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Editor:

Joshua Thompson, B.A., D. Phil. (Oxon.)

Volume Three (New Series)

1995/96

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About Our Contributors:

- Robert Dunlop, M A, M Litt. is pastor of Brannockstown Baptist Church, Co. Kildare.

- Sam Simpson is a retired minister.

- Ian Wilson, BA, Dip Ed is Vice-Principal of Lurgan College, Co. Armagh.

EDITORIAL

Two articles in this issue focus on two Irish Baptist pastors, who have made valuable contributions to the witness of the gospel in Ireland and Scotland but in entirely different ways. Both non-collegiate men, their route into the ministry of the Irish churches demonstrates the degree of independency exercised by local churches in time-honoured Baptist fashion. Sam Simpson's piece is autobiographical and has historical value for that reason. Ian Wilson's contribution has a special interest and importance in his treatment of the subject which is both affectionate and objective.

"Our Task in a Changing Ireland" is an absorbing survey of the challenge arising from the ongoing and undoubted work of the Holy Spirit among Irish Catholics. Robert Dunlop has suggested four matters which Irish Baptists ought to consider and act upon in order to update their church life and correct their mission strategy in the light of a swift-moving change in the religious and cultural atmosphere in the island. What is happening surmounts religious prejudices of all kinds and calls for a compassionate and sensitive response matched by a humble and tolerant spirit which submits to the sovereignty of God. There is need for all Christians, especially Baptists, to engage in promoting a "peace process" which is based on biblical doctrine and practice and which advances the ministry of reconciliation.

"Some Extinct Churches of the Nineteenth Century" marks appropriately the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Famine Years. It is hoped to mark this period in Irish history in at least one paper next year.

SOME EXTINCT BAPTIST CHURCHES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Joshua Thompson

Although the formation of Baptist churches was not a declared object of the Baptist Irish Society, it was soon evident that converts needed pastoral care and instruction if the work was to have lasting results. The best way to conserve those results was to form local churches, but the BIS Committee could not make church-planting an overt part of its operations without endangering support from evangelical Christians in both Great Britain and Ireland who did not hold the Baptist doctrine of the church.

The itinerant ministers also had a problem. They taught the baptism of believers as an integral part of the gospel and stressed the need for regular worship and witness. They also knew the pressures of living as Baptists in an overwhelmingly paedobaptist environment and were alert to the need of their converts, or as many of them as submitted to believer's baptism, for church fellowship. Evidence of their concern is that, as a result of their labours between 1814 and 1824, seven new churches were established at Moate (1814), Thurles (1815), Ferbane (1816), Newry (1817), Kilcooley Hills (1817), Abbeyleix (1822) and Easkey (1823). Fresh starts also were made in Clonmel and Athlone, where formerly there had been Baptist churches. The fact that the Newry church was short-lived and the Kilcooley Hills and Athlone churches had an intermittent existence serves to emphasise the ministers' determination to promote church fellowship among their converts, even when the long-term prospects were uncertain.

Ivimey and the committee made no secret of these activities, reporting the formation of churches with approval in the *Irish Chronicle* and in the

Annual Reports,[1] and claiming them as evidence of successful gospel preaching in predominantly Roman Catholic areas.

After 1824 the rate at which churches were formed as a direct result of BIS operations slowed down. From 1825 to 1865 fifteen were founded - at Ballina (1827), Limerick (1827), Coolaney (1833) Rahamey (1837), Conlig (1840), Roscrea (1840), Birr (1841), Carrickfergus (1844), Newtownards (1847?), Belfast (1843?), Banbridge (1846), Curragh (1852?), New Ross (1854), Rathmines (Dublin 1861) and Larne (1865) - but only five of them survived beyond 1865, and by then the future of those at Rathmines and Larne was already in doubt. The three healthy survivors - Conlig, Carrickfergus, Belfast - were in the north. Of the seven churches formed in the first ten years, Newry, Abbeyleix, Thurles, and Kilcooley Hills had vanished by 1865. Clonmel had also disappeared, while Athlone continued with great difficulty. The factors causing this impermanence, especially in the midlands and west, may be traced in the case of the Abbeyleix church.

Abbeyleix (1822-1852)

This church was formed of people who had been drawn together through Isaac McCarthy's preaching and had been baptised by him. The church met in a new chapel, financed in part by personal loans from members of the BIS committee and built on land donated by Lord de Vesci.[2]

From the start a basic problem was the regular pastoral care and instruction essential to the growth of any local church. The best McCarthy could do in the first nine years of its existence was to include Abbeyleix in his regular itinerary, which meant a visit about once in six weeks.[3] In the intervals, unless visited by another itinerant minister, the Abbeyleix church probably followed the practice used at Thurles where the members met

"every Sabbath morning, for prayer, at eight o'clock . . . (and) when Brother McCarthy is not with them they read Burder's sermons and so keep up the Sabbath exercises." [4]

The problem seemed to have been resolved in 1831 when James Haddon, a former Independent minister (with the IES) whom McCarthy had

baptised, was appointed to the staff and stationed at Abbeyleix; but he resigned a year later because he was "not meeting with much success" and emigrated to America.[5] The church had again to rely on intermittent visits from McCarthy for another five years until Thomas Berry was sent in 1837 "as minister and itinerant."[6] The committee by then accepted that, to survive, Abbeyleix needed a resident minister, but insisted (not unreasonably) that itinerant evangelism should still form the major part of the minister's workload.

External factors, religious, political and economic, hindered growth of the church. On 2 June 1838 Berry spoke frankly about two of them:

"Abbeyleix, though small, has one of the largest Orange lodges in this country. Among this class, humanly speaking, there is not much good to be expected. I am happy that one or two of the church have ceased meeting in their lodge. The Methodists also are prejudiced; and some of them, who receive my private visits kindly, would not allow me to preach in their houses."[7]

Again, in 1842, he met a man, converted under the preaching of Stephen Ryan, who "after his spiritual change was boycotted and lost his shop and business and now lived in a poor cabin in the bog - but happy in Christ."[8] Later still, in 1848, he reported:

"A Romanist family, through the reading of the New Testament, were induced to come to our chapel; and the result is, that with the exception of the younger members, the whole family, intelligent and well-acquainted with the scriptures, have proposed to be baptized. They have attended for three months, and the treatment they have experienced will give our English friends an idea of what such persons have to encounter when they unite with us. A Protestant of influence, the deputy agent of a landlord, represented to me, that a son of one of the candidates for baptism was a thief. I at once investigated the case, and not only found the young man innocent, but honourable. The case was brought before the magistrates, he was fully acquitted, and his accuser put to shame. Whilst this family went to mass, they were respected by Protestants. Now even that class, if they had the power, would persecute."[9]

Such persecution, prejudice and bigotry often forced converts to leave the country.

Despite the obstacles Berry tackled his work with vigour and imagination. In 1840 he appealed in the *Irish Chronicle* for money to engage six Scripture Readers in his "district" and as a result, three years later he employed five Readers for a short period in a concerted burst of personal evangelism. Since the chapel had a baptistry, Berry used public curiosity about believer's baptism to induce people to come and hear the gospel:

"(The) plan of not baptizing all the candidates together, I found to work well last year ... My reason is, that many more persons will come to a public baptism than to an ordinary service. Upon such occasions I do not confine myself to a discourse on the subject of baptism but take a wider range and at some length preach the Gospel and enforce its precepts."[10]

The fortunes of the Abbeyleix church during Berry's ministry have been traced from the fragmentary statistics in his extant reports.[11] In 1853 Berry recorded that during the fifteen years he had baptised over 80 persons; the church had received 99 members, of whom 63 had emigrated with their families, while 13 died in the famine years.[12] It seems fair to assume from the above statistics that transfers and exclusions account for the remainder. The experience of Abbeyleix was not untypical.

As the table below shows, of the fifteen churches planted in the midlands and west between 1814 and 1861, those at Raharney, Roscrea and New Ross were short-lived; nine disappeared in the decade after the Famine; only three survived beyond 1865. Moate alone continued into the twentieth century.

	Church	Formed	Disbanded
1.	Moate	1814	–
2.	Thurles	1815	1851
3.	Ferbane	1816	–
4.	Kilcooley Hills	1817	1851
5.	Abbeyleix	1822	1853
6.	Easkey	1823	1851
7.	Ballina	1827	1865
8.	Limerick	1827	1853
9.	Coolaney	1833	1854
10.	Raharney	c1837	c1838
11.	Roscrea	c1840	c1841
12.	Birr (Parsonstown)	1841	c1857
13.	Curragh	1852	c1860
14.	New Ross	1854	1857
15.	Rathmines	1861	–

(Note: This list does not include Athlone [16] and Clonmel [17] churches which had existed earlier, but owed their precarious life in the nineteenth century to the BIS).

This collapse was not unique, for the comparable Independent Churches suffered a similar fate[13] as did congregations of the other denominations; but the experiment suggested that churches of the Baptist faith and order could thrive in less adverse circumstances.

The Impact of Emigration and Famine on the Churches

The pattern of emigration from Ireland during the nineteenth century, especially in the period 1814-65 when the BIS operated, has to be seen as part of a vast migration from Europe to the New World. Exact figures of such extensive movements are hard to establish, but it has been estimated that from 1830 to 1930 there was an influx of 38 millions to the United States of America. The bulk of these immigrants arrived in two waves, the first occurring between 1830 and 1870, and the second, more massive one, between 1870 and 1920. The first wave was from northern and western

Europe. It was high in the 1850s, peaked in the 1880s, and did not fall below 250,000 a year until after 1907.[14]

Within the 'first-wave' pattern Irish emigration to the United States peaked early during the famine years and their aftermath, exceeded 100,000 annually, and then declined to a lower but fairly steady rate. In 1850, for example, 164,004 landed in the United States. By 1870 there were 1,855,827 native-born Irish in that country.[15]

Earlier in the century the severe economic depression which followed the Napoleonic Wars boosted the rate of emigration from Ireland. In 1820, for instance, 20,000 emigrated.[16] Other 'push' factors were bad harvests, unemployment, high rents, land hunger, persecution. 'Pull' factors were private letters from emigrant relatives and friends, progressively cheaper fares to America. and the relaxation of attitudes in the U.S.A. towards Catholics. It has been shown that private letters were more influential than guide books and publicity from travel agents in promoting emigration.[17]

These private letters contained practical advice on what to bring, when to leave, what to provide on shipboard, how to avoid 'runners', and directions as to destination and the best routes to it. The emigrants also tended to speak honestly of the hardships and problems of settling in some areas of America. Many of them sent passage money to relatives.

More liberal attitudes towards Catholics followed the easing in 1780 of U.S.A. laws restricting Catholic immigration and public worship, and encouraged the inflow of Irish Catholic settlers, which gave American Catholicism its 'Irishness'.

While the U.S.A. received most emigrants, British America (Canada), Australia and the West Indies also attracted them. Between 1831 and 1841, 189,225 arrived in Canada, though many of these people moved south to the U.S.A., this being a more economical route than the direct one; 4,554 went to Australia and 494 to the West Indies.[18] In the decade covering the famine period (1845-55) it has been estimated that 1,481,000 went to the U.S.A., 340,000 to Canada and 70,000 to Australasia.[19] Thousands more simply migrated to urban centres of Great Britain.[20]

The combined effect of famine, disease and emigration on the population was dramatic, the 1841 and 1851 censuses showing a 20% drop in population, from 8,175,124 to 6,552,286. The population was rising in 1841, and has been estimated to have been more than 8.5 millions in 1846, so the probable fall in the five years to 1851 may have been nearer 25%. How many died from starvation, disease, accident, or old age cannot be stated precisely, nor can the exact number of those who left the country. Probably, during the decade 1841-51, the number of deaths from all causes was roughly equal to the number of emigrants.

Taken by provinces, Munster and Connaught suffered more from depopulation than Ulster and Leinster. Leinster lost 15%, Ulster 16%, Munster 22% and Connaught 29%.[21] Depopulation varied from county to county within the provinces. Among the hardest-hit were Roscommon (31%), Sligo and Mayo (29%), Queen's County (27%), King's County (24%), Westmeath (21%), and these were the very counties in which the chief activities and the oldest stations of the BIS were concentrated.[22]

How did these severe losses affect the Baptist presence and witness in the midlands and west? One way of answering this question is to examine the itinerant ministers' reports. Before doing so, it is worth remembering that the exodus of people from Ireland during the first three decades affected the Baptist community as it did other religious groups. The Clough-jordan church in Co.Tipperary is a case in point. In correspondence of 1822 this church complained about the adverse effect of emigration on its membership in particular, and on the Baptist churches at large.[23] Its minister, Thomas Hassell, since his settlement in 1801 had baptised 'about 100 persons here and in other parts of Ireland', but the Cloughjordan church, despite accessions to its membership, had lost 'very many' through emigration to America.[24] Hassell asserts that 'thousands of protestants have emigrated to America - Methodists and Baptists have directed their course to Canada'.[25] These comments though vague and general do convey the impression that losses through emigration were neither novel nor insignificant in the life of the churches.

