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VOLUME THREE 1970/71

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Irish Baptist Historical Society

JOURNAL

Volume Three - - 1970/71

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Editorial

Publication of the Journal, besides making available to a wider public the papers read to the Society, also enables us to keep in touch with members in Great Britain, America and elsewhere who cannot attend the Society's meetings. To all such we send greetings. Publication also makes possible the use of material like Rev. Craig's contribution on Rev. John Bates. Other members having such material or who would like to contribute correspondence, information etc. for publication in these pages should get in touch with the Editor.

Membership of the Society grows slowly, but as the following pages illustrate enthusiasm for and research into Irish Baptist history continue to flourish amongst us. Appreciation is expressed to the contributors of the papers published herein.

H.D.G.

A History of Brannockstown Baptist Church, Co. Kildare

With special reference to the life and work of John La Touche

The village Baptist Church at Brannockstown, Co. Kildare, stands in a two acre site near the Wicklow border seven miles from Naas. It represents one of the more unusual Irish Baptist foundations and has some fascinating historical associations.

John La Touche, founder, builder and benefactor of Brannoxtown Baptist Church, was born into a famous family. His Huguenot forefathers were powerful and influential Seigneurs of Blois and were highly favoured in the Court of Louis XIV. Following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, a section of the La Touche family fled their native France and settled in Holland. As far as Ireland is concerned the first of the emigres was David Digues La Touche, who arrived on our shores as a Williamite soldier. Morally he was a refugee, legally he was a deserter from the French Army. He brought two things with him, a Bible and a bag containing one hundred gold crowns. These simple possessions of the captain of General Cailmotte's Brigade, were to become the two main symbols of the La Touche family in Ireland. Money and religion were the twin assets by which the La Touches gained national renown.

David was a boy of fourteen when he left France and just twenty-one when disbanded from William of Orange's army after the Battle of the Boyne. He settled in Dublin and quickly formed an alliance with other Huguenot

refugees, who deposited their cash and valuables with him for safe-keeping. His influence and wealth expanded rapidly as the following account shows -

'The foremost private bank in Ireland was conducted by the firm of David La Touche and Son. La Touche established a poplin factory in 1693. For some years he carried on the composite business of banker and poplin manufacturer. About the year 1710, La Touche was joined in partnership by Nathaniel Kane to form the firm of Kane and La Touche, which some years later discontinued poplin manufacturing and restricted its activities to the business of banking. In the year 1745 the founder died and his grandson, the Rt. Hon. David La Touche was admitted in his stead. The prestige and influence of La Touche's bank was probably unique at the time. In addition to acting as banker to most of the nobility, gentry and statesmen of the day, it maintained correspondence with practically all the capital cities of the world and in most of the large towns in Great Britain'. [1]

The descendants of David La Touche became wealthy landowners in 18th Century Ireland. They settled in three counties of East Leinster, Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare. His grandsons were, David of Marlay, Rathfarnham; Peter of Bellevue, Delgany; and John of Harristown in Co. Kildare. The Kildare wing of the family rose to considerable prominence in the agrarian world. Harristown demesne an attractive, heavily wooded estate flanking the River Liffey became the family seat about 1783. It was purchased from the Fitz-Eustace family whose head was Lord Portlester. According to the record in the Domesday Book the La Touche estate in 1871 totalled 11,282 acres and was valued at £7,951-5-0. All this property was not situated in Kildare; there were large estates in Leitrim, Tipperary and Limerick.

The first occupant of Harristown, John La Touche, was born in 1734 and married Gertrude Fitzgerald of Corkbeg, Co. Cork. There is an amusing and enlightening reference to his political career in Miss M.F. Young's family portrait - [2]

'The parliamentary career of John La Touche of Harristown was not uneventful. In 1767 he sought to enter the Irish Parliament as a

member for the city of Dublin, a vacancy having occurred on the death of James Grattan (father of Henry Grattan), the two candidates for the position being the then Marquis of Kildare, afterwards 2nd Duke of Leinster, and John La Touche of Harristown. Popular feeling ran high, the Fitzgerald faction harping on the string of the "Foreigners", and just as it happens in our own day, a General Election was not carried without a great deal of assistance from the Father of Lies. So disappointed were the merchants of Dublin that the best man, in their opinion, had failed to win, that a beautiful gold snuff-box was presented to the defeated candidate'.

