resigned his charge. He retained certain Congregational friendships; he preached occasionally in certain Congregational chapels; but his bitterness at the failure of Congregationalism grew with the years.

Yet, he had secured the support of William Bond, the leading chapel personality, a forceful enlightened man to whom the church owed much; he had secured the support indeed of sufficient in his congregation, odd though it was in his eyes, for them to forgo their promised building should he remain with them, to refuse—with but six dissentients—to accept his proffered resignation. 'What is to become of the Churches' (wrote one) 'if everybody who has a God—given insight into the truth, and what is more a rare and precious knowledge of his own ignorance, is going to resign?'[21] That his congregation, his tutors, leading pastors in his denomination, all asked him to stay, indicates the ferment within the most united of the Free Churches; but Ward stood by the advice he gave his friend Hunter in January 1873—'Do not let yourself be led into a party squabble. Do not have a party at all. Be as far as you can minister to all and don't let even the warmth of admiring friends detach you from those, who not sympathising so fully with your teaching, admire you less enthusiastically.'[22]

His successor was Matthew Robertson. Robertson was a graduate of London and Edinburgh; he was an able man, an orthodox man, and the church grew considerably. The promised chapel was built and its appearance did injury to the proportions of Wren's Pembroke College Chapel opposite, and Little St. Mary's Church and Peterhouse next to it. For over £12,000 an important London architect erected a lofty and sturdy stone building which is handsome and accomplished. It was allowed sufficient decoration to suit its Early English-French style, a dignified example of Gothic

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 25.
[21]*Ibid.*, p. 45.
[22]Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Entente Cordiale, and sufficient severity to assuage the Puritan consciences of its worshippers. It was complacently remarked that the arrangement of the arches bade 'fair to mark a new epoch in the building of churches intended for Congregational worship.'[23] It was opened in May 1874. Henry Allon's nephew, then a schoolboy in the town, remembered his Uncle's 90 minute address. He also recalled the successive visits of Baldwin Brown, George Macdonald, John Stoughton, R. W. Dale and Guinness Rogers—balm to the soul of William Bond and signs that Congregationalism took its national symbol seriously.[24] Nonetheless Dr. Robertson's pastorate ended rapidly in 1877 when, amidst customary squalid accusations of lying and hypocrisy, a narrow majority sought his removal. His desire for a lectern or for congregational repetition of the Lord's Prayer is an inadequate explanation for the unrest. His antagonists included supporters of Ward—and perhaps Robertson developed perfectionist views repugnant to such in his church. Certainly many conservative evangelicals were influenced at this time by the Convention Movement, and Robertson's successful pastorate suggests an evangelical approach. Of eleven members who resigned with him, while two were active in founding a Presbyterian Church, six belonged to a family active in promoting a mission to the lower orders.

Thereafter the church existed prosperously under ministers of solid learning and intellectual distinction. It retained its mixture of tolerance and conservatism. Its monumental side pulpit, stained glass rose window and Father Willis organ, even its windows in the apse commemorating Congregational saints and to the memory of William Bond, are evidences of convinced good taste. But in 1883 a pulpit gown aroused suspicion, repetition of prayers and of *Amen* provoked controversy, and a weekly offertory was soon abandoned; and though the church was early in its use of unfermented wine (1875) a common cup was used until 1903. It was of course the ideal church for P. T. Forsyth. He ministered there from 1894-1901, and to him has been attributed the exiguous evening congregation: one Forsythian sermon a week was very wonderful, but two were very trying. If Emmanuel Church never became the University Church for all Nonconformist gownsmen, it yet attracted a group of able Free Churchmen, the first important academic generation of such men. The vestry still houses the records of the Cambridge University Nonconformist Union, a

[23]*C.Y.B.*, 1874, p. 414.

[24]H. N. Dixon, 'Religious Life in Cambridge in the Eighties of Last Century', *C.H.S. Trans.*, xx, 1942, p. 314.

body which flourished from the 1880's and the distinction of whose membership underlines the debt which the University owes to its religious dissenters : the more to be remarked upon since few enough remained convinced ones.