It was not until 1823 that specific reference was made in BIS records to the effect of emigration. That year McCarthy wrote about a letter of

dismission[26] given to one of his members on leaving for America.[27] The following year McKaeg, then the itinerant minister at Ballina, spoke of 'the poor Irish' leaving Mayo in large numbers for England, Scotland and America. Many of them, according to McKaeg, were prepared to go to any part of the world in search of a better life.[28] McKaeg himself left Ireland in 1824.[29] moving to Bingley, Yorkshire and then to Australia early in 1831.[30] Between April and August 1831, Wilson lost 200 children from his schools when their parents emigrated to America to escape famine conditions in Mayo and Sligo.[31]

From 1834 on, the reports contain a growing number of allusions to losses through emigration in both schools and churches. Allen recorded the departure overseas of numbers of the church members in his 'district'.[32] McCarthy, in an account of the annual conference of the churches in his midland 'district' when 50 members had joined in a communion service, asked plaintively, 'What would it have been were it not for the rent emigration has made among us?'[33] Two years later, McCarthy quantified these losses in a letter dated 6 July 1836:

'It is still ... grievous, that so many of the most precious of our little flocks, by emigration, are taken away from us. Four went to America last month, and two are removed to another part of the kingdom ... twenty-eight members have gone to America, and the most of these had large families...'[34]

It is important, when interpreting these remarks, to remember that, unlike the paedobaptist denominations, Baptists do not count their numbers by families. The logic of our doctrine of a regenerate, baptised church membership permits us to count as members only those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, make a public profession of their faith in baptism by immersion and are admitted to membership. In practice, this confined participation in the Lord's Supper, church business meetings and the offices of the church, to members. However, it did not exclude others from attending the public services, and reckoning themselves part of 'the Baptist community.' Consequently, the Baptist community comprised not only church members but their families, and adherents who, while attending public worship, stopped short of baptism and church membership.[35] This being the case, there is significance in McCarthy's way of putting it, viz.

'Twenty-eight members have gone to America, and the most of these had large families.' If, for example, these 28 members consisted of married couples with an average of 4 children, then together they would make up a group of 84 people. This may be taken as a minimum, since McCarthy states that most of them had large families, which in nineteenth century Ireland might mean from five to fifteen or more children in each. The loss in numbers could have been in excess of 100, not taking adherents into account. McCarthy described the Ferbane church's losses through emigration in 1847 in similar terms: 'Four or five large families went to America, hereby we are deprived of about thirty or forty regular and attentive hearers.'[36] This suggests a factor of almost 8 in estimating the Baptist community at Ferbane in relation to the number of church members, but this would scarcely have applied to the churches as a whole. In guaging the effect of emigration on the Baptist community a factor of 3 will be used to estimate its size. Probably this is low in relation to the nineteenth century when families were larger and church attendance more fashionable. Since World War II the census returns for Northern Ireland show that approximately twice as many persons registered their religious affiliation as 'Baptist' than the aggregate church membership shown in the official statistics of the Baptist Union of Ireland. The ratio for the Republic of Ireland is slightly higher.

A more organised view of the effect of emigration might have been expected in the detailed Green/Davis report of June 1837. Surprisingly, the sole reference to emigration was a comment that McCarthy 'deplores greatly the removal of a considerable number, who, he hopes, were receiving the truth - some for fear of their Catholic neighbours, some, and no wonder, in the hope of bettering their condition in another land.'[37] Similarly, the report of a preaching itinerary by two prominent Baptist ministers in 1838 was singularly silent on the subject of emigration.[38] This paucity of information may suggest that the problem was not yet pressing, except in McCarthy's 'district' and in Athlone where Hamilton reported that all the members of the church there, except three, had 'gone to America and other places.'[39] More probably, it reflected the preoccupation of the visitors with other aspects of the Society's work since their aim was to stimulate support for the BIS among the English churches. They preferred, therefore, to be positive about the opportunities for evangelism among Roman Catholics rather than to focus

on difficulties which militated against the creation of a virile and viable Baptist presence.

There is little reference to emigration in the records between 1838 and 1845, apart from an incidental note about the departure of Haddon[40] to America, and of a convert called McGinn who emigrated to Canada and joined the Baptist church at Quebec.[41] In 1842, however, the committee was prompted to comment on the continuing phenomenon of large-scale emigration from Ireland following the publication of the 1841 census report:

'Indeed, with a love of country seldom surpassed, the Irish are, to a great extent, a migratory people. It is not for your Committee to say what it is drives them from home - certain it is that they go forth in almost every direction. Our own cities and towns abound with them - Canada and the United States of America are constantly finding them a home. Australia, and unhappily more recently, the West Indies are resorted to in search of the living they can scarcely obtain on their own soil; a fact, which in the opinion of your Committee, greatly enhances the importance of this Society's efforts.'[42]

The 1841 census had disclosed an Irish-born population of 290,891 in England and Wales concentrated in the towns and cities. Most of these were Roman Catholics occupying a position at the lower end of the social scale. Their presence gave rise to public misgiving and unease, and the committee's comments reflect this feeling.

In passing, it must be noted that, within the British Isles, this tendency to migrate and emigrate was not peculiar to the Irish, as the quotation above implies. Apart from hunger and persecution, the 'push' and 'pull' factors were similar to those operating so powerfully in Ireland, and they were well understood. The following table shows the number of emigrants from the United Kingdom as a whole to the American continent from 1821 to 1861:

1821-31	225,878
1831-41	655,747
1841-51	1,545,543
1851-61	2,054,578[43]

The committee's comment about the migrant tendencies of the Irish contains the germ of an argument for supporting the BIS, which was developed as the pressures of emigration in the later 'Forties and 'Fifties challenged its integrity. The argument ran:

- the BIS-aided churches were steadily losing members and converts through emigration;
- those who emigrated became witnesses and evangelists in their adopted countries and strengthened the Baptist witness there;
- therefore, the work of the BIS was important and worthy of generous financial support.

The following year, 1843, the annual report returned to the topic, suggesting reasons why converts from Roman Catholicism tended to leave Ireland. These were - religious persecution, the often ruinous boycott and petty annoyances. Taken together, it argued, they explained why the Irish Baptist churches were not stronger and more numerous.[44] There is little doubt that the hostility shown to those who apostasised from Roman Catholicism was an additional 'push' factor, often as potent as those noticed earlier. This hostility operated most powerfully in areas like the midlands and west, where Roman Catholicism predominated and Anglophobia flourished. There, any defection to Protestantism, whether to the Baptist or any other denomination, was treated as a denial of 'the true faith' and of the patriotic ideal. In 1843 Bates, then at Ballina, lost members through emigration because they were unable 'to withstand opposition.'[45] However, it is impossible to disentangle hostility from other 'push' factors such as hunger, poverty, and unemployment, which many of the converts experienced along with other people. Emigration for them, as for a multitude of others, was an attractive 'escape hatch.'[46]

Erosion by emigration was also felt in the churches in the north of Ireland. Serious permanent emigration from Ulster had been a fact of life during the eighteenth century, and continued in the nineteenth century, accentuated by the economic depression which made its greatest impact on the north east.

Ernest Payne estimated that famine and emigration reduced the Baptist community in the south and west by more than 3,000 adherents in 1846, 1847 and the ensuing years, and that, thereafter, Baptist work was concentrated chiefly in the north.[47] The census of 1861, the first to distinguish Baptists as a category, returned a total of 4,237 Baptists distributed as follows:

Ulster	3,438
Leinster	455
Munster	225
Connaught	119[48]

This appears to confirm the second part of Payne's statement. Unfortunately, neither the 1841 nor the 1851 census give a breakdown of the minor denominations, so that a direct comparison cannot be made. Evidence for the distribution of Baptists between 1841 and 1861 must be extracted from BIS records, extant church books and the returns of the 'Irish Baptist Southern Association' which BIS-related churches formed. These churches reported annual statistics relating to baptism and membership gains and losses in the manner common to similar associations in England and Wales. In 1845 the IBSA circular letter included a list of 40 churches, which its compilers claimed was more correct than any earlier list, though they warned that the list 'may not include all the baptist churches in Ireland, nor be quite numerically correct.' An attempt has been made to trace statistically the fortunes of these churches and the Baptist community from 1841 to 1865.[49]

If the 1845 list be taken as tolerably correct and a consevative factor of 3 used to estimate roughly the larger Baptist community, tentative totals for the provinces emerge as follows, and may be compared with the 1861 census returns:

Province	Churches	Members	Community size
Ulster	22	741	2,223
Leinster	7	173	519
Munster	6	100	300
Connaught	4	67	201

These figures suggest that the pattern of distribution for 1845 was similar to that of 1861 with the largest concentration in Ulster. The pattern of distribution, therefore, was not radically changed by famine and emigration as Payne suggested. Nor do these figures offer a basis for Payne's estimate that the churches of the south and west lost more than 3,000 adherents in the famine years, unless Payne's category of 'adherents' included the children in the BIS schools.

In 1845 there were 14 BIS-aided churches in the south and west (Abbeyleix, Athlone, Ballina, Clonmel, Coolaney, Cork, Easky, Ferbane, Kilcooley Hills, Limerick, Moate, Parsonstown, Rahue and Waterford), that is, all except the churches in Dublin, Cloughjordan and Boyle. By 1861 their number had been reduced to 3 (Athlone, Moate and Rahue). Cork and Waterford were no longer receiving aid, while the remaining nine had ceased to exist. As far as the BIS operations were concerned Payne was right in saying that the concentration of effort had shifted to the north. Nevertheless, there remained scattered pockets of the Baptist community in Munster and Connaught.

The real decline in the Baptist community in the midlands and west, despite the large numbers who emigrated during the famine years, did not set in until after 1851. An examination in detail of the available statistics from 1845 to 1851 shows that only two churches, Clonmel and Limerick, did not survive. Remarkably, the others not only held their ground, but in some cases increased their numbers as the following table shows.

	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851
Abbeyleix	31	35	37	33	31	37	18
Athlone	5	12	?	6	8	10	9
Ballina	27	32	40	65	94	46	55
Clonmel	7	8	8	–	-	–	–
Coolaney	12	14	10	10	9	6	6
Cork	33	40	27	?	25	23	25
Easky	12	12	12	15	19	19	13
Ferbane	11	11	?	12	?	12	?
Kilcooley Hills	13	?	14	14	19	?	20
Limerick	5	–	–	–	–	–	–
Moate	17	?	?	12	13	13	11
Parsonstown	16	?	?	?	?	15	23
Rahue	43	43	?	30	28	28	?
Waterford	25	?	?	20	25	23	18

It may be fairly said that the famine years in themselves were not as destructive of the churches as has been assumed. The care and generosity shown to the starving poor drew numbers into the Baptist community. Such people were not received indiscriminately into church membership, although they were welcomed to the services of public worship. Those seeking baptism and membership had to produce credible evidence of a spiritual change. The insistence on believer's baptism by immersion proved an insurmountable obstacle to many who otherwise qualified for membership. The numerous outstations in hamlets and villages, through which the churches and ministers sought both to evangelise and to provide Christian fellowship for isolated groups of believers, helped to sustain a Baptist presence in areas stricken by famine and depopulated by mass emigration. The churches, in their weakened state, however, were unable to withstand the loss of the more prosperous and better educated members who had both the initiative and the means to seek a new life abroad. In 1850 the committee reported that emigration had 'swept through and desolated (the) mission churches'; that over 100 Irish Baptists had landed in New York State alone during 1849; and that 'strenuous efforts (were) still being made across the Atlantic, to induce the other members of our churches to follow the example of those who have already sailed.' One of the ministers commented bleakly, 'I really hardly believe that it is a

kindness to undermine our churches by a continual drain upon them of generally not the poorest or worst off.'[50]

While in 1849 the BIS-related churches recorded a gross increase of 79 members (an average of nearly 6 per church and equal to the average in the English Associations), they had a gross loss of 99 members 'almost entirely from the emigration of our members', and a net loss of 20 members. The following year McCarthy lost 'several' to America; Berry reported the closure of some outstations and 'the departure of many of (his) members to America and England'. Berry confessed,

'To see the fruits of almost a whole life leave the land of one's birth, leaving only the least efficient and active behind, is indeed painful, and often suggests to the mind, ought not I to follow them?[51]

Berry did not emigrate, but other ministers did - Denis Mulhern to Boston in 1849, John Bates to Iowa in 1850, William McKee also to America in 1852. The whole Kilcooley Hills church probably emigrated as a group under the leadership of their pastor, W.J. Wilson. The death of Charles Hardcastle in 1847 from famine fever, the retirement of Isaac McCarthy in 1851 and of William Thomas in 1853, the loss of Michael Mullarky in 1850 when the Society no longer had sufficient funds to employ Wilson and him, also deprived the churches of experienced and trusted leaders during this crucial period.

So, the drain of continuous emigration, the pressure of economic depression, and the loss of respected ministers, eroded the organised life of the already weakened churches of the midlands and west during the later 1850s, the process being hastened as falling income forced the committee to curtail BIS activities there. The midlands churches at Abbeyleix, Ferbane, Parsonstown (or Birr) and Kilcooley Hills collapsed, while the churches in the west, Coolaney, Easky and Ballina[52] followed suit. Athlone and Moate just survived. Cork and Waterford carried on much reduced. As the 1861 census showed, however, the Baptist community in Connaught and in the areas of Munster outside Cork and Waterford was not completely obliterated. Nevertheless, as far as the BIS was concerned, the ground lost in the south

and west was never recovered, although agents were maintained in Ballina and Athlone until 1865.