In spite of this setback, La Touche did sit in the Irish Parliament as a Knight for the Shire of his county. The political prestige of five members of the La Touche family who sat in the House of Commons, came to the notice of Lecky, the historian. He says - *'this family may claim, what is in truth the highest honour of which an Irish family can boast - that during many successive Governments, and in a period of the most lavish corruption, it possessed great parliamentary influence, and yet passed through political life untitled and unstained'.*

The Rt. Hon. David La Touche (1729-1817) of Marlay (named after his wife's paternal forbears - her father being Richard Marlay, sometime Bishop of Waterford and Uncle of Henry Grattan), for nine years Governor of the Bank of Ireland, sat as MP for the Borough of Belturbet. It has been written of him that *'his politics were dictated by his Protestantism and in 1792 he opposed the Bill for the relief of Roman Catholics, but was nevertheless esteemed by Henry Grattan, who accounted him "one of the five just men".'* [3] It is clear that the La Touchean reputation for fairness was not always seen on the surface, when those strange bedfellows, politics and religion, embraced each other even in the noble minds of great men.

Following the death of the first occupant of Harristown in 1805, the estate fell into the hands of his son, John. When he died in 1822, his

younger brother, Colonel Robert La Touche, succeeded him. His wife was Lady Emily Le Poer Trench, daughter of the Earl of Clancarty. They had four children, one of them, John, was destined to enjoy a long life and occupy a unique place in the annals of Irish Baptist History.

In the beautiful Georgian house in Merrion Square, Dublin, owned by their father, John and William, his twin brother, were born in 1814. His early years were spent in Dublin but on inheriting Harristown from his father he settled in the Kildare mansion which became his home for sixty-two years. During his lifetime the traditional family connection with banking was drastically changed. By 1850 the personal fortunes of the La Touche family had begun to decline. They began to lean heavily on the Bank of Ireland, which had been established partly through their influence in the banking world. In 1870 the career of one of the most famous private banks in history came to a close when it was taken over by the Munster Bank Limited. The transfer did not come without a gallant struggle by John. When his son, Percy, came of age on July 12th 1867, he immediately broke the entail of his estate at the urgent request of his father, so that the property could be used as security to support the bank.[4] Although the termination of the private bank closed an important chapter in the La Touche story, the final transaction was happy and conciliatory. All their accounts were in credit and the intimate relations which existed between the family and the Bank of Ireland continued.

We now turn our attention to an examination of the three most prominent facets of John La Touche's long life; his place in history as a wealthy landowner, his remarkable family associations and his outstanding influence as a sincere Christian and convinced Baptist.

Although he was of aristocratic stock and lived through the Victorian era of class assertion, it cannot be said that John La Touche was a tyrannical overlord. His firm fairmindedness was blended with a compassion somewhat ahead of his times and certainly not native to his station in life. During the famine he allowed no white bread or pastry to be made in the kitchen at Harristown and only the simplest dishes appeared on the baronial table. The deer-park in the estate went out of existence, all the deer were used to make food for the starving people. His relationships with his tenants were, on

the whole, reasonable and fair. Local people remember him as a meticulous, kind hearted man. Small in stature, he wore a neatly trimmed beard and had a distinctive 'French' nose. In a letter from Coniston his wife reveals his farming bent - *'The "Master" is quite enchanted with this place, and everything else - especially a perfectly faultless Sis-Cow we met in a field. All her glories and perfections were explained to me, in a sort of Litany of the Durham Shorthorn - and she was valued on the spot at £35'.* [5] The La Touches went frequently to the Continent and spent enjoyable vacations at Mentone. From there Mrs. La Touche wrote in 1885 - *'The "Master" has just made me crosser by going and buying at a bazaar for his pet home for Incurable Ladies a whole sack full of china'.* Again, this incident demonstrates his admirable benevolence, even though the problem of getting the china from the South of France to the South of Ireland did not occur to him and ruffled his wife!

In many ways the "Master" was overshadowed by his talented wife. She was born at Desart Court, Co. Kilkenny on December 15th, 1824, the daughter of Lieutenant Rose Lambart Price and Catherine, Countess of Desart. Maria Price married John La Touche in May 1843, their partnership lasted for over sixty years and was broken by the death of the "Master" in 1904.

She was a keen botanist and possessed considerable intellectual powers. She enjoyed the art of vivid description, one unforgettable stroke of genius compared a row of jackdaws on Harristown lawn to *'the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland walking in stately procession!'* Her idea of unsociable detachment is *'a Scotch Manse in the time of John Knox'.* Her insatiable love of *'the treasures of Nature's boundless store'*, brought immense happiness to her life. The woods and gardens of Harristown were her constant delight.