The story of Ward and Robertson demonstrated the extent to which a congregation could accommodate the unorthodoxies of agile pastors. It also proved that dissent could not hold such men. For them, within the bounds of organised religion there lay either the Establishment or Unitarianism. Neither provided a satisfactory solution : nor has one since been found.

There is a sequel. Robertson and Ward remained in Cambridge, Robertson as a journalist and Ward as a don. Ward's academic career was distinguished. In 1872 he gained a scholarship to Trinity. In 1881 he became lecturer in Moral Sciences. In 1887 followed the degree of Doctor of Science ; in 1891 that of Doctor of Law at Edinburgh. In 1897 he became first Professor of Mental Philosophy.

In her memoir of her father, Olwen Ward Campbell mentions his full and formidable circle of Cambridge friends. It is remarkable how many of them were of Nonconformist extraction, though like him they had long ago moved towards the ' natural kindliness of the natural sciences '. In 1924 the church which had introduced him to this life, invited him to the jubilee of the new building. A similar invitation had gone to all its surviving pastors. By 1924 it had vindicated those who had hoped much for it. Its membership was now large and the problems of the 1870's seemed distant, lost in a pre-war world. Yet a surprising number of those involved in them still lived, among them J. H. Robison and Thomas Simon. James Ward's reply to the invitation, from his home in that part of Cambridge in which comfortable dons have always delighted, caused the old issues to flicker again :

> . . . the memories of my connexion with that church—which happily the lapse of more than half a century has softened—are too mixed to make me want to revive them. My ministry in Downing Place lasted less than a year and it was the darkest and the saddest of a long and eventful life.
>
> I shall never forget the personal devotion of those who were ready to stay on in that unpretentious ' chapel ', if I would stay with them ; nor the earnest appeals to me of men like Baldwin Brown and Campbell Finlayson to do so. If I had done so, and I am by no means sure that I ought not—you would not be celebrating the jubilee of the fine building in Trumpington Street a week hence. It is a monument to two men, Henry

Allon and William Bond, but it is the tombstone of a buried life to me.[25]

Few letters are more melancholy, and the predicament of many bruised people who have suffered in Nonconformity is movingly expressed in it. Yet it is inadequate quite to end thus. For every pastorate which has ended in crisis, which after all has been my theme, one can point to one which was triumphant. Spring Hill College is now Mansfield College, Oxford and it has never ceased to improve upon its reputation. It might have become Mansfield College, Cambridge, because in the 1870's D. W. Simon had wanted to secure a site which was then vacant, but the Wesleyan Methodists built the Leys School instead. Eventually, a very different College moved to Cambridge, to a site almost opposite the Leys School. Spring Hill must be associated with Simon and Fairbairn: but Cheshunt is forever associated with Henry Robert Reynolds, a man who once (it was in 1864) equated delight with Mendelsohn, Ullswater and a glass of Champagne,[26] a man who came as near to complete refinement as it is possible for a Nonconformist to come, and in whose life controversy had no abiding place. Within the compass of a buried life there is Ward's experience, the very essence of Spring Hill, and there is Reynolds'. Like Ward's, Reynolds' first pastorate, in the 1840's, had been in Eastern England in a church far more quarrelsome than Downing Place ever was. Yet Reynolds, whose intellectual integrity was no less, was happy in a church seldom prepared to allow for bookish young pastors, and Ward, who was a cultured man, was unhappy in a church which at great cost was so prepared. Such is the untidiness of God's will for man.

CLYDE BINFIELD

Note: I have given references only for quotations taken directly from printed sources. Apart from this, I have drawn the bulk of my material from copious records possessed by London Road Church, Braintree, Emmanuel Church, Cambridge, Royston Congregational Church, and to a lesser extent from the churches at Beccles and St. Neots.