The Ballina Experiment

Frederick Trestrail visited Ireland and reported seeing on his route from Dublin to Ballina, via Mullingar, Ballinasloe and Castlebar, crops 'abundant and varied except for the potato which is diseased again'. Abandoned farms were everywhere. Trestrail was taken to see 'large bodies of young persons and adults of both sexes, labouring cheerfully on the farms cultivated by the Society of Friends.'[53] These were farms purchased by the Quakers, after the distress of early 1847, and used to teach improved agricultural methods.[54] Trestrail's inspection arose from a suggestion by William Hamilton, the minister at Ballina, that the committee might consider using part of the balance in the Famine Relief Fund in a similarly constructive way. The relief committee was impressed and acted on Trestrail's report. Their decision was published in October:

'The Society of Friends having employed a considerable portion of their relief fund in the cultivation of several farms in the county Mayo, affording employment to great numbers of the peasantry, as well as giving them sound practical instruction in the cultivation of various kinds of green crops, and with signal success; the Relief Committee have resolved to expend what funds may be sent out to Ballina during the coming winter in a similar manner. The whole question has been carefully considered, and the method of procedure, the probable expense, the number of persons likely to be effectually relieved, who will be taught to work, and thus may become skilled labourers - a class of persons so much wanted in Ireland - have been as nearly as possible ascertained. Extensive enquiries were made on the spot, by the secretary during his late visit to that country.

It is presumed that this mode of relieving the poor, especially those belonging to the church at Ballina, will commend itself to all the contributors to the Relief Fund. By taking this course, there is every reason to believe that the greater part of the expense will be repaid by the crops, and the Mission in that district materially assisted. The experiment, if successful, may be tried elsewhere.'[55]

The committee leased a farm of 136 statute acres, (a large part of which had been cultivated by the Quakers during that year), at £80 per annum plus poor rates and county cess of about £14, from 1 November 1848. The lease was for 21 years with an option to surrender it at the end of one year, or every third year thereafter.[56] This favourable arrangement was possible only because hundreds of farms were lying derelict as a direct result of famine and emigration.[57] Colonel Vaughan Jackson, a landed proprietor near Ballina, who had taken Trestrail to see the Quaker farms, advised the committee on the management of the farm. One of the Scripture Readers called Middleton, who had farm experience, was made farm manager. Hamilton supervised Middleton's work and kept the accounts. That winter 20 labourers were employed, which meant that, with their dependants, about 100 persons were supported. Another 20 labourers were given seasonal work. Three of the labourers, who were members of the Ballina church, lived in cottages on the farm, while Middleton lived in the farmhouse. During the first year the farm showed a small profit.

The decision to lease the farm, and to divert funds to this project in a period of stringency had been criticised, especially by a former BIS secretary, Rev. Samuel Green (Walworth), who opposed the project because it made the Ballina minister a patron. The committee invited him to inspect the farm during a visit he made to Ireland in June 1848. He reported in detail on 27 June, stating that he had returned from his inspection convinced of the need for such operations on a larger scale! He had changed his mind because the scheme was financially viable, no money from the general fund had been diverted to it, and those who were supported by it were chosen 'on account of need and moral conduct.'[58]

The farm experiment continued for three years. In 1850 the committee sought the expert advice of Mr. Joshua Whitaker of Bratton who recommended certain changes if the experiment was to continue. After considering them the committee decided to surrender the lease in November 1851, although the expenses for 1850 had been covered and the cost estimates for 1851 were lower by £100.[59] Some other factors influenced the decision. Large-scale emigration from the area cast serious doubts on the future of the Ballina church. While the farm had given employment to some members of the church, (which had more than 100 members at this time), and had helped

to hold it together, it was at best an emergency measure. After the experiment ended the Ballina church felt the full effects of emigration and began to decline, though it survived until 1865.[60]

FOOTNOTES

1 *History of the Baptist Irish Society*, (London, 1845) p. 13

2 Baptist Irish Society Seventh Annual Report (1821), p.13.

3 *The Baptist Irish Society*, p.57f.

4 BIS Third Annual Report (1817), p.41. Rev. George Burder of Fetter Lane church, London, was the author of Village Sermons in several volumes. See *Baptist Magazine* 1811, p.252; BM 1812, p.121.

5 BM 1831, p.433; BIS Eighteenth Annual Report (1832), p.22.

6 BM 1837, p.512

7 BM 1838, p.323.

8 BIS Twentyeighth Annual Report (1842), p.12.

9 BIS Thirtyfifth Annual Report (1849), p.21

10 BIS Twentyninth Annual Report (1843), p.10.

11 See Joshua Thompson, "Baptists in Ireland 1792-1922: A Dimension of Protestant Dissent", (Unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford) 1988.

12 BM 1853, p.45.

13 See J.M. Henry, 'Congregationalism in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century', (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, QUB)pp. 311-316

14 Maldwyn A. Jones, *Immigration*, (New York, 1960), passim.

15 R.D. Edwards, *An Atlas of Irish History*, p.156

16 R.D. Edwards, op. cit. p.146

17 Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: the adaptation of English and Scottish immigrants in nineteenth century America* (London, 1972), passim, esp. p.36. See also Maldwyn Jones, 'The Background to Emigration from Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century' in *Perspectives in American History*, vol.7 (1973), pp.3-92.

18 R.D. Edwards, op. cit., p.146

19 R.D. Edwards, op. cit., Map No.43 'Destinations of the emigrants, 1845-55', pp.144-5.

20 R.D. Edwards, op. cit. p.151. The 1841 census returns show 419,256 Irish-born in Great Britain; by 1851 there were 733,866.

21 R.D. Edwards, op. cit., p.234.

22 R.D.Edwards, op. cit., Map no.71 'Population changes, 1841-51', p.233.

23 Joshua Thompson, 'The Cloghjordan Correspondence of 1822-3' in IBHS Journal, vol.16 (1983-84), pp.28-37.

24 Ms. letter Thomas Hassell and ors. to John Saffery, dated 4 August 1822.

25 Ms. letter Hassell and ors. to Saffery, dated 25 August 1822.

26 A letter of dismission was a certificate of good standing granted by the local Baptist church of which the subject was a member, and was addressed to a named church or left 'open' in cases where the receiving church was not known.

27 BIS Ninth Annual Report (1823), p.23.

28 BIS Tenth Annual Report (1824), p.29.

29 BIS Eleventh Annual Report (1825), p.13.

30 Ken R. Manley and Michael Petras, *The First Australian Baptists*, (Eastwood, NSW, 1982).

31 *Irish Chronicle*, December 1831, p.895.

32 BIS Twentieth Annual Report (1834), p.12.

33 *Irish Chronicle*, October 1834, p.441.

34 *Irish Chronicle*, August 1836, p.370.

35 Hardcastle, the minister at Waterford, drew the distinction in 1846 when he wrote, 'Many of the members both of the church and congregation have emigrated'. BIS Thirtysecond Annual Report (1846), p.23.

36 BIS Thirtyfourth Annual Report (1848), p.19.

37 *Irish Chronicle*, January 1838, p.42.

38 *Irish Chronicle*, October 1838, p.453. The ministers were the Revs. J.Howard Hinton and Charles Stovel.

39 *Irish Chronicle*, August 1836, p.372.

40 *Irish Chronicle*, January 1839, p.41. The Rev. James Haddon was an Independent minister working with the Irish Evangelical Society, who adopted Baptist views and was baptized by McCarthy. Shortly afterwards he was appointed a BIS itinerant minister and allocated to Abbeyleix. He emigrated to America in 1832. See BIS Eighteenth Annual Report (1832), p.22.

41 BIS Twentyeighth Annual Report (1842), p.25.

42 BIS Twentyeighth Annual Report (1842), p.3

43 Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, 2nd.ed. (Oxford, 1962), vol.13 in The Oxford History of England, p.601.

44 BIS Twentyninth Annual Report (1843), p.5.

45 BIS Twentyninth Annual Report (1843), p.13

46 F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since The Famine*, (London, 1973), rev.ed., p.114.

47 Ernest Payne. *The Baptist Union* (London, 1959) p.69.

48 H.C. Sessional Papers 1863, lix, 11.

49 See Joshua Thompson, "Baptists in Ireland 1792-1922: A Dimension of Protestant Dissent", unpublished D. Phil. thesis, 1988.

50 *Irish Chronicle*, May 1850, pp.324-8.

51 *Irish Chronicle*, July 1850, pp.457-61.

52 Although a BIS minister was retained in Ballina until 1865, and for a short period was given an assistant, the church became progressively weaker. It was a final gesture when the committee sent Stokes, one of Berry's protégés who had worked with Eccles in Belfast, to Ballina in 1861. When, in 1865, Stokes resigned to pursue his studies for the ministry he was not replaced, and the church died out.

53 *Irish Chronicle*, September 1848

54 *The Great Famine*, p.258

55 *Irish Chronicle*, October 1848, p.648.

56 *Irish Chronicle*, December 1848, p.809; BIS Thirtyfifth Annual Report (1849).

57 *The Great Famine*, p.125.

58 *Irish Chronicle*, August 1848, pp.533-4.

59 *Irish Chronicle*, May 1851, p.325.

60 Middleton, the farm manager, and his family left immediately for America.

OUR TASK IN A CHANGING IRELAND

by Robert Dunlop

An overview of some current trends and tendencies in the religious and cultural atmosphere of Ireland in the closing decade of the twentieth century. This paper read at a meeting of the Southern Association of Irish Baptist Churches in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, on February 3, 1996 also identifies several important issues for Irish Baptists in their church life and mission strategy.

The Census of 1991 shows that there are 1,156 Baptists in the Republic of Ireland. Numerically, we are slightly fewer than the Jews and stronger than the Lutherans (1,581 and 1,010). Moslems (3,875) and the Jehovah Witnesses (3,393) outnumber us by three to one. Significantly, there are more people listed as "Christian" (unspecified) 16,329, who along with other "Unstated Denominations" (2,197) and those listed as "Evangelical" (819) outnumbering in total the Presbyterians (13,199) and Methodists (5,037) combined.

Our main concern is not the religious topography of the country, or even these enlightening statistics, but rather with the mission of the 1,000+ Baptists gathered in our score of churches.

Our significance does not lie only in our numerical growth, but rather in our success or failure to communicate intelligently with the rapidly changing social, cultural and religious milieu of contemporary Ireland.

We need to take time to re-adjust our antenna, so that we are tuned into the wavelength on which the nation transmits its feelings. Before saying

anything we need to listen, to assimilate, to dissect, to reflect, and then to respond.

We are Gospel people who believe passionately in the permanent validity and vitality of the Great Commission. But we cannot go on blindly answering yesterday's questions, or assuming that what is now, is what has been.

All observers of life in Ireland are agreed that things are changing rapidly. Our culture is undergoing convulsive re-orientation. The value-system which formed personal morality and public opinion is under enormous pressure. For the first time in history the Irish are a people in transit. We are sure neither of where we are nor where we are going.

Naturally, we must take account of the outlook and belief system of the religious majority. Within Catholicism weekly Mass attendance is 82% [McGreil, 1988-89], 69% in Dublin, but as low as 5% in some marginalised areas. In the town of Newbridge only 50% of the people go to church, and in Portlaoise 25% of births in the County Hospital are out of wedlock.

We are now encountering "a la carte Catholics", "new Catholics" and I have actually met a girl in Dublin with a T-shirt proclaiming "Recovering Catholic"! The European values survey confirms that a "new Catholic" has emerged with the following characteristics - an outlook that questions the Church's right to speak with absolute authority on matters of personal morality, an optimistic interpretation of religion, and an increasing move towards a "life force" rather than a personal God, while retaining an appreciation of the sacramental life of the Church.

In addition, there is a growing mass of angry, disillusioned Catholic people who are morally and spiritually rudderless, who cynicism has been heightened by clerical misdemeanour and hierarchical fudging. I want to introduce two internal critiques which have appeared in print.

The first is from Mary McAleese:

"Our fight for faith, our struggle to believe in a loving God was ironically often subverted by the very agencies whose function it was to transmit the faith and witness to it in a very special way. I have grown to prefer the Christ of the light touch, the Christ who loves each one so uniquely and so absolutely that he has counted the very hairs on each head, and to be rather impatient with the Christ who has the Gospel in his safe and the Code of canon law in his desk."[1]

Kevin Hegarty, a Mayo priest, who was recently dropped as Editor of Intercom, put it like this:

"A new class has emerged in Ireland - well-educated, articulate and questioning, even sceptical of venerable institutions as the Church. and the church establishment is at a loss to understand what has happened. Schooled in the ways of an authoritarian and patriarchal society, and drawing inspiration from outdated maps of the Irish mind, church leaders have failed to develop a pastoral strategy and language that empathises with modern Irish experience and strong enough to offer a critique of its materialistic drift. The church has reacted to crisis in the fashion of beleaguered institutions. It seems the most consistent response is to draw the remaining wagons into a circle and hope for rescue."[2]

What we are experiencing is a severe collision between a people formed by an ancient culture and tossed around by the strong winds of modernity. It is not sufficient to read this purely as secularisation. When the Irish rebel against anything they have their own way of doing it. So, what we are confronting is residual Catholicism with a dash of scepticism in an atmosphere of consumerism. This mixture is difficult to quantify or assess and we must guard against simplistic or over-confident evaluations.

It is necessary to make a brief excursion into the territory of subversive memory. The present alienation from religious concepts, allied to creeping, or even galloping secularisation is not occurring in an historical vacuum. Within the sub-consciousness of contemporary alienated Irish Catholics is a longer and more pervasive alienation - directed against the intruder, the

religious coloniser, the people of "the other side." And those who are disillusioned with their own side are not ready to transfer to the other side. Catholics, even of the disillusioned variety, are not queueing up to become Protestants. There is too much at stake for such a move.