Ah! how I thank my God for making
This joy in His works a part of me,
So that my heart in its bitterest aching
Can be glad in the gladness of bird and bee;
Can turn to look at fern or flower
Soothed in its darkest and saddest hour
When a friend's kind touch would be agony.

Lady Waterford introduced the La Touches to John Ruskin in 1858, and there later developed a fascinating relationship between Brantwood and

Harristown. As a writer and thinker Mrs. La Touche earned the commendation of the Professor, who wrote to her - *'there is no one who can help me as you can, for you see with my eyes and more - and feel as I feel - and speak more clearly than any living animal can speak or sing, except an Irishwoman..... I owe you infinite letters, for one of yours is worth an infinity of mine, but I think you ought to get into the habit of writing whatever you would like to say to me, knowing that I listen and am grateful, even when utterly silent'.* 7 The Rector of Carnalway, Canon Somerville-Large, who was a personal friend for over twenty years, wrote of her - *'I never met a woman with so creative a mind and meeting her was one of the epochs of my life'.*

Her biographer, Miss F.M. Young, gave this appraisal - *'Like most Irish women of her class, she was a keen follower of what went on in Parliament, but her political opinions, like her ideas on sport, were often more decided than entirely correct'.*

As we shall see later, she never came fully to share her husband's evangelical convictions. Her religious outlook fell within the framework of loyalty to the Church of Ireland coupled with respect for the Bible, which she read regularly. There was nothing rigid in her religious demeanour as the following extract from a letter to Miss Young illustrates -

> *'I have no horror of those who leave the Roman Catholic Church for the "dreariness of Protestantism". They can't feel the dreariness, and possibly they felt something worse (to them) than dreariness in the Church of Rome. Before all things, let us be true to ourselves. Religion, is a thing to live by. "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments". That's all that signifies. Many people can keep them better by having all sorts of external helps; by confession and direction and their crutches and their signposts. Others are helped by the very freedom and individualism which is the dreariness of Protestantism. Others, again, are lifted into the light, and set upon their feet by methods such as General Booth's. I have no horror of them, nor of people who, leaving one system, adopt another in all sincerity'.* 8

We must now examine the conversion of John La Touche and the contribution

he made to the Baptist cause in Ireland. The circumstances surrounding the commencement of his spiritual pilgrimage are somewhat clouded. There are two authentic accounts of his conversion which throw considerable light on the effect of his decision to embrace the principles of evangelical religion. [9] Unquestionably, the most colourful description came from the pen of his wife, in a letter headed

Coniston,

July 20th 1883

'We are having a heavenly time and the "Master" is more delighted with this place and the joys of Brantwood, and the enthusiastic welcome they gave him, than he has been for a long time with anything..... I do really twenty times a day bless Mr. Spurgeon (though of course I had far rather it had been the Archbishop of Canterbury or even Cardinal Manning) for rescuing the "Master" out of the blighting narrowness of a life entirely given to sport, and enabling him to see the beauty of things he never gave a thought to when he was young. People may talk of goodness narrowing people, but experience proves that any and every kind of spiritual interest (thought of the unseen) enlarges the nature of a person and widens their life'.

Miss M.F. Young adds further information to the story in the following way -

'During the years when the La Touches spent their winters in London, Mr. La Touche, who had never been what is called a "strong" Churchman, decided "after much deliberation", to leave the Church, and was baptized by Spurgeon, under whose influence he had fallen. Ever after he was a pronounced Baptist. That this change of faith in her husband was a grief to Mrs. La Touche can be well understood, but in later years she always insisted that those who carp at and criticize the Church with bitterness are far better to do it "from outside". She always remained faithful to the old Church, though much pressure was brought to bear on her just at the first to leave it.' [10]

The precise date of La Touche's meeting with Spurgeon has not been discovered, but it is reasonable to assume that it must have taken place around 1860. The "Master" and the Prince of Preachers, met from time to time in Mentone, where they both holidayed. Spurgeon found the bracing air of the French Riveria invigorating and it was in Mentone that he died.

As an evangelical Christian, the "Master" not only perused his personal devotional development but speedily displayed a concern for the spiritual well-being of his contemporaries. In the 19th century it was regarded a foolish and mistimed move for a landed gentleman to sever his former allegiance and embrace the convictions and practices of a particularly strict and somewhat obscure branch of Nonconformity. We must not minimise the impact his spiritual renewal must have made on the entire community and especially among those of his own social class. He had been Master of the Kildare Hounds from 1841 to 1846, and High Sheriff for the county in 1849.