[25]Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[26](Harriet Vaizey and Sarah F. Best) *Henry Robert Reynolds, D.D., his Life and Work by His Sisters*, 1898, p. 192.

THE BEGINNINGS OF OLD MEETING, BEDWORTH

The church worshipping at Old Meeting, Bedworth, which may claim to be the oldest Congregational church in Warwickshire with unbroken continuity of existence,[1] was formed on 25 March 1686 when Julius Saunders and eleven others, seven of them women, united in a church covenant.[2] Three were of the Drake family, and it was 'at Val Drakes house '[3] that the covenanting took place. The leading spirit, who signed first, though he did not at once accept the pastorate, was Julius Saunders.

Saunders came of an old Warwickshire family, which claimed a Protestant martyr[4] at Coventry in 1555. The third son of Francis Saunders of Bedworth,[5] he had been at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge.[6] Then, throwing in his lot with the Nonconformists, he attended the earliest of the Northamptonshire Dissenting Academies, that kept at Sulby Hall, near Welford, by the ejected minister, John Shuttlewood.[7] At Easter 1683 'Julius Saunders and Valentine Drake, both of Bedworth' were 'presented for not coming to church'; and at Trinity Saunders was 'committed to the gaol',[8] where he continued 'about the space of two years'. 'As soon as I came out of prison', he writes in the Bedworth church book, 'I set upon the work with all my might'. The formation of the church in March 1686 was the result.

[1]See *The Vanguard* (the organ of Warwickshire Congregationalism), no. 59 (April, 1962), pp. 7-8.

[2]J. Sibree and M. Caston, *Independency in Warwickshire,* 1855, pp. 152-3, print the covenant and the signatories' homes but not their names.

[3]For this and subsequent quotations from the Bedworth church book, which is deposited in the County Record Office, Warwick, I have to thank the Rev. P. S. G. Lidgett and Mr. A. Mann, who have lent me a photostat copy and given permission to publish extracts.

[4]Laurence Saunders (*D.N.B.*); cf. *Evangelical Magazine,* xiv. (1806), p. 577.

[5]Cf. *Visitation of the County of Warwick* (Harleian Soc. 62, 1911), ed. W. H. Rylands, p. 111.

[6]Cf. *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922-7), ed. J. & J. A. Venn, as Sanders.

[7]For Shuttlewood, who in 1654 received classical ordination, see *D.N.B.*; *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934), ed. A. G. Matthews; T. Coleman, *Memorials of the Independent Churches in Northamptonshire,* 1853, pp. 155-60.

[8]*Warwick County Records,* VIII (Warwick, 1953), ed. H. C. Johnson, pp. 31, 53.

The other members soon brought pressure on Saunders to become their pastor. They sent John Haddon[9] ' to the Church of Christ in Cambridgeshire, over which Mr Holcroft[10] and Mr Odey[11] were Co-pastours '—interesting evidence of the far-reaching influence of that notable centre of evangelism, with its two saintly ministers; and on 16 May 1687 Haddon brought back word that ' it was the unanimous judgment of that Church, that I should take the pastorall charge, of the Church in Bedworth '. ' But as yet I was fetterd ', Saunders writes, ' till Christ set me at Liberty '. Liberation came in the following October during a time of prayer for labourers: ' I said to the Brethren, Now send to Mr Clark & Mr Boun, I will take the Pastoral charge as soon as you will '. Matthew Clark,[12] an old friend of Saunders' tutor Shuttlewood, and John Bohun[13] were ministers of the Congregational churches at Market Harborough and Coventry respectively, the two churches nearest to Bedworth; and on 16 November 1687, not at Bedworth, but ' at Mr Bouns house, because by reason of his ilnesse, he was not able to come to us ', with a sermon by Clark from *Zech.* iv.10 and a renewal of covenant by the Bedworth church, Saunders duly accepted the church's call to become its pastor. Clark advised the Coventry church, ' an ancient Small people almost lost for want of a pastour ', Bohun being ' soe infirm yt he cannot come amongst them ',[14] to unite with the new fellowship at Bedworth, but the members were not willing. Not till 18 November 1707 did formal union take place.