In his analysis of S. J. Connolly's study of Protestantism, Martin Maguire points to the pain of being over-run:

"For the coloniser the colonial situation is seen as the confrontation of the civilised and the primitive, which in Ireland was the confrontation of the Protestant and Catholic. The imagined community of the Protestant Irish was that of a newly emerging British Protestant community. The point of contact with British culture was the shared perception of Catholicism as an international and insidious menace. But whereas the anti-Catholicism of English Protestantism was forged in wars with the Catholic powers, and therefore had only political connotations, the anti-Catholicism of Irish Protestantism was loaded with cultural connotations which marked it as a colonial ideology. Catholics were not only a seditious threat but were also a superstitious mass."[3]

Because we have inherited an "identity-in-opposition" culture our task is complicated. Even when one strand in the sociological bonding is fractured it does not mean that everything collapses. This was underlined in a piece which appeared in the Irish Times[4] which spoke of

"...former Catholics who go along with the extremes of their belief so that the children won't feel outsiders. Catholicism is so vast and so saturates all aspects of life and death that to leave it means leaving the protection of the pack, being alone."

We must also take cognisance of the image of the "turn-coat" in Irish Catholic religious folklore. When Catholic faith and national identity became intertwined in the crusades of Daniel O'Connell and many successors, it became even more subversive to break ranks with the pack and to start hunting with the alien hounds. Conversion to the "other crowd" was suspect and highly dangerous. A satirical publication in 1826 responds to the case of a Catholic priest who joined the Church of Ireland:

"I hear you have obtained a chaplaincy of £300 a year. A fine thing this - a capital price for an old "turn-coat", but do not bother hoping for higher or richer office. No, no these are fat things which good Protestants want for themselves; and even though the church endures such apostates as you, believe me that it suspects their sincerity ... enjoy yourself for a while, and never forget that, like hundreds of your predecessors, you will one day be likely to seek refuge in the church you have abandoned."[5]

While the polemical missiles of the nineteenth century may have gone into retreat, there is still lingering in the sub-consciousness of even the disillusioned and disaffected a hesitancy to seek refuge in enemy territory. These feelings must be taken seriously as expressed in the stark words of T.S.Eliot: "Of all that was done in the past, you eat the fruit, either rotten or ripe." Or, as Bible Baptists might put it, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."[6]

These incontrovertible facts throw up a large agenda for our churches in the current climate. To-day, we look briefly at some of the items that need to be on our agenda if we are to stay in business.

1. We need to affirm our Baptist ecclesiology and be true to ourselves.

At this juncture in our history and development our understanding of the gathered church, democratic decision-making, the priesthood of all believers and freedom of conscience under the Word of God, ought to find acceptance among those who are recovering from the wounds of heavy authoritarianism, clobbered with the weight of Canon Law and looking for a hospitable spiritual home. But we need to have more to offer than confessional orthodoxy. With all the faults of Catholicism, and its seemingly impersonal atmosphere, there is at its heart a deep sense of community, a feeling of belonging. Somehow we have not been able to communicate our ecclesiology. I am more convinced the longer I live that it is a fitting model for the Irish situation - provided it is seen to work and [is] not just a concept in our minds or a principle on our books.

An awkward and penetrating question concerns our identity. In spite of our historical rootage in the Third Way of the Reformation, have we been

hampered with a flirtation with the trappings of bourgeois Protestantism, particularly in its cultural and socio-economic orientations? Theologically, we cannot and must not disown our Reformation heritage but neither must we neglect the original vision of the Anabaptists to be a Christian counter-culture centred on the Person of Jesus, the life of the local church, and the call to discipleship within community and society. We must admit, with deep repentance, that we have not been free from the superior outlook of blue-blood Protestantism and have lost our way in failing to be true non-conformists.

2. We should strive to foster communities of loving accommodation and Biblical diversity.

We cannot walk away from the cultural orientations which have influenced and too often, even controlled the life and style of our congregations. Several of our churches are trying to minister to a body of people representing the confluence of those nurtured in the cradle of Southern Protestantism and those whose formation was within the bosom of scholastic Catholicism. And in spite of a commonalty in Christ, an identical identity as Irish men and women - these people are often culturally and habitually worlds apart. Even though they may not be able to pin-point the influence of the Genevan work ethic or the Thomistic world view, they have been permanently branded with one or the other. A failure to understand this in church life breeds intolerance, élitism and a patronising posture. Those with a Protestant heritage are tempted to patronise the newcomers with the idea that given time they will come round to our way of thinking and acting. The newcomers are usually full of enthusiasm and idealism, which is often followed with [by] a sense of shock that the small print of their lives is set in bold caps [capitals] in the social and spiritual priorities of their new friends. When all this baggage lands in the melting pot of church life there needs to be a lot of sacred space.

How does this tolerance translate? It may mean the challenge of a whole new social world which is confrontational rather than comfortable, [which] questions given assumptions rather than acquiescing in inherited practices. It may mean an easy or ambiguous attitude to habits such as smoking, drinking, dancing, Sunday sport, and even an occasional flutter on

the Grand National. Some of our churches have had to re-Adjust so as to accept that there are members of their body who love Jesus and drink Guinness, and it never enters their head that the two might be incompatible. But then if we had done our homework we should have known that some Dutch Calvinist Christians smoke cigars, that Italian evangelicals play soccer after Sunday worship, that French Baptists drink wine and that American fundamentalists have the Sunday newspaper delivered to their door. There's a new breed of Irish believers who will do the lot and never blink an eyelid, and are totally gob-smacked to discover that participation in such habits could ever be treated as an index of their spirituality.

3. **We should place a lot of weight on long-term pastoral care and patent Christian nurture.**

While not fudging or playing down the radical nature of the Gospel call, we need to address the issue of long-haul spiritual nourishment. This will mean a very sparing usage of such well-worn categories as "backsliders", coming to terms with a lot of blowing hot and cold, coming and going, picking and choosing. Our pastors are often tearing their hair out trying to find a way to nurse wounded folk back to spiritual health, and they need the patient understanding and support of the whole church.

In terms of style, those who come from a tradition where serious sins were frequently ignored while wrongdoers were "read off the altar" require skilled pastoral attention. We cannot replace the thunderings of Canon Law with the threatenings of Bible texts. The rawness of broken lives requires eirenic treatment with more honey than vinegar. Let us never forget the old Puritan saying that "new presbyter is but old priest writ large."

In the area of worship we need to provide a balanced diet and to recognise a variety of tastes. It is usually assumed that those emerging from Irish Catholicism have an identical palate worship-wise - a preference for an informal, unstructured style of worship. It is well to be aware of a substantial minority who feel liturgically underfed in many Free Church services. Are we Baptists able to cater for their needs without losing our venerable simplicity or must they beat a path to the Presbyterians or the Church of Ireland? We are somewhat poor at colourful and imaginative celebrations

of the great moments of life - birth, baptism, admission to membership, marriage, death. There are people sitting in our services every Sunday who ache for an appropriate and, at least, occasional celebration with creative and symbolic significance. Advent, Christmas, Easter, baptism, Communion, Ordination - all offer the kind of setting for a meaningful liturgical celebration without the trappings of perfunctory ritual. This, too, is part of our pastoral task.

4. We should give thoughtful attention to the language and style we adopt in-house and in the great beyond of the external world.

It is always good to start with an internal re-organization. We have our shibboleths, our buzz-words, our denominational dictionary. Abandoning the lingo of Protestant scholasticism frees us up to find fresh ways of stating old truths. If there is non-registration in the church there will be non-communication in the world.

I have a long-standing respect for the famous James Denny, of Trinity College, Glasgow. He coined the phrase "evangelists as theologians and theologians as evangelists". He once said that "the simplest truth of the Gospel and the profoundest truth of theology must be put in the same words - he bore our sins". His successor described him an unequalled "for making the New Testament intelligible as the record and deposit of an overwhelming experience of redemption and for generating in those who listened to him the conviction that the gospel incarnate in Jesus is the only thing that matters".[7]

The teaching church is the telling church and the telling is a listening church. The logic of this compels us to find ways and words to share our faith and to lead others to faith. This brings us beyond a maintenance mentality - concentrating on the machinery of the church and letting the fire go out in the boiler! This is the bottom line as Orlando Costa emphasises that "an evangelistic decision can be authentic only if it is the result of the Spirit's inner witness corroborating the church's external witness of faith."

Ultimately, the call is to commit ourselves to evangelism which is culturally-sensitive, non-threatening, user-friendly and shot through with

integrity. Because of our burdened history, we need to divest ourselves of every vestige of sectarian imperialism. Orlando Costa has reminded us:

> "The ministry of *diakoma* liberates evangelization from the danger of sectarian proselytism; which reduces the Gospel to an ideological slogan that seeks nothing more than the cheap increase in the number of adherents in a community that is already alienated from history and God's purpose for it."[68]

This is a great time to be kingdom-builders in Ireland. Never before was there a spiritual hunger which is almost tangible. Never before was the pain of our people so palpable. Never before was the door of Gospel opportunity so apparent. In the words of Jim Wallis, it is time "to come out of hiding and see the Risen Lord". And when we see Him we shall also meet the Christ of the human road described in the moving lines of the Argentinian poet Federico Pagura:

> "Because [Jesus] came into our world and story;
> because he heard our silence and our sorrow;
> because he filled the whole world with his glory, and came to light the darkness of our morrow;
> because his birth was in a darkened corner;
> because he lived proclaiming life and love;
> because he quickened hearts that had been dormant, and lifted those whose lives had been downtrodden;
> "Because he drove the merchants from the temple, denouncing evil and hypocrisy;
> because he raised up little ones and women, and put down the mighty from all their seats;
> because he bore the cross for our wrong doings, and understood our failings and our weakness;
> because he suffered from our condemnation and then he died for every mortal creature.
> "Because of victory one morning early, when he defeated death and fear and sorrow,so nothing can hold back his mighty story nor his eternal kingdom tomorrow.

So today we have hope and expectation,
so we today can struggle with conviction,
so we today can trust we have a future,
so we have hope in this our world of tears.

FOOTNOTES

1 *Doctrine and Life*, November 1995, pp.597-8

2 *Irish Times*, January 1 and 2, 1996

3 *Studia Hibernica*, No.28, 1994 p.169

4 *Irish Times*, 1 February 1988

5 Cited from 'Third Way' - article in the *Politics of Conversion* by J. Liechty

6 Jeremiah 31.29; Ezekiel 18.2

7 *Lausanne Manila Papers*, p.199

8 *Liberating News*, p.143

THESE FIFTY YEARS: SOME PERSONAL REMINISCENCES AND THOUGHTS

by S. H. Simpson

I have been invited to share with you what God has done for me during the past fifty years. My aim is to give thanks to Almighty God for His gracious dealings with me, His unfailing faith-fulness, His unchanging goodness and His untiring patience.

Background

I was born into an intensely Christian and strictly Sabbatarian home. Shoes had to be polished on Saturday night. As children, we were forbidden to play with our toys on Sunday. On Sundays we went to Sunday school at 10.30 am followed by the church service, then afternoon Sunday school and an evening service at 7 o'clock. Then to finish the "feast" I was frequently taken to a cottage meeting. I suffered from spiritual indigestion and was understandably relieved when Sunday was over for another week. Having said that, I thank God for godly parents whose desire was to see their family saved and following the Lord. My father revelled in the Scriptures, and especially in the Epistle to the Romans which he had committed to memory. At the age of ninety he was able to recite all sixteen chapters word perfect. He was also a man of prayer, and conducted family worship for many years.

One of my earliest memories goes back to 1923, when Rev. W.P. Nicholson held an evangelistic campaign in Ravenhill Presbyterian church to which my parents belonged. I recall going with my mother night after night, and learning hymns and choruses. Then I would come home, stand

on a chair and preach - in imitation of "W.P. Nicholson". I was only four years old. I can remember quite clearly the evangelist taking me up in his arms one evening, kissing me and saying, "Sonny, when you grow up aren't you going to be a preacher and a good red-hot one?" In my teens I rebelled against God and thought my parents were fanatics, but I never forgot Nicholson's words. When the Lord saved me just before my eighteenth birthday, the desire to become a preacher of the gospel began to blossom in my life.

My conversion took place on the evening of 31 January 1937. I had been under deep conviction of sin for a period of two months and could find no peace. After an evening service in Cregagh Methodist church at which Rev. J.B. Jennings preached, as I walked along the Woodstock Road in Belfast, I surrendered to the claims of Jesus Christ.

Beginnings

Being a music-lover and possessing a reasonable baritone voice, I joined Ravenhill United Testimony Male Choir soon after my conversion. This gave me opportunities to testify and sing the gospel, and later to give a short message from time to time. I look back with gratitude to my colleagues in the Choir for their encouragement to a beginner in the work. My dedication to male voice singing has never diminished over the years. I have had the privilege of founding a number of male voice choirs and Male Choir Festivals, some of which are still in existence. I also spent six years studying voice production.

As time went by I became deeply involved in the work of Castlereagh Road Mission (now Castlereagh Baptist Church) where I was baptised and received into membership. I felt that it was my responsibility to give my undivided attention to that corner of the vineyard, so I severed my connection with the choir. I found outlets for my musical talents in my home church. My pastor (H H Murphy) felt I had some ability for preaching and gave me opportunities to minister the Word and preach the gospel. He advised me about reading,, helped me to build a good library and encouraged me to take a Bible correspondence course.

Secular and Sacred

At that time I was employed by the animal feeding stuffs firm of E.T. Green Ltd., where I commenced at the age of fifteen and continued for thirty years, rising to the rank of Sales Manager. I planned to remain in business, and to do the Lord's work on a voluntary basis. I enjoyed the independence this gave me, which I would lose if I were full-time.

However, the Lord had other plans and gradually the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle began to fall into place. In 1945 I was invited to become the pastor on a part-time basis of Wilson Memorial Hall in the village of Eden (near Carrickfergus). So, in November 1945, as a rather raw recruit, I took on the pastoral responsibility of that fellowship.