The outstanding contribution of John La Touche to the cause of evangelicalism was the founding of the first and only Baptist Church in Co. Kildare. Agents of the Baptist Irish Society had preached in the County at an earlier date, but prior to the turn of the decade which unshered in the 1870's there had not been a gathered congregation worshipping after the Baptist order. The precise date of the church's formation is unknown but a congregation was officially meeting as a Baptist church as early as 1873. It is almost certain that regular services were initiated by Mr. La Touche at an earlier time, as the following account suggests. It appeared in 1883.

'Mr. La Touche has even shown an eager interest in the social and moral well-being of his tenantry. Nearly twnety years ago he was led to see the Scripturalness of our views of baptism. Earnestly desiring to serve Christ, he devoted himself for a time to evangelistic work in London; but the spiritual destitution of his own country, and especially of the neighbourhood in which he was most interested, induced him to return to Brannoxtown and endeavour in some way to evangelize the people there. He commenced by holding a prayer meeting in a cottage and giving short expositions of the Bible narratives. At length a cottage was

specially fitted for the purpose and services held regularly on Sundays. Several were converted at these meetings and ultimately baptised. In due time a little church was formed to which Mr. La Touche continued to minister. At length, finding his strength unequal to the full strain of pastoral work, he obtained for a few years occasional help from various ministers in Great Britain and Ireland. About twelve months ago he was able to secure the services of Rev. John Stubbs, who had returned from missionary work in Allahabad' [11]

There is widely held opinion in the area to this day that the tenants and employees of the "Master" were "expected" to attend the services at Brannoxtown. There are some who maintain that one of the conditions of employment at Harristown was regular attendance at the Baptist Church. Undoubtedly, these assertions are not without foundation and in this respect the "Master" did not shed all his landlordish authority when he met Spurgeon! However, in fairness it must be said that there is no evidence of religious coercion and we can rest assured that the motive behind the stipulation was the spiritual good of his tenants and workers.

It is highly improbable that the Church functioned in its infancy according to the practice of congregational church government. Indeed, there is no evidence to substantiate the notion that during the life time of the founder it was organized after the historical Baptist pattern. Undoubtedly, Baptist doctrine was adhered to, but certainly not Baptist order. Mr. La Touche looked for high standards in a minister as the following notice, which appeared in "The Baptist" of November 16th 1877, proves -

'Wanted, a pastor for a church in Ireland; he must be well educated, of good address and an earnest, animated, extempore preacher of the Word. A liberal stipend and a furnished house, with garden, will be given. Full particulars, stating age and if married or single to - X.Y.Z., Post Office, Newbridge, Ireland'.

The pastorate changed often during the early years of the Church and apparently the "Master" was solely responsible for employing and maintaining the ministers. There is an amusing anecdote, which is widely accepted as authentic, often told to illustrate the place the founder occupied in the supplying of a regular minister. Mr. La Touche is reputed to have invited at least one of the pastors to Harristown House for tea. After the meal was over he suggested that they should spend some time together in prayer. In the course of his prayer the Master, requested God *'to open a suitable sphere of service for our brother who is now concluding his ministry amongst us'*. This unexpected turn of events was accepted as formal notice to quit and the poor pastor went home to pack his bags! The story loses nothing in the telling, but the main thrust of the report is unquestionably true.

On a two-acre site just outside the Demesne wall across the road from the Brannoxtown Gate, the village Church and attractive manse were erected. The church opened for public worship in May 1882 and cost around £3,000 to build. It is an elegant Gothic structure, built of chiselled limestone, the coignes and arches being faced with red sandstone. Undoubtedly, the description of the building contained in an early report is fully justified - *'For beauty of design and finish it stands without a rival amongst the Baptist chapels of Ireland'*.

A writer in the Pall Mall Gazette recorded the following impression -

'Beyond the wood, outside the iron gate, lies a little colony. In the midst of it lies the spire of the Baptist Church.... It is the creation of the lord of the Manor, who has long ago forsaken the chief amusement of the county for other pleasures less akin to the delights of the world. On Sunday the congregations assemble twice for service at the Baptist Chapel, and ever attended by the venerable patron and founder of the colony. The service is simple and unpretending, as are the members of the congregation, but it has that which is wanting in too many a sanctuary - "the quiet peace that speaks of heaven".'