By the time Saunders became pastor, fifteen more members had been added to the church, five men and ten women. In the next three years thirty-four more were added, six men and twenty-eight women. On 23 May 1688 a deacon was chosen, but on 29 December 1689 he was excommunicated for lasciviousness; another deacon was chosen on 24 January 1692. Finding the right elders proved difficult; but eventually two men were nominated and on 20 December 1691 and 12 February 1692 were set apart.

The church was now duly constituted, and on 24 April 1692 the elders ' laid their hands on me, declaring me to be a Minister of the

[9]John Haddon, of Long-Ford, Foleshill, was perhaps an ancestor of the eminent Baptist John Haddon (1744-1818) of Naseby (cf. T. S. H. Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*, 1964, p. 34).

[10]For Francis Holcroft, see *D.N.B.*; *Cal. Rev.*

[11]For Joseph Oddy, see *Cal. Rev.*

[12]For Clark, see *Cal. Rev.*; *Freedom after Ejection* (Manchester, 1917), ed. A. Gordon; Coleman, pp. 120-6.

[13]For Bohun, see Gordon, p. 225, as Bunn.

[14]Gordon, pp. 118-19.

Lord Jesus Christ, & the Pastour of this his Church '. Unity was not easily come by, however. The members came not only from Bedworth but from several villages outside, in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire as well as Warwickshire. A considerable group came from Welford and a number of villages in its vicinity. Following the death of Shuttlewood on 17 March 1689, the church ministered to by Shuttlewood had been ' discontinued '.[15] Saunders had been in the habit of going over to Welford occasionally to preach, and in June 1689 was doing so ' one Lords day in a month '. Although there seemed to be ' a mighty work of God upon the hearts of many ' at Welford, ' great dissatisfaction at my being at Welford ' was expressed in the Bedworth church meeting. ' Great opposition ' was shown by Valentine Drake, who ' would not come to the Church-Meeting '. ' The Church gave me liberty ', but in September ' refused to cast out Val Drake '. ' I was greatly troubled and declar'd against their non-proceedings. He drew many after him, made a scisme in the Church, manifested much passion in our Church-Meetings, & so far prevailed, that I was necessitated to breake off from going to Welford, whereby that great & blessed worke, that was going on, was made to cease.' At the time Saunders wrote, ' I have continuall heaviness for the Churches not excomunicating Val. Drake, who doth greatly trouble us & breake our peace '. In the following July ' I purposed not to go to Welford on a Lords day '. On 12 January 1691 Drake was ' nominated to be chosen an Elder ', ' but never was the thing accomplished ', and on 16 September his ' Election ' was ' nullified '. On 11 April 1692 Drake, the foundation member in whose house the original covenanting had taken place, was ' cast out for despising the Authority of Jesus Christ in his Church, continuing with great contumacy against repeated Admonitions '.

Drake's opposition and eventual excommunication might appear to be due to no more than jealousy over sharing his minister with another people who lay beyond his own control; and this may have been a contributing factor. His deeper objection, however, was not so much to Welford as to the church at Rothwell. Rothwell's remarkable activity at this time in evangelism, church gathering and church dividing extended into many counties but has not previously been known to have affected Warwickshire. Before offering some elucidation of the situation at Bedworth in the light of relations with Rothwell, we are so fortunate as to have a contemporary portrait of Saunders in action in a Northamptonshire

[15]Gordon, p. 77.

village close to Welford. It comes in a manuscript letter of 23 December [1687] to Richard Baxter from Edward Pearse,[16] Rector of Cottesbrooke, a parish from which the Bedworth church was drawing members. Pearse was a moderate churchman, known for his four volumes entitled *The Conformists Plea for the Nonconformists* (1681-3).