The going was tough as I was living in Belfast. Each Sunday I travelled by bus to Eden, conducted the morning service, visited around the congregation in the afternoon, preached again at the evening service before returning home. Each Tuesday evening I led a Bible study, and each Thursday the prayer meeting. I rose early in the mornings to study in preparation for the various meetings. These were precious days. I made many blunders, but the Lord was gracious and I learned by my mistakes. The Lord blessed those feeble efforts to the salvation of others. Recently I was speaking to a man, who as a lad of fifteen accepted Christ in the Wilson Memorial hall.

One unforgettable experience was the first funeral I was asked to conduct. A little boy of two, had wandered on to the railway line, and been killed by a passing train. The parents were non-Christians and I found it difficult to comfort them, but the Lord helped me. On another occasion, I visited a lad of fifteen who was dying of tuberculosis. When I talked to him about his soul he became angry and told me not to come back unless I would promise not to mention the subject again. A short time later he died. I was devastated and thought I had failed miserably. I learned subsequently that even when we are really experienced in dealing with such cases, only the Holy Spirit can create desires in the hearts of sinners.

My wife, Norah, and I married on 28 May 1947 and this, next to getting saved, was the best thing that ever happened to me! The Lord provided

me with a partner who was totally behind me in His work . Working together as a team through the years, she has been a tower of strength to me.

In order to be near the Hall, we set up our first home in Eden, and I travelled to business in Belfast by bus each day. For a short time we lived with an old lady in her cottage on the Larne Road in Eden, then briefly in a small gate lodge on the North Road before moving into a suitable house in Eden village. Our son Jim was born there, and two years later his sister Olive.

During this period Youth for Christ organised an evangelistic campaign in Carrickfergus. The evangelist was Jack Cochraine from the U.S.A., assisted by a quartette known as Global Gospelairs. A large number of people professed faith in Christ, including several young men connected with the local YMCA. Their leader invited me to commence a Bible class as a follow-up. For several months we met each Monday evening at a place called "The Tryst" as I taught them and saw them grow in grace. Feeling they should become active in the Lord's service, I persuaded them to join with me in forming the Carrickfergus Youth for Christ Male Choir. Many of these young men became active for God, and one of them is in the Christian ministry. Others became local preachers, Sunday-school teachers, and youth leaders.

A New Responsibility

Moving back to Belfast in 1951, I was invited to take responsibility for the work in Cregagh Mission Hall in Everton Drive. This presented a real challenge. The numbers had sadly dwindled. There were fears that the work might close down altogether. After much prayer, I decided that this was the will of God for me. I commenced my ministry there in November 1951. For the first twelve months or so things were very flat and discouraging. The building was used as a school during weekdays. Each Sunday the desks had to be moved and replaced with forms and afterwards re-arranged for school on Monday morning. Eventually, a few praying people started attending the services. We commenced early morning prayer meetings with occasional all-night prayer times when burdened people shed tears as they cried to the Lord for the salvation of their sons and daughters. This was the turning point in our efforts in Cregagh. Soon new faces were appearing

every Sunday evening, among them quite a number of young people. A boys' club was formed and also a girls' gymnasium. Both ventures proved effective in getting young people to bring their friends to the Sunday evening services. Soon there were several rows of young folk under the sound of the gospel . The Holy Spirit began to move, and week by week as the gospel was preached, and the Christians prayed, God visited us in a wonderful way. On one occasion, after an all-night prayer meeting, we had a special youth service. At the close I appealed for those anxious to be saved to come forward. No less than fourteen crowded into the little back room. It took quite a while to deal with each one individually, but the Lord enabled me. This was one of the greatest thrills of my fifty years in the ministry. The work was developed with provision for Sunday school, children's meeting, Boys Brigade and a Youth Fellowship which grew to over seventy in membership.

Until then we only had an evening service on Sunday with the mid-week prayer and Bible study. After a mission, conducted by the late Currie Brennan, in which many young people were saved, some with no other church connection, we commenced a Sunday morning service. This proved to be of great benefit to the young converts.

My first Baptist Church

After almost nine years in Cregagh, I received a call to Carryduff Baptist Church on a part-time basis. I did not want to leave Cregagh Hall as the Lord was really blessing the work there. However, I felt this was the Lord's call to me. and commenced my ministry in Carryduff in April 1960.

This was my first appointment to a church within the Baptist Union of Ireland. I had been of Baptist persuasion for many years and during the early part of my ministry in Cregagh Hall was a member of Mountpottinger Baptist Tabernacle. I was received into the Union as a pastor at the Assembly in May 1960. Although I felt a little strange at first, I soon proved the benefit of the fellowship of my brethren in Christ. I did not feel I was on my own any more. I recall with affection brethren such as L E Deens, George and Willie Weir, Tom McNabb, James McManus and many others who are now with the Lord. They were a source of encouragement to me in those days,

not forgetting our brother Joss here, who has always been so helpful and whose wise counsel I have always valued. Busy though he was as Union secretary, he always had time to listen. I can say that the Union has been a great asset to me.

One incident comes to mind regarding my first wedding as pastor of the Carryduff Church. I had officiated at a couple of marriages in Cregagh Hall, but since the Registrar was in attendance I had had no experience of filling in the Registers. I was very careful on the morning of this wedding to have everything correct. I checked the duplicate entries several times. Then I started reading the instructions in the Registers and discovered that all the details must be written with indelible ink! I looked at my ink bottle only to find that the label said "washable ink." My heart sank. Had I made a faux pas? I telephoned the Union secretary for advice. Quite calmly, in his re-assuring way, he said. "Remember Spurgeon's advice to his students, 'Always have one blind eye and one deaf ear!'" I can tell you this eased the tension, and I have often applied that rule in other matters through the years.

The Carryduff people kind and friendly, and we worked happily together for over four years. At that time the district was thinly populated and the congregation scattered over a wide area. I learned a lot about church life. Again I had the joy of leading a number to Christ. I remember the bright singing and the warmth of the prayer meetings in a closely knit fellowship. Plans were drawn up for a new building and the first phase of the project was completed before I left.

A Choice

So far as my secular work was concerned, I had been manager of the despatch department for a number of years, but in 1960 had been appointed sales representative responsible for a large area of the Province. In 1962 I was promoted to sales manager and became responsible for the business of two mills, namely Belfast and Londonderry. As you can imagine this was a heavy workload. After a hard day's work I had to come home and take up my church duties. In January 1964 I said to my wife, Norah, that a choice would have to be made between - either E T Green or full-time pastoral work. I remember she said, 'I can't see you giving up the Lord's work.'

I had received several invitations from churches asking me to consider the full-time pastorate, but I had turned them down. However, early that year I vowed to the Lord that if another opportunity came I would give it my careful consideration. He took me at my word and later in the year I received a call to the Banbridge Baptist Church. After much heart-searching I decided to accept. It was not an easy decision for we had two teenagers at high school at the time, and their future was important to us. However, they were very understanding. So in November 1964 I said goodbye to my colleagues in Greens, and started out on my first full-time charge. This is something I have never regretted. It was such a joy to be able to set everything else aside and concentrate on preaching and teaching the Word of God, and caring for the flock of God.

We look back with gratitude to God for His sustaining grace and providential care as we endeavoured to slot into a different lifestyle. I could relate many incidents when in a miraculous way the Lord supplied our needs. We never lacked any good thing. I rejoice in the wonderful blessing of the Lord upon the work in Banbridge. Many souls trusted Christ, were baptized and added to the church. I held several missions, including tent campaigns and special efforts in Orange Halls. The work grew steadily and the premises became inadequate for the various activities. When eight houses beside the church building came on the market the church bought them at a reasonable price with a view to erecting a new suite of buildings. This project came to fruition a few years ago and the church has every right to be proud of its premises which include an ample car park so essential in these days.

Having retained my interest in male voice singing, I succeeded in forming a male choir in Banbridge which is still in existence. As well as that, the Festival of Male Voice Praise which we inaugurated twenty-eight years ago is still going strong and I shared in it two weeks ago. God has used this method of proclaiming the gospel and there are those in the Christian ministry today who were converted through these efforts.

During our time in Banbridge I trained the Baptist Sunday Schools choir for the annual May demonstration. This involved travelling to Belfast on six successive Saturday afternoons in preparation for the big night. I

enjoyed working with the children and we had some wonderful times as we performed before a crowded audience in the Wellington Hall.

Another highlight of our time in Banbridge was a radio broadcast service on 7 January 1968. I received many letters of appreciation including one from a backslider who had come back to the Lord after listening to the service.

A Call to Scotland

In 1971 I accepted a call from Bellshill Baptist Church, near Glasgow. This entailed leaving our family in Ireland and adapting to an entirely new environment. I shall always be grateful to my wife and our family, Jim and Olive, for their understanding and co-operation. We soon settled in with our Scottish friends and grew to love them for their warmth and kindly ways. I was the second minister of Banbridge to move to Bellshill. In 1908 Pastor T J Harvey went from Banbridge to Bellshill and left his mark to the extent that Bellshill were willing to do the same again. Our brief sojourn in Bonnie Scotland was blessed by the Lord. A number were saved and believers built up in their most holy faith. An evangelistic campaign under the auspices of the Movement for World Evangelisation, led by Derek Cleave supported by singer Eric Clarke, proved to be a great success. It opened with a march of witness led by the Salvation Army band and an open-air service at which people of the town and district were invited to the meetings.

During our stay in Bellshill I was also responsible for training the church choir. We presented cantatas such as "Cross to Crown" at Easter and "Night of Miracles" at Christmas. While at Bellshill, my wife Norah had to have heart surgery in Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The congregation showed us much love and concern during those critical days. I also had the joy of officiating at the wedding of our daughter Olive in the Bellshill Church.

Back to Ireland

In 1975 I was guest speaker at the annual meetings of the Northern Baptist Association in Portstewart. During that visit I was approached by the diaconate of the Portstewart Baptist Church about a call. I declined

because I felt I had more work to do in Scotland. A year later, however, I received a call from the Portstewart Church and accepted it. It was not easy to leave the friends at Bellshill, but being certain we were in the will of God we said farewell and crossed the Irish Sea back to our native land.

Commencing in January 1977, our ministry at Portstewart lasted almost ten years. We again experienced the blessing of God as we laboured in that beautiful seaside town. From May to September each year the church building was usually crowded with holiday-makers. Encouraging in one sense, this influx made it difficult to maintain close contact with the church members. I was always glad when the holiday season ended and I could get down to looking after my own flock. Nevertheless, we made some lovely friends among the visitors. A highlight of the Portstewart year was the renowned Convention week in June when the cream of preachers addressed large audiences in the huge Convention tent. It was a privilege to have one of them, year by year, speak at our Baptist services on Convention Sunday - men like Francis Dixon, Derek Prime, Raymond Brown, George B Duncan and others whose ministry and warm Christian fellowship cheered our hearts.

The church grew through the introduction of the "Evangelism Explosion" method of training men and women for personal evangelism. Having attended a study course in England with our treasurer, Ronnie Simpson, and with the approval of the office-bearers we introduced the scheme to the church. As we trained others the Lord blessed our efforts. At one stage eighteen people witnessed in the community while thirty-six others supported them in prayer. Thus out of a comparatively small congregation no less than fifty-four members were active in outreach for a period of seventeen weeks. It was a memorable season when souls were gloriously saved.

As the work progressed a church hall was built to accommodate Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade, and a Youth Club meeting on Saturday nights. The Youth Club proved to be a spiritual success as young people were led to trust Christ during the epilogue which concluded each evening's activities. The church building itself became inadequate for our needs and was doubled in size. Both building projects were paid for within five years. To God be all the glory!

Here I pay tribute to my late friend and colleague, Dr Bill Holley. Bill was an elder, and his genial disposition and sincere Christian character were a real inspiration. He could relate to all ages and classes of people. It was a severe loss to the church when the Lord took him home in June 1985. There are many in the Portstewart area who trace their conversion to the influence of Dr Holley.

Worth recording was the campaign conducted by Ian Leech, an evangelist from Edinburgh. It began with a dinner for men in the Windsor Hotel. Each man was asked to invite an unconverted man and to pay for the guest's meal. About forty men responded positively and so around forty unsaved men were brought under the sound of the gospel. A similar evening was arranged for ladies. One lady invited several friends and paid for their meal. At the regular mission services night by night people responded to the gospel call.

In 1984 I reached my sixty-fifth birthday and offered to retire but the church persuaded me to continue for another two years. To celebrate that birthday the church paid for a trip to Israel which was an unforgettable experience for Norah and me. The Lord continued to bless the ministry right to the end. On my last Sunday in Portstewart a man for whom we had prayed for many years accepted Christ as his Saviour. It was sad to part with the friends at Portstewart. Their wonderful send-off took the form of a "This is your Life" event, the highlight of which was when our daughter Olive from Canada walked in. The church had generously brought her over specially for the occasion.

Retirement

Leaving Portstewart we came back to Belfast. Soon after we had settled in Claude McQuigg an elder of the Newtown-breda Church called on behalf of the church to invite me to help them during their vacancy. This arrangement lasted for almost two years when Val English became pastor. Almost immediately I responded to a similar request came from the vacant Carryduff Church, of which I was a former pastor. Norah and I transferred our interest and membership to Carryduff where I still fill the rôle of honorary elder. Just recently the Carryduff friends organised a service of thanksgiving

to celebrate my fifty years of service for the Lord. It was a fantastic evening as folk from all the churches I had served joined us in giving praise to God for His faithfulness over half a century. We can say with the Psalmist, "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad". I still have opportunities to preach round many of our churches, and I am grateful to the Lord for the health and strength I enjoy.

A Few Reflections

I have seen many changes. On the one hand, Baptists are erecting beautiful buildings, so different from what we were used to in my young days. Pastors are no longer living on the poverty line which is only right and proper. Most pastors can afford to run a car. The work of the various departments of the Union has developed immensely. On the other hand, there is cause for concern. When Irish Baptists were less affluent there seemed to be a deeper commitment by church members. Prayer meetings in many churches are now poorly attended except by the faithful few. Attendances at evening services are in decline; many are content to go to church on Sunday morning, and for some this seems to be sufficient for the remainder of the week. Have we lost our vision and our evangelistic thrust?

As for the unsaved, I know only too well how difficult it is in these days to persuade them to come under the sound of the gospel. Indeed, quite often we find ourselves preaching the gospel to the converted. Are we as exercised as we ought to be about the ungodly? If we were, more would be done in seeking the lost for Christ.

Church music has also changed. Whereas in bygone days many churches had a church choir to lead the praise and help the congregation to learn new hymns. Now very few churches have choirs. Also, in many cases, modern hymns and choruses have displaced good hymns which had been central to worship for centuries. Do not misunderstand me, I am not totally against change. I know it is important to consider the needs of young people whose choice of hymns and music are quite different from that of an older generation. I feel a balance needs to be struck in an effort to keep everyone happy.

As a retired pastor I pray much for the young men who are starting out in the ministry at the present time. Pastoral work has never been easy but somehow today problems are more acute than ever they were and it takes a wise head to cope with the m. I grieve over the divisions that exist among our churches. Surely we should all be big enough to respect one another's opinions on disputed issues and not to think we are always right and others are invariably wrong. Too much is at stake in these days. May the Lord revive us again and break through all the barriers that are stifling the work of God among us.

WILLIAM WILSON (1900 – 1986): HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY

by Ian Wilson

It is a difficult task to write a paper of this sort about your own father. Basic historical prerequisites, like objectivity, may well be missing, and it is possible that matters of interest on a family level may be of little relevance to a wider audience. In dealing with the subject, therefore, I have tried to discipline myself to the "historian" role, although I think you will find the "son" emerging not infrequently. In order to give some sort of order to what I am going to say, I want to deal, fairly quickly, with the early life, and spend rather more time on the ministry, considering not only the places, but also the content and purpose.

Background

So, who was William Wilson? Well, he was born on 2 August 1900 in Victoria Avenue, Newtownards. His father was William Alderdice Wilson and his mother Martha, née Francis. The family was associated with Greenwell Street Presbyterian Church in Newtownards, a church with a fascinating history and a strong evangelical tradition. My father never spoke about his parents' spiritual condition, probably because both were dead before he entered his teens. He did often recall, however, that it was a rigid rule in the household that nothing that could be construed as work was ever done on the Sabbath. This meant that the Sunday dinner was cooked on Saturday evening, and shoes were polished for church at the same time. I have also, in my possession, a tribute in verse to my grandfather which consistently refers to his Christian commitment in lines like:

"But he was ever ready;
And we shall swift prepare
To join him, with the ransomed,
Beyond earth's pain and care."

While neither are conclusive, it is, I think possible to conclude that my father's early upbringing was traditional, conservative Ulster Presbyterian!

In 1904 the family moved to Ballyclare where my grandfather had been appointed a foreman in Kirkpatrick's Mill. My father's early education was, therefore, in Ballyclare Boys' National School. This period of his life ended suddenly and tragically on May 6 1910 when his father, still only in his 40's, collapsed and died in Sandy Row, Belfast, where his mother, my great grandmother, lived. He was buried in Ballyclare New Cemetery. Immediately following this the family moved back to Newtownards where my grandmother's family still lived, and father attended the Model School. However, within six months his mother and an elder sister were both dead. The events of the next few years are extremely vague. I know that my father completed his schooling in Newtownards, leaving school during 1912. This probably means that he lived with his maternal grandmother. However. when he left school his first job was as an office-boy in Dunville's Distillery in Belfast. This again suggests that he was living with his paternal grandmother. When she died in 1914 he returned to Newtownards. By now his maternal grandmother was also dead and he lived with the Francis family. relatives of his mother, at Drumhirk just outside Newtownards on the road to Donaghadee. At about this time he entered the employment of Iverson's. a handkerchief manu-facturer in Newtownards. These years were not particularly happy ones for him. The remaining family had been split up - his elder brother, James, was with the Ulster Division in Flanders and his younger sister, Annie, remained in Belfast with relatives of the Wilsons. By the time he was 18 he was living by himself in "The Devonshire", a commercial boarding house just off Conway Square. He never tired of telling that, at that time, his salary was £1 per week and his full board at the Devonshire was 19s.6d! He appears to have made some progress at Iverson's - indeed he visited his "old boss" shortly before he died - but in the early 1920's disaster struck again. The factory was burned down and my father

was out of a job. How he managed it, I do not know, but he opened a little shop of his own, at the corner of Doctor's Lane and High Street, selling general groceries and confectionery. When he went into Christian service his brother James took over the shop, and still had it when he died in the 1960's, although latterly at a different location in North Street.

The religious aspect of my father's life at this time was relatively unimportant. The Francis family, with whom he lived during his middle teenage years, were from a Quaker background, but by this time I don't believe there were any Quaker connections. They seem to have been involved with Cooneyite teaching, for a while at least: I seem to remember my father saying that Edward Cooney had stayed in the house at Drumhirk. However, he retained his connection with Greenwell Street Church where the minister, Rev. T McIlwrath, was an out and out evangelical. In his own testimony he often referred to the times that he came under deep conviction under Mr McIlwrath's preaching, but he remained unconverted. As he entered adulthood his contact with church became purely nominal and he became deeply involved with the Orange Order.

Conversion and Baptism

During November 1921 W P Nicholson conducted a mission in Strean Presbyterian Church, Newtownards. On Friday 4 November his text was Romans 3 v 20 - "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight". At the end of that sermon, as my father himself wrote, "On the first seat of the gallery of the Strean Church, I was enabled to say from my heart, 'Christ for me!'"

At first, there were doubts, but a further mission in the town by the Scots evangelist James McKendrick was used to bring assurance to many converts, including my father. Not only that, but arising from McKendrick's ministry and greatly influenced by Mr T W Doggart, a number of new converts were exercised about believer's baptism and were baptised in November 1922 in Hamilton Road Baptist Church Bangor by Pastor David Burrows. Meeting Nicholson shortly after-wards, my father told him of his baptism. Nicholson's response was characteristic: " I hope all that water didn't put the fire out!" On 4 February 1923 a number of these new converts,

led by Mr Doggart, held an open-air service in William Street, Newtownards. The next week they met again in the Orange Hall and formed the Newtownards Baptist Church. The first secretary was William Wilson.

Church Secretary

One of his first major tasks was to invite Pastor John Ravey to assume the pastorate of the Church. Under Pastor Ravey's leadership the church began to flourish, and my father started to take part in a variety of ways. He was never forthcoming about where exactly he started to preach, but I do know that he was speaking in halls in the Ards area in 1926-27. It is clear that by this time he was certain of his calling to be a minister of the Gospel. I remember him telling me that, by the year 1927 he was preaching nearly every Sunday. Unfortunately, Saturday was the busiest day of the week in the shop, and it you didn't stay open late you would lose a sizeable proportion of your trade. So he was often shutting up shop at 11.30 pm on Saturday, preaching twice on Sunday, and opening up the shop again at 7.30 on Monday morning. It was clear that this could not go on, and in early 1928 my Uncle James took over the shop and my father became an evangelist with the Northern Baptist Association.

NBA Evangelist

His first mission in his new job was held in the Tamar Street Hall, Belfast during March 1928 and I have in my possession the fly-leaf of a bible presented to him at the end of that mission which he used as a sort of autograph album. Although many of my father's diaries did survive, none did from this particular period so that I have only a very sketchy idea of what exactly he did during these years. It was reported that during the period of his appointment he conducted missions in every one of the six counties including a number of tent missions. One story stands out at this time. The tent was pitched at Demone, near Poyntzpass and the folks arrived one evening to find that some of the hymnbooks had been badly damaged. My father assured his workers that it was the devil who was responsible and went on with the meeting. Next day, as he approached the tent, he saw the farmer who owned the land standing with a young calf. He looked my

father in the eye and said, "I just thought you would like to meet the devil, Mr Wilson."

The period of service with the NBA was short-lived. My father had spoken on a number of occasions in Grove Church, and, as I have indicated, in the outstations. On 7 November 1929 a special Church Meeting was held in Grove and a unanimous call was issued to him to come as assistant to Pastor Jardine who had been pastor since 1915 and who was approaching the end of his ministry.

Assistant to Alexander Jardine

It has always seemed to me that this was a novel arrangement for Irish Baptist Churches at the time and one that could well be a model for today. It seems clear that the initiative was Pastor Jardine's because the financial arrangements were that my father was to receive £130 per annum, £100 of which was to come from Pastor Jardine. My father always looked back on those years of assistantship with great nostalgia. I think that Pastor Jardine treated him almost like a son. He was given his head in visitation and had plenty of opportunities to preach, and not only in the Grove. Over all there was the wise counsel of an old and experienced Pastor which did much to restrain a nature that was at times impetuous.

Little more than a year after going to Grove a call was received from the Magherafelt and Coagh churches which had been jointly pastored by Pastor G. Olley. I do know that my father was really interested, having had a couple of profitable missions in Coagh, but he foresaw real problems in such a pastorate. He had never driven a car, and as a result saw difficulties in ministering in two churches in this way. So he remained at Grove. It is of interest, by the way, that this call came via the Field Committee of the Irish Baptist Home Mission and was contained in a letter from the Convenor of that committee, Pastor Burrows.

Wedding Bells

Possibly the most important event in these years however involved wedding bells. In Balfour Street in Newtownards lived a family called

Cousins. There were four daughters, the third of which was Janet. Her place of employment was F C Glasgow's department store just across the road from William Wilson's shop. Apparently my mother had the reputation of arriving at work just on time, and often rather out of breath. My father recalled seeing her hurrying down the street every morning on her way to work. The courtship began around 1927. I believe the first date involved a walk from Newtown-ards to Bangor and back - my father always claimed that this was to test that he was sound in wind and limb! The move to Belfast created problems for the young couple and on at least one occasion my father missed the last train back to town and had to walk it. They were married by special licence in August 1930, in my mother's home, because Grandmother Cousins was unable to attend an outside wedding. They set up house together in Grace Avenue, Belfast.

Pastor of Grove Church, Belfast

When Pastor Jardine retired in 1932 on grounds of ill health, Grove Church issued a call to my father to succeed him. The Church meeting was held on 21 January 1932 and the voting was 163 for, 7 against. The letter informing him of the decision could only have been written in Ireland for it contains the immortal line, immediately following the voting figures (accurately reported), "You can see from this that it was unanimous". He took over as from 1 January at a salary of £200 per annum.

In many ways this was an enormous undertaking for a relatively young and inexperienced pastor. Grove Church in 1932 had one of the largest memberships in the Baptist Union and that membership brought with it diverse problems for a young pastor. The official "hand-over" took place on 23 February 1932 when Pastor Jardine chaired the Annual Social. Taking part were Pastors Charles Willoughby (Mountpottinger), John Ravey (Shankill) and George Olley (Newtownards) along with Peter Ewing, the senior Elder. Pastor Willoughby, by the way, was my father's closest colleague geographically. He was a man of strong Calvinist convictions which became apparent when my father had to apologise for forgetting a Women's Meeting in the "Tab". Pastor Willoughby's response was unexpected - "Brother, it was foreordained of God before all eternity that you should not speak at that meeting"!

The work at Grove continued during these years with some success. There was a group of young men in the Pastor's Bible Class, many of whom went on to missionary or pastoral work. One young man who was involved in Grove at the time was the late Pastor Herbie Hunter. He preached for the first time at Grove Women's Meeting. Shortly afterwards he was startled to receive an invitation to speak at the Tamar Street Hall, and approached my father with great concern, because, as he said, he had only one sermon. My father sought to encourage him by telling him that preachers often used the same material more than once. Suitably strengthened, Mr Hunter accepted the invitation and apparently opened his sermon with the words, "By popular request, I will repeat my sermon on....."! This phase of my father's ministry again did not last long. On 30 September 1935 he resigned in order to take up itinerant evangelism. The farewell meeting was held on 24 September and at that meeting a report was made of the blessings of the past three years. In that time some 130 had been baptised in the church and over 100 added to the membership. Special mention was made of the visitation of the people in their homes. My father commented at that meeting on his departure, saying that he was acting in what he believed was the will of God.

This whole period of his life has always intrigued me, probably because he never really said a great deal to me about it. What he did say, however, was that he had a heavy burden for evangelism and found this heavily circumscribed by the pressures of the pastoral side of the ministry. This again interests me, because that was the side of his work that I would think was most remarkable in the years that I can remember in Grove. I wonder myself, perhaps, if he did not find pastoring such a large church just a bit too much. The ramifications of the work at Grove, certainly in the 1930's, were extensive. For instance, a proportion of the relief given to those suffering because of the depression was channelled thorough churches, and I know that my father was involved, particularly with families associated with Skipton Street and Tamar Street Halls. It would also be fair to say, I think, that in those days congregations were volatile. While there were numbers baptised and added to the church, the little visitation notebook which I still have would show that a good few also left. There was emigration, brought about by the depression certainly, but there was also a great deal of movement to other fellowships, mostly independent or Brethren. That being said, the Grove Church that he left in September 1935 was very much a going concern,

described at that farewell meeting in 1935 as "united and prosperous". Taking part at the meeting were Pastors T R Gardiner (Antrim Road) and W Weir (Tobermore and Carndaisy).