Pearse tells how it had been his own custom often to omit the sign of the cross in baptism, to administer the Lord's Supper without wearing a surplice and not to insist on kneeling; and 'till late yeares, had a people who never stirred from me, but owned me. But since the late yeares of Tory-prosecutors it hath not been so. Some that were forced from home elsewhere found harbour in some of my neighbours houses' and 'a Carpenter, one of Mr Browning's Church at Rowell, lurkt here, and began to sow his ill grounded notions of seperation'. 'Severall of this, and neighbour townes, who heard Mr Shuttlewood at Sullby (near Naseby) and heard in publick also, were very diligent in keeping meetings in this and other villages, meeting often in the night, till 1. or 2. in the morning'; and another 'yong Carpenter that used to write my sermons' 'fell into high notions, and open seperation' and 'entertained all strangers that came to keep meetings in the time of publick, on the Lords dayes, and other days. And when they durst not meet in other townes, they resorted hither often, and in great numbers'. 'Mr Holdcroft preached at his house one weekday to a great meeting, but he is but a Confused preacher, as the most judicious told me.' 'Mr Shuttlewood being much molested at Sullby, near Naseby, went away.'[17]

> I was informed, that the hottest promoter of seperation was one Mr Saunders, who came from Cambr. & studied with Mr Shuttlewood, and preaching provokingly at Bedworth in Warw: shire (his native place) in time of publick, day after day, was complained of, and refusing the Oathes was committed to Warw. Goale, where he continued a year or more. This yong man preacht here, in time of publick, and other times; so that I could do no lesse, than desire discourse with him, civilly inviting him to my house, whither he came unwillingly,

[16]For Pearse, see *D.N.B.* The letter is now in three pieces: D. W. L. Baxter MSS., 6.210; B. M. Egerton MSS., 2570.128 (photostat at D.W.L.); D. W. L. Baxter MSS., 1.62. For reassembling the pieces and for help in ascertaining the writer, who signs E.P., and the year-date, I have to thank the Rev. Roger Thomas.

[17]For details of this, see [Edward Pearse], *The Conformists fourth Plea for the Nonconformists,* 1683, pp. 79-82.

and a hott raw disciple [probably Valentine Drake] with him. I found him to be of the highest sort of separatists, and brought him to some streights in discourse ; and with mildnes, warned him not to make Breaches, and take heed he did not bring people to seperation, by breaking moral duties. Yet he came again : I went to the Carpenters house, where I met some hott yong disciples with him ; after a long peaceable discourse I warned him again, against drawing people to seperation by breaking moral precepts : I gave him some instances of sad Breaches between husbands and wives and other duties neglected : and warned my neighboures against their Scandalous Courses, and hindring the work of God in this place, and left them. Our Conference was mild. But a Taylor present told me with much pride, they would bear witnesse against the Church of England. I told him they knew not whither they were going, and their principles were such, as would break any Church in the world. But instead of hearing me, they grew higher and more offensive. I could write many sheets. One Lords day, here came a Baker, one of Mr M[atthew] Cl[arks] Church, and a Taylor . . . They who have least judgment follow Mr Wowin,[18] and leave Mr Shuttlewood ; and others leave both, to join with Mr Saunders at Bedworth.

Pearse goes on to write many sheets. His account is too long to be printed, but the comments that follow are too interesting to be omitted.

Our yong ones talke of constitution of churches, discipline, and other points, that tend to make great Preachers : They say we come not in at the right door, God doth not own our way, the Com[mo]n pr[ayer] is taken out of the masse B[ook] &c. yong, rash, censorious Ones would rule : . . . They are against all maner of forms of prayer in private and publick, and have got Mr Ainsw[orth][19] of seperation among them, but keep it close, save that by discourse I hear of his notions.

In this lively portrayal we have not only a young man's self-assured enthusiasm but all the High Calvinism, Independency, Separatism and Antinomianism which were the driving-force of the church at Rothwell and its evangelism. With this church Saunders had for some years had associations. After the death on 9 May 1685

[18]For John Wowen, see *Cal. Rev.,* where the reference to this MS. is confused.

[19]Presumably Henry Ainsworth, *Counterpoyson,* 1608 (and many later editions).

of its minister, Thomas Browning,[20] the Rothwell church book records[21] Saunders (as also Francis Holcroft of Cambridge) among visiting preachers; and on 30 March 1686, only five days after the Bedworth church's first covenanting, Rothwell had given Saunders 'a call to take the Pastoral Charge over them'. Naturally, 'my Brethren would not give me liberty'; they wanted him for themselves. Not until 22 March 1690 was there ordained at Rothwell, in the person of Richard Davis,[22] a new pastor who was to make the church a storm-centre of dissensions that raged far throughout the country.

The Rothwell church drew its numerous members from a wide area. In this it only followed what at the time was common practice.[23] It then sent out 'gifted brethren' to evangelize, and to prepare the ground for a new church to be formed by other members, including some whose home was in that locality. Rothwell would also observe the Lord's Supper in an outlying place, before any new church had been gathered, appointing for this purpose 'an Universal Church-Meeting'. To those who objected to such behaviour, Davis retorted that 'Holy Mr Holdcraft and his Church, practised this for many Years, and found the Blessing of God attending their Practise'.[24]

So with Welford. Rothwell admitted members from Welford and from the other Northamptonshire parishes from which Bedworth also drew. Two of Rothwell's elders and 'gifted brethren' were, like Saunders, in the habit of preaching at Welford, one of them with the support of 'one and twenty godly ones'[25] there. At least twice Rothwell held church meetings at Welford.[26] To this practice Bedworth was not in a position to object: on occasion it did the same itself. Welford is, after all, nearer to Rothwell than to Bedworth. But one can see how friction might arise.

[20]For Browning, see *Cal. Rev.*; Coleman, pp. 49-53; Norman Glass, *Early History of . . . Rothwell*, 1871, pp. 16-27.

[21]Cf. Glass, p. 30.

[22]For recent study of Richard Davis and the Rothwell church, see Roger Thomas, 'The Break-up of Nonconformity', in G. F. Nuttall and others, *The Beginnings of Nonconformity*, 1964; G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question*: a turning-point in eighteenth-century Dissent', in *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., xvi.1, 1965; H. G. Tibbutt, 'New Light on Northamptonshire Nonconformist History', in *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, iv.1, 1966-7; Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1795*, 1967.

[23]Cf. G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, Oxford 1957, pp. 108-9.

[24]R. Davis, *Truth and Innocency Vindicated*, [1692], p. 80.

[25]Glass, p. 109.

[26]Glass, p. 68.

In fairness to Rothwell it must be said that it sought to evangelize openly and in unity with its sister churches. On 30 July 1690 Saunders writes ' Mr Richard Davis & Robert Betson[27] came to us in the name of the Church at Rothwell, with a letter, about the right hand of fellowship '. This immediately follows Saunders' record that he abandoned preaching at Welford, and that it was the cause of his doing so appears in the later comment, ' My going to Welford was not broken off untill they of Rothwell came hither '. During the next three years relations between the churches grew closer. At last, on 21 December 1692, Saunders records that ' the Right hand of fellowship was given to the Church in Rothwell '. Rothwell on its side welcomed the ' messengers ' from Bedworth, ' gave so to them again ' and ' as a fuller confirmation ' appointed its own messengers ' to visit Mr Saunders and return them the right hand of fellowship '.[28] Bedworth's friendship and support must have meant much to Rothwell, for it was at this time that opposition to Rothwell's doctrine and practice came to a head in the formal inquiry held at Kettering which Davis dubbed the ' Ketterin Inquisition '. Saunders is mentioned as one of two ministers whose advice was sought when Rothwell first got wind of what was afoot.[29]