Return to Evangelism

Leaving Grove, the family, now increased by the addition of a son (my, brother, Raymond) went to live in Ballywalter and my father launched into his chosen ministry of evangelism. For the first year he was freelance, conducting missions throughout the North of Ireland. Indeed, he went straight from Grove to a mission in Coagh, reported in the same issue of The Irish Baptist as his farewell meeting. Missions in Great Victoria Street, Portrush, My Lady's Road, Belfast and various other places followed, with a great deal of work in the summer months done through tent missions.

During the early part of 1936 my father was approached by the Evangelisation Society of London which was seeking to increase its team of staff evangelists. I know that my father would have loved an appointment in Ireland but the vacancy was in Scotland. So it was that on 1 May 1936 he became an Evangelisation Society evangelist based in Glasgow and working mainly but not exclusively in Scotland. My mother and brother remained in Ballywalter until the end of the school term when they crossed to join father in Glasgow. The family home was in the pleasant suburb of Clarkston.

For the next three years father had a punishing schedule of missions and meetings. I have in my possession much of the correspondence and publicity from the period and it makes interesting reading. He was always advertised as "William Wilson, the Irish Evangelist". I have one lovely letter, sent to my father by Mr J J Smith, the General Secretary of the Evangelisation Society in which he refers to a letter he had received from Pastor D J Finlay of the St George's Cross Tabernacle, Glasgow, now known as Finlay Memorial and pastored by Michael Healy. Pastor Finlay had been writing to thank the Society for the services of its evangelists, and he had concluded his letter with the words, "the little Irishman preaches as well as any of them", to which Smith had added the dry rejoinder, "So you see, you have had promotion!"

Pastor Finlay was one of the real characters associated with Christian work in Glasgow at the time. He was married to Ella Quarrier, daughter of the founder of the famous Orphan Homes at Bridge of Weir. Finlay was what could only be described as a dominating personality. My father's first meeting with him took place shortly before his first mission was due to start in the Tabernacle. Finlay asked to see him at 10.00 a.m. one weekday morning and my father, as was his wont, arrived five minutes early. The entrance to the Tabernacle was down a long corridor. As my father walked in a window slid open, and the pastor demanded to know who he was. My father explained that he had an appointment at ten o'clock. Finlay pulled out his watch, looked at it, said "Brother, it's only five minutes to ten, come back in five minutes", and shut the window. Despite this abrupt introduction, my father built up contacts at St George's Cross that lasted to the very end of his ministry - he preached there in 1972 and we had visits from some of the folk from the church as late as 1975.

Along with correspondence and publicity material I also have some of my father's old diaries. The one for 1938 is particularly interesting. I have counted it up and he was actually preaching on 250 days that year, on some of them more than once. Although much of the work was in Glasgow there were also visits to Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as other less well known towns. When I say the work was punishing, I mean punishing. On 6 February 1938, a Sunday, he spoke in Bethany Hall, Glasgow at 11.15, 3.30. 5.15 and 7.00 - this after he had spoken to a congregation of 400 on the Saturday night, also at Bethany. The diary entry for Monday 7 February reads, "Very tired, in bed until 3 pm." You may be interested in the entry for 11 March 1938. He was conducting a mission in the Gordon Mission, Aberdeen and Friday was the "rest day". So we find that he went to hear Karl Barth speak, I believe at a public lecture at Aberdeen University. He always told, with some glee, about the end of that mission. He finished on the Sunday evening and on Monday he filled the time until the departure of the train by walking down the fish dock. Unfortunately he slipped and fell flat on his back. He had the luxury of an empty compartment all the way to Glasgow while the other passengers stood in the corridor!

While the work was undoubtedly arduous, he was using the same sermons on a number of occasions, which meant that there was not as much

preparation necessary as for a consecutive pastoral ministry. His 1938 diary would show that some of his sermons got 9 or 10 airings. Another aspect of the work at this time was the use of the lantern lecture - a method that he used extensively and, I believe, effectively. He had a number of sets of glass slides which he used at least once in each mission - his favourites seem to have been "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Spurgeon's Life". These lectures were always individually advertised and this caused some confusion. In Greenock, 3000 invitations had to be reprinted because they invited people to some and see "Bunyan's Immoral Allegory"! On another occasion in Paisley, the lecture on Spurgeon got off to a flying start when the projectionist put up a picture of father on the screen, just as he, with his back to the screen, was delivering the opening line of the lecture which was, "The greatest preacher of the last generation is the man whose picture you see on the screen". He was alarmed to find this particular lecture brought to a premature halt by prolonged applause!

During the summer months the work was almost entirely done through tent missions mainly in holiday areas like the Fife coast. One thing about these missions is that, even in the 1930's in Scotland, attendance at tent missions was often sparse, sometimes only 20 or 30. On the other hand, winter missions at some of the larger city venues like Tent Hall, Glasgow or Carrubbers Close, Edinburgh often produced congregations of 500 to 600, particularly on Saturday and Sunday nights. The other thing that stands out is the regularity with which conversions were reported. There is scarcely a week in which he was not able to report a number of professions of faith. For instance, from 14-28 November 1937 a mission was held in Madeira Street Baptist Church, Leith. The minister, Rev. Angus McMillan reported that during that two weeks over 40 professed faith in Christ.

Pastor of Thomas Street, Portadown

The onset of World War Two coincided with my father's decision to leave the Evangelisation Society and return to pastoral work in Ireland. On 5 June 1939 the Portadown Church had held a Special Church Meeting when a unanimous call was issued to my father. The late Alex Russell was secretary and he left no doubt as to what he expected: "I need not say that we shall patiently wait for an early reply stating your acceptance of this

invitation". Whether my father had been approached in advance I do not know, but he certainly made up his mind quickly. The letter from Portadown was dated 6 June, the Evangelisation Society's acknowledgement of his resignation was dated 8 June and his acceptance was conveyed to the Portadown Church on the 11 June - so Mr Russell's patience was not too sorely tried!

His departure from the Evangelisation Society was clearly unexpected. The new General Secretary, Lt Col D C D Munro wrote in response to the letter of resignation, "Your letter has given me much sorrow as I had no idea that there was anything in the wind, and that you might be leaving the Society." My father had agreed to fit in with Evangelisation Society arrangements so that replacements could be found for his missions. This meant that he was not released until the end of September 1939 and he was inducted at Portadown early in October. Taking part in the induction service were Pastor Ravey (President of the Baptist Union) and Pastor G H Weir, the immediate past pastor who was the speaker. My mother and brother had moved to Portadown in September in time for the start of the school term and had set up home in the manse, 111 Thomas Street.

The work in Portadown during the war years was difficult. On top of the usual shortages there were evacuees to deal with, including the family of a Grove officebearer which was accommodated in the manse. The son of that family still remembers the punishment that my mother inflicted upon him. He was given strict instructions not to go near the river Bann, but one day he went down there anyway and managed to catch a pike. When my mother found out, she cooked the pike and made him eat it. In addition, of course, there were also extensive military establishments close to the town and my father was appointed an Honorary Chaplain to the Forces on the basis of his contacts with the local camps. The war also led to a considerable amount of inter-church contact on a purely social basis, which would, I think, lead to many raised eyebrows today. For instance, my mother, along with the wife of the minister of Armagh Road Presbyterian Church and a leading member of the Society of Friends formed a committee to provide "comforts for the troops". Among my parents' friends in Portadown were the Montgomerys - a Church of Ireland family from Seagoe. My mother sang duets with one of the Montgomery girls - not only in the Baptist Church, but

in other churches as well - including on one occasion singing at the Harvest Thanksgiving at Vinecash Presbyterian Church. As his farewell, Mr Russell said that during my father's pastorate the work had been blessed both financially and spiritually, and he had created a spirit of fellowship with Christians from other churches. At my father's funeral, the late Kenneth McCluskey said the greatest contribution of the Wilson years was that, for the first time the Baptist Church gained acceptability in the community at large. One of the highlights of the time in Portadown was the holding of the May meetings there in 1941.

I know, from talking to my father, that while he greatly enjoyed the work in Portadown and enjoyed much encouragement, he found it hard to adjust to a situation where he was no longer his own master. However, it is, I think, a token of the esteem in which he was held that we continued to receive visits and Christmas Cards from a number of Portadown folk until his death, 43 years after he left Portadown.

Return to Grove

At Christmas 1942, scarcely three years since he had commenced his ministry in Portadown, he received a private letter from Peter Ewing, Senior Elder in the Grove. Since 1936, Grove had been pastored by Hugh Frazer, who had come from Hermon Baptist Church in Glasgow. In January 1943 Pastor Frazer left Grove to take up the ministry at Jarrow-on-Tyne Baptist Church. The purpose of Mr Ewing's letter was to sound my father out about the possibility of a return to Grove. His first reaction was to say "No!" Indeed I believe I am right in saying he told Mr Ewing that he did not wish to be considered. As a result, a church meeting was held on 25 February 1943 to consider other names. When no agreement could be reached a proposal from the floor that father should be called to the pastorate was accepted and passed. (This procedure was, I believe, totally unconstitutional.) Again, I have got to say that my father didn't hang around when it came to such matters. The letter containing the call was dated 26 February and the letter from the Portadown office-bearers accepting his resignation with regret was dated 9 March. My father's ministry in Portadown ended at the end of April 1943, the farewell being on Wednesday 21 April. He was "preached out" by Pastor F H Forbes and Pastor A Clarke. The family that moved to

112 Orby Drive at the beginning of May 1943 was three in number. Within one month that had increased to four, with my arrival at the beginning of June!

It is strange that my father kept reports of all his welcome meetings, except the one at Grove in 1943, so that I know absolutely nothing about it. However, the move to Grove at the age of 43 was, against all the odds, his last one. War time bombing and associated events had reduced the congregation somewhat, but the nucleus of workers he had known in the 1930's were still there, by and large. Peter Ewing was still the senior elder, and his support and help were always a tremendous source of strength. John Longridge was now secretary, assisted by W J McCormick. Many of the younger men who had been associated with the church in the Thirties had gone on to higher things, but a group of dedicated workers remained. During the immediate post-war years a series of Saturday night meetings, organized largely by Mr Hugh Shaw, saw the church packed week after week, with many professing faith. The revitalising of the city centre and the emergence of meetings in larger venues there brought those meetings to an end. However, the ministry of the church continued to flourish. There were large Sunday congregations both morning and evening. The Sunday School flourished and there was a large children's meeting. One of the features of this was the handbell which my father sounded round the streets before the meeting began. The Women's work consisted of two meetings - a Tuesday afternoon Women's Own meeting and a Tuesday evening Baptist Women's Fellowship. Both meetings met weekly and both were well supported. There was also a flourishing Baptist Youth Fellowship on Wednesday evenings. In addition there was the work in the two outstations - Skipton Street (off the Albertbridge Road) and Tamar Street (off the Newtownards Road). Both halls had Sunday evening evangelistic services, Sunday Schools, and mid-week meetings. It never ceases to amaze me that my father was expected to be present at so many of the meetings. He rarely missed a Sunday afternoon at Sunday School and was sometimes called at short notice to teach a class if a teacher didn't turn up. He dared not have missed the Children's Meeting and was no stranger to the BYF. He was really only excused the women's meetings - and I suppose when I was young this was because he had to stay at home and look after me.

It always seemed to me, however, that it was the pastoral side of his ministry that was most remarkable. Never having been able to drive a car, he did most of his visiting by bicycle, apart from a short period in the early 1950's when he had the luxury of a motorbike. Every day he had the same programme. He would be at his desk in the study by 9 am and would prepare until 11 am. Then he would set out to visit his congregation, never staying too long in any one place. Grove folk used to say that they didn't dare miss a Sunday morning service, because they knew that if they did, Pastor Wilson would be at their doors on Monday morning to find out what was wrong. In the afternoons it was visitation again, including hospital visits. The only variation came on Monday when he would sometimes relax for an hour or two in the morning.