Unity, alas, can be the mother of schism. ' Falling in with Mr Davis ' caused dissension, withdrawals and excommunication at Bedworth. Three months after the opening visit by Davis and Betson, ' several of our Brethren withdrew from the Church ' ; and on 9 August 1693, after the fellowship sought by Rothwell had been given and reciprocated, all those who had withdrawn were excommunicated. They numbered only nine, four men and five women ; but five of them were among the twelve foundation-members ; and to their ' cutting off ' must be added that of their leader, Valentine Drake, who, as we saw, had been ' cast out ' eighteen months earlier. Richard Davis had caused a schism, which might have led those who remained to become, as his adherents elsewhere sometimes did, a Baptist church. At Bedworth the issue was quite otherwise—a surprising *volte-face.*

[27]For Betson, a shoemaker and elder at Rothwell, who in 1691 became pastor of the West End Congregational church at Wellingborough, see Glass, pp. 89-90 ; Coleman, pp. 228-31.

[28]Glass, pp. 122, 126. The identity of date in the two church books is evidence that Rothwell's reference to ' the church of Christ assembled at Coventry ' is to the Bedworth church, meeting in Coventry, which we know from the Bedworth church book it sometimes did.

[29]Davis, p. 39.

From 'Mr Davis & the Church in Rothwell & their Notions', Saunders writes, 'God mercifully delivered us after some time, when we saw they tended to loosenesse, as all error does'. Against the date 26 December 1693, only four and a half months after the dissentients' excommunication, he writes: 'After God had made me & others sensible of our sinne & perceiving a lightnesse & loosenesse in many . . . We were distressed: And agree'd to renew our Covenant, professing our repentance & Faith to the mutual satisfaction of one another'. There is no reference to Rothwell here; but the church book is peppered with comments on the earlier entries relating to Rothwell, making of it a sort of palimpsest, as if in pathetic eagerness to assist in its interpretation. Against the first visit from Rothwell and his abandoning Welford, Saunders writes ' I have seen cause since to be ashamed, & am grievd & troubled that ever I fell in with the Antinomians' and 'Tis but righteous, when we forsake the Lord, that he forsake us'. Against Valentine Drake's excommunication he writes haltingly 'thô we had done badly—yet his carriage was not as it ought to be'. Against the later excommunications he writes: 'But their withdrawing being occasion'd by our falling in with Mr Davis & his Notions (of which We are now ashamed) We declared the excomunication to be null & voide, & declared the same to them; several of them returned to us after, I hope that I shall loath Antinomianism while I live upon this earth, & ly low before the Lord in a sense of my instability'. Shame and pain are evident here, but also, surely, nobility of spirit. For the year 1694 there are no entries, as if Saunders were *hors de combat*, which perhaps he was, spiritually if not physically. But he now kept to the hard course of admitting his mistake. On 18 December 1695 there is the welcome entry 'Val. Drake reconciled';[30] and at or after the union with Bedworth in 1707 of the church at Coventry, to which those excommunicated may have attached themselves, three more of the dissentients renewed covenant. The sad entry against a fourth name 'withdrawn thrô our default' may imply that this member never returned.

Antinomianism, with which the Rothwell church was charged (by many others besides Saunders), springs from an eagerness to run ahead of the desire known to every 'real' Christian to find something of 'heaven' already on earth. In the excitable and unstable the impulse to disregard the limits and limitations of life

[30]On 18 December 1718 'Valentine Drake, who had long withdrawn himselfe from Communion, thô desired to return, being guilty of being drunk & other sin's, was declared No Member'.

on earth may lead, though it does not always do so, to neglect of religious restraint and social checks and to immoral behaviour. How much 'lightnesse & loosenesse' actually existed among the Bedworth church members, and how far Saunders was justified in associating it with the antinomian tendencies encouraged by Rothwell, is difficult to assess. Probably it was the case of Thomas Page, the church's second choice for deacon, which proved no wiser than its first, that (as he believed) opened Saunders' eyes. On 29 March 1693, not much more than a year after his election

> Thomas Page & Elizabeth Boswell of Ulthorp were excomunicated in a Church-Meeting at Bulkington for lascivious carriage. Shee is a bold confident whore, both of them deeply tainted with antinomianism. After[wards] the Lord forced him to confesse that he had comitted adultery with her severall times, & so the mouths of those that tooke their part were stopped, & the Lord cleared up the innocency & uprightnesse of our proceedings.

Alas, both parties were parents of children who had been baptized at Bedworth. Against Thomas Page's name in the list of members Saunders has written : 'Excomunicated. Being guilty of Adultery with Elizabeth Boswell, oh the fruite of Antinomianisme'.

There had been other lapses, and lapses continued to be recorded after the church's renewal of covenant at the end of 1693 ; but their number is no greater than in other church books. What the student does not always observe, although it is recorded, is that on a number of occasions the erring member was later received back. Sometimes admonition was enough. On 27 June 1688 'Eliz. Drake was admonished, Our Love was confirmed to her again'. On 22 December Thomas Scherrald and his wife were 'admonished for wicked carriage and fighting' ; a year later, under 5 December 1697, Saunders records 'Thomas Scherralds Admonition taken off, he acknowledging his sinne' ; and when at Epiphany 1705 the church registered a meeting-house at the Quarter Sessions, the property registered was in part the freehold of 'Thomas Skerrald'.[81]

The Rothwell church's distress that the Bedworth church now charged it 'with sundry false accusations relating to doctrine, order, and walk, which they could not prove, but yet continued to asperse with dismal calumnies' is reflected in a number of entries in the Rothwell church book. On more than one occasion Rothwell sent

[81]*Warwick County Records, VIII*, p. cxxiv. The present meeting-house, a remarkably unadorned, four-square building, has the date 1726 scrawled on three bricks at intervals along its front wall. It contains volumes by Matthew Henry to which chains are still attached.

messengers to Bedworth, only to have them rejected, 'nor could they possibly learn when their church meeting was, being they did so industriously shift them'. At last, after consulting 'with sister churches, what further to do with Mr Saunders, and the church he belongs to', Rothwell on 29 August 1697 'declared non-communion with Bedworth church, excepting those that approved themselves to be orderly walkers', by which presumably they meant some who had now withdrawn from Bedworth after the renewal of covenant; and on 3 April 1698 Rothwell 'ordered a letter to be sent to Bedworth church to renounce communion with them'.[32]

With the turn of the century life at Bedworth seems to have flowed more smoothly. The church became strong enough to form a daughter church in Coventry. On 24 April 1720 thirty-five members, fifteen men and twenty women, were dismissed 'to sit down as a distinct body of themselves in the same faith & order which we profess & practice'. The date of Saunders' death is uncertain, but he 'lies buried under the table-pew of the Meeting-house'.[33] During the later years of his pastorate he trained a few students for the ministry. Among these were his son Julius (1691-1750), who from 1725 till his death (when his son, Julius III, succeeded him) was minister at Denton, Norfolk, where at his ordination Saunders *père* 'expressly forbad him using notes';[34] his son John (1693-1768), who from 1718 to 1728 was minister at Bury St. Edmunds (where his predecessor, to the discomfort of Saunders *père*, had been a friend of Richard Davis), and from 1728 till his death at Hertford; and his nephew Thomas, who from 1721 till his death in 1736 was minister at Kettering.

With the new century Welford also found stability. In 1700 the people there entered into covenant, and took John Norris to be their pastor; and they did so in independence of both Bedworth and Rothwell. To-day Bedworth, Rothwell and Welford all live in mutual amity.

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[32]Glass, pp. 126-7.
[33]*Evangelical Magazine*, xiv. (1806), p. 579.
[34]John Browne, *History of Congregationalism . . . in Norfolk and Suffolk*, 1877, p. 339.