Presidential Year

In 1950 he was elected vice-president of the Baptist Union and he served his Presidential year 1951-52. The Annual Assembly was held that year from 21-15 May and the guest speaker was Rev G R King of the East London Tabernacle. My father's Presidential address was entitled, "The Unique Splendour of our Baptist Witness". The Presidential Year was marked by two sad events. In February King George VI died. As President my father was invited to attend the meeting of the Northern Ireland Privy Council at which the ceremony of proclaiming Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth took place. It was fortunate that Grove had in its membership two of the Brown family - owners of the funeral undertaking firm. They provided their best limousine, and I can still see my mother and father being driven off to that ceremony. They were both highly amused by the salutes they got from the police at the Stormont gates as they were driven through. My father, in particular, found this very gratifying because as a very ill-suited member of the 'B' Specials he had stood guard at Stormont during the early stages of the building work. As a confirmed royalist and unionist it is no surprise that my father had a part in the memorial service to King George, held in the Great Victoria Street Church on Friday 15 February. The second sad event was the death of the highly respected Union Secretary, Pastor F H Forbes, on 15 March 1952. I don't know if Dr Thompson remembers how he managed to communicate the news to my father - he had to ring Kelly's Wine Cellars, just across Clara Street from Grove and I still have the note that Mr Kelly

passed to my father. On a happier note, the year 1951-2 also saw a number of changes in the pastorate and my father took part in at least three induction services. Pastor Jim Tetley was installed in Portstewart in September 1951, Pastor Jack Johnston was installed in Banbridge in November 1951 and Pastor George Blayney was installed in Ballymena in May 1952. My own memories of the Presidential year involve the annual Presidential visit to the Southern Churches which took a full month and involved several nights in each of the churches. I was given time off school and went with my mother to join father for the last few days. I can still remember vividly arriving in Waterford on a bitterly cold February day and being met by my father and Mr Tweedall who was in charge of the work there. We were taken to the church in Catherine Street for a cup of tea and I looked on with amazement as Mr Tweedall, having failed to find a spoon, proceeded to stir the cups with a piece of wood that had been used for stirring a tin of paint! In Waterford we stayed in the Imperial Hotel which turned out to be a cold barrack of a place. My mother, who was just recovering from major surgery, asked if there was nowhere in the hotel that was warm and was told, "Of course there is - the bar!" And that is where, to his great amusement, Mr Tweedall found us. It is interesting to note that the lantern lecture, so much part of my father's repertoire when he was an evangelist, again came to the fore during this trip. Athlone, Brannockstown, Cork, Limerick and Waterford all had "'The Pilgrim's Progress' illustrated by filmstrips in full natural colours". Whilst in Athlone my father stayed with the Doonans who led the work in Athlone and Moate. He struck up a friendship with one of the near neighbours and was highly amused, on the last day of the visit, when Mick on hearing that he was leaving said, "Mr Wilson, it's been nice meeting you. You know I wish I could blast the border to blazes!" At the end of his visit he wrote of one meeting that he attended: "To see an Episcopal rector, a Presbyterian minister, a Methodist minister, several Brethren and three Baptist pastors in one very happy Gospel meeting was almost a foretaste of the Millennium."

One other note on the Presidential year reflects another side of my father's personality. As was, I believe, always the case with Presidents of the Baptist Union of Ireland he was invited to join the General Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society. At the time, the English Union was perceived as being theologically liberal - something that my father abhorred. So he declined the invitation, stating his reasons. I have at home a letter of

reply from the acting secretary of the BMS expressing regret at his decision, noting that the BMS was completely separate from the English Union and was supported by many churches not in that Union, including some in Ireland, and expressing the hope that he would reconsider. He didn't! On a more positive note, he took part in the opening services of a brand new work in what is now Newtownabbey. Originally called the Cloughfern Baptist Church, now Rathcoole, it held its first services in the Protestant Hall, Doagh Road, on 7 October 1951. On the previous day my father had chaired a special thanksgiving conference at Carryduff to mark completion of the renovation of the Church building.

Final Years at Grove

In the years following the Presidency the work in Grove continued to develop. The congregation in the Fifties and Sixties was not as large as it had been in the early Thirties but the number of Baptist churches in East Belfast was growing, some of them drawing their foundation membership largely from the Grove. I believe I am right in saying that Church Street East (now Calvary, Dee Street) started in this way, then Dundonald was constituted a church in 1953: a number of its foundation members came from Grove. There was also a move amongst some independent churches to come into the Baptist Union and my father was partly instrumental in Castlereagh becoming a Union church in 1964. Nevertheless, Grove's book membership in 1961 was 254, making it the third largest church in the Union. My memory of these days is that congregations were large, both morning and evening, with the main church always filled almost to capacity in the mornings (although capacity had been reduced from the pre-war 500 to around 400). By the 1960's the building, largely unchanged from its opening in 1915, was becoming increasingly dilapidated. Ambitious plans were drawn up for renovation of the premises - effectively the total rebuilding. The first stage was the building of a suite of halls at the back of the old building, opened in 1962 as the Jardine Memorial Halls. This was followed by the virtual rebuilding of the main church building at a cost of £18,500. The renovated building was opened on 20 May 1967. My father was tireless in his fund-raising for the new building, so much so that the treasurer, making one of his regular Sunday morning reports on the finance of the project, said that he believed the pastor was mentioned in the Bible, Luke 16 v 22, "And

it came to pass the beggar died". Be that as it may, the project was completed with virtually no debt to the church. This turned out to be the last major event of my father's ministry in Grove. He had always said that he did not intend to outstay his usefulness to the church and by 1968 he felt that his physical powers were no longer up to the needs of the work. He might indeed have retired earlier had the rebuilding programme not been under way. Talking to him in his last years he said he had always intended to retire as soon as I was settled in a job. I graduated in 1965 and started in my present school on 1 September 1966. So it was that, in June 1968 my father intimated to the Grove Officebearers that he intended to retire on 31 October. On 27 October he conducted his last services as Pastor. His subjects were, I think, typical of the man. In the morning he spoke on "Looking only unto Jesus" and in the evening on "The Legitimate Boast of a Fundamental Evangelical". The farewell service was held on the Thursday evening following.

In concluding this section I should refer briefly to four events which were highlights of his last years. In 1964 the church sent my father and mother to the Holy Land as a twenty-first Anniversary present. The group leader was none other than Geoffrey King who had been guest speaker at the Annual Assembly in 1951. Then on 24 September 1963 he was invited to lay the foundation stone of the new Baptist Church in Newtownards and on 3 October 1964 he shared with Mr Joe Bowden in the opening of the completed building. I don't believe I remember anything that caused him greater pride. On 5 October 1963 he conducted the opening ceremony at the new Rathcoole Church where he had spoken just 12 years earlier at the inaugural services.

While he was in Grove for 25 years, this did not mean that he had no invitations to go elsewhere. He had a number of calls, including Banbridge and Carrickfergus. I will not embarrass the church concerned, but he always said that he should have accepted the call in which he was addressed as "Reverend Sir" and which concluded, "I remain, your obedient servant."

Retirement Years

During the early years of his retirement my father was kept busy preaching round the churches. When we moved to Bangor my mother and father joined Hamilton Road Church where he had been baptised almost fifty years earlier. There he developed a very close relationship with H M Carson, who was the pastor. A close friend of Mr Carson described it as the relationship of soul-mates. My father assisted Mr Carson in visitation and spoke on occasion when he was away, although he steadfastly resisted attempts to persuade him to take up the office of Elder. Mr Carson wrote to me after my mother's death, recalling afternoons with father when they had talked, mainly I suspect about my father's beloved Covenanters. "We may not have agreed with each other in our understanding of the millennium, but that was a very small matter compared with the great area of gospel truth in which we delighted." In 1976, father had a slight heart attack, which forced him to slow down considerably. His first preaching engagement after this was in Grove, and he had to visit the doctor to get his permission to go. The doctor told him, "No more than 15 minutes now!" Although he continued to accept invitations to preach until 1982, he was becoming more and more hesitant about doing so. His last sermon was preached, I believe, in Tandragee in the summer of 1982. He remained in reasonable health until the end of 1985, when he began to go down hill very rapidly. He was in Hamilton Road for the last time on the last Sunday of February 1986. He was very confused at the time, much to my mother's alarm. Shortly afterwards he contracted pneumonia and after a long struggle, passed away on 21 April 1986. Although we were, of course, very sad at losing him, the funeral service really was a service of triumph and thanksgiving. He rests in Clandeboye cemetery "Till He Come".

Theology and Preaching

I suppose it would be wrong to finish without some mention of his theology and style of ministry. His theological standpoint was very much, I believe, the product of his background. His early upbringing in the Presbyterian Church was reflected in the fact that almost every Sunday morning the service opened with either a metrical psalm or paraphrase, and I can still remember him announcing the hymn number followed by, "...go

to the tune...". His Presbyterian background was also apparent in his love for all things "Covenanting". He read the covenanter stories avidly and frequently referred to them in his preaching. Indeed, after his death, I found in his bible a rather indifferent photograph which I had taken of him at Anwoth old church near Gatehouse-of-Fleet. On the back he had written Mrs Cousins' paraphrase of the words of the godly minister of that church, Samuel Rutherford, written when he was in jail in Aberdeen

> "O if one soul from Anwoth
> Meet me at God's right hand
> My heaven will be two heavens
> In Immanuel's land."

At one stage, when he was with the Evangelisation Society, a Church of Scotland Minister tried to persuade him to enter the Church of Scotland ministry. My father admitted to being tempted, then said: "But what about the babies?"

Then his association with WP Nicholson very directly affected his evangelistic ministry. He quoted Nicholson often, and adopted the same very direct Gospel approach. He did not agree with Nicholson on two points, however. He despised lengthy appeals, or requests to put up hands. I remember him being very annoyed when one of his deacons told him that he should have "tested the meeting" after a particularly powerful gospel address. Nor did he agree with Nicholson's teaching on "the Second Blessing."

Finally, his formative Christian years under the ministry of John Ravey had a profound effect on him, as did his contact with Pastor Jardine. From them, I believe, he learnt his basic theology. He was not a Calvinist in the sense that we would understand it today, although he sat under and deeply appreciated the ministry of a "reformer" in H M Carson. He read C H Spurgeon a great deal and tended to quote him when matters of election and predestination came up, but I don't think he would ever have been happy to assent to the doctrine of a limited atonement. He was also dispensational and pre-millennial in his eschatology and often preached on the subject, as well as sponsoring visits by people like Lindsay Glegg and other leading speakers on prophecy. Once again, this reflected his background. This was

the teaching that he would have had from both Pastor Ravey and Pastor Jardine as a young man. Having said that, he never allowed his views to break his fellowship with other Baptists. Minnis Mills and he differed on many issues theologically, yet they remained firm friends and neither had any problem with a pulpit exchange. Although he was non-collegiate, Grove was one of the first churches to have Principal Kingdon speak when he came to Belfast. Altogether I believe that the tolerance that was, by and large, shown by Irish Baptists to each other in those days should be a model for today's church.

As for his preaching, I can only say this. It was fast, it was biblical, and it was evangelistic. I think that the thing that stands out in my mind about my father's preaching is the fervency of his gospel preaching. His expository ministry was simple and straightforward and he did like taking "series" and preaching through things like the Seven Churches in the Revelation. When he got going he was really fast. I have spoken in some places and been told that my father would have said twice as much in the time - I'm never sure whether it is a criticism or a compliment! Certainly, he sweated profusely when preaching and frequently had to change his shirt after a morning service.

I must also say that he was a great Protestant. In the 1930's he produced a little pamphlet entitled "Is Protestantism Doomed?" and every summer he used to preach in July on themes like "What the world owes to Evangelical Protestantism". One of his scrapbooks contains a letter from the LOL No 6 District prayer circle which concludes with the words, "We note with satisfaction the manner in which you uphold our Protestant and Godly principles". This is rather ironic since one of the first things my father did when he was converted was to resign from the Orange Order, and he made it clear in his preaching that he, for one, believed that membership of the Order was incompatible with a Christian's testimony.

A Filial Assessment

As I finish, I would have to say that I consider my father to have been one of a group of men who graced our Baptist Churches during the years of growth in the Fifties and Sixties. Men like Hugh Orr, T J McNabb, Minnis

Mills, who were very different in their own way, but who together contributed to the spiritual strength of the denomination. I will never forget the quiet depth of Pastor Mills, the homiletic correctness of Pastor McNabb, the thought-provoking exposition of Pastor Orr. And to that company father made his contribution too, along with others I have not mentioned. They all had a number of things in common. They had a deep love for the Lord; they had a burden for souls; they had shepherd hearts which bound them to their people in love; they had a love for the Word and for preaching; they had concern for the denomination; and they had a tolerance of each other. That is a testimony that we all would do well to seek to emulate.

Report to Annual Assembly 1996

The Historical Society has continued its work of developing interest in the history of Baptists in Ireland. During the year under review the members and their friends met on four occasions. A founder member and former Principal of the Irish Baptist College, David P Kingdon, who was the guest speaker at the centenary Assembly in 1995, addressed the annual meeting of the Society. In September, the honorary secretary presented a paper on "Some Extinct Baptist Churches of the Nineteenth Century". At the December meeting Pastor Samuel H. Simpson who celebrated fifty years in Christian service in 1995, reviewed his experiences and commented on the changes he has observed during the period. His talk was heard with great interest. At the March meeting members heard an account of the life and ministry of the late Pastor William Wilson by his son Ian.

The Society's contribution to the centenary celebrations was in two parts. An exhibition of archives, memorabilia and photographs was mounted and manned by Pastor Steven Curry, and attracted interest and comment by the crowds attending the Assembly meetings. The history of the Union entitled "Century of Grace" by the honorary secretary was launched and has been well-received. It is hoped that a copy may find its way into each Baptist household in Ireland.

A supporter of the Society, Sir Ivan Neill, has sponsored a scheme for a definitive history of the "Irish Baptist Foreign Mission" to be researched, written and submitted as a thesis for a Ph.D. degree, preferably by a graduate of the Irish Baptist College.

The members of the Society have approved a committee recommendation that the honorary secretary should seek opportunity, with the permission of the Council and Fellows of the Regent's Park College, to create a database comprising the Irish materials held in the Angus Library, Oxford.

The important and onerous task of cataloging the Society's archives has commenced. The initial work is being done by the committee members and will be ongoing for some time. Deposits of correspondence, minute books, photographs and other material are always welcome from churches and individuals. The Society will accept for safe-keeping sensitive materials for restricted consultation. Currently, there is no charge for this service.

The members of the Society give thanks to the Lord for the steady growth of interest in their work.

Irish Baptist Historical Society

(Formed 1968)

President: Dr H.D. Gribbon
Secretary: Dr J. Thompson

117 Lisburn Road
Belfast BT9 7AF

Telephone: (01232) 663108/9
Fax: (01232) 663616

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