As we have already noted Mr and Mrs La Touche went separate ways in the matter of ecclesiastical affiliation, the "Master" walked each Sunday along

the ancient avenue which led to the Brannoxtown Gate and his cherished chapel. His life partner worshipped in the Parish Church at Carnalway, which stood in the estate at the end of the main avenue and was built by the La Touche family. A friend wrote - *'I was from the beginning of my acquaintance with her much encouraged by her love for the House of God. As long as it was possible for her she walked to church twice on Sunday and to our week-day services, but toward the end of her life she was seldom able to come'.*

Mr La Touche occupied the front pew in Brannoxtown church and always sat in the same seat. It is doubtful if any of his family ever attended the services and he had no spiritual successor to follow his footsteps to Brannoxtown. A striking tribute to his life and work appeared in a denominational paper in 1898 -

'No doubt to one in his position it would have been easier to float with the stream; but since the Lord Jesus Christ became to him a great reality, it has been from that period ever his ambition to live and work for him to the best of his ability. Nobly has he performed a difficult task. A kindly respect and love for men is at all times exhibited to those who, differing from him, desire to walk before their God and worship Him according to their conscience. But with a firmness that is intensly Puritanical and the very spirit that forced his great ancestor out of France he contends for the right to worship the God of the Scriptures according to the highest light revealed to himself.

He early grasped that a Christian life has no pre-emption from conflict. Henceforth all circumstances and trials were for him but the testing and building up of Christian character. In every obstacle, in every trial, in every grief (and he has had his share) he has striven to profit by them and so make full use of trials to the building up of his Christian manhood. Thus from practical experience he is able to comfort and support others in hours of trial and weariness.

Wherever he saw a footprint of his adorable Lord and Master he humbly strove to place his own. Accordingly, when he saw believers' immersion to be the only Scriptural baptism he immediately obeyed. Mr. Spurgeon

baptised him at the Metropolitan Tabernacle over a quarter of a century ago. No man holds a truer, deeper place in the heart of the denomination in Ireland to which he belongs'. [12]

An additional and important part of his service to the community was the erection of the village school and teachers' residence. The school, which was built with the aid of a State grant and vested in trustees, opened in 1885. Although annexed to the church property it was never a Baptist Church school, though the Baptist minister was a frequent visitor for the purposes of religious instruction. While it was not a Church school it was *'a vested schoolhouse built for the congregation of Brannoxtown and he caused the children of his dependants and employees to attend it'.* The school functioned for twenty years and gained a high reputation in the area. the "Master" was a familiar figure with the pupils, he frequently did a tour of inspection and took a personal interest in the progress of every scholar. After his death the school was closed in favour of the church school at Carnalway. [13] His son, Percy La Touche was unfavourable to the appointment of a manager for Brannoxtown school and in liaison with the Department of Education caused it to be closed. The building was not used for educational purposes again until 1928, when it was reopened under Roman Catholic management. It still serves the local community in that capacity.

The little congregation at Brannoxtown flourished during the lifetime of the founder. Attendances often reached between 70 and 80, but the highest recorded membership was 34 in 1887. Outside meetings were established at Blessington, Calverstown and at the Soldier's Home in the Curragh Camp. A regular service was held in Kilcullen with the Episcopalian minister, Presbyterian minister, Methodist minister and the Brannoxtown pastor conducting it in turn.

Harristown House was destroyed by fire in 1891 and was vacated by the La Touches for over two years. During this time they lived in a cottage on the estate next door to the Baptist Church. Mrs. La Touche grew to love village life and welcomed the new identification with the people. She expressed

doubt about the rightness of *'living at the end of long avenues far away from one's fellow creatures'*. The little garden became her delight but life was marred somewhat by the regular arrival of members of the *'mendicant profession'* who were pleased to see her "ladyship" without having to walk a mile of an avenue! Her powers of observation were keen and she wrote an amusing note about *'the heretical place of worship'* next door.

> *'I get a good deal of entertainment, living next door to Brannoxtown Baptist Chapel. They had a service last night and no less than seventy people attended! Two car loads of soldiers came from the Curragh. As we sat at dinner I saw all the arrivals and heard the opening hymn, "Onward Christian So-oldiers", taken so fearfully slowly that one felt the Christian Soldiers did not want to hurry themselves, and evidently wished to remain non-combatants'.*

John La Touche died in 1904 and was buried in the family tomb in the estate grounds outside Carnalway graveyard. Because of his prominent position in the administration and financing of the Church (he contributed £30 per quarter to the regular Church funds), the work at Brannoxtown suffered severely because of his departure. Apparently provision had been made by him for monetary support after his death, but in 1911 a report from the Church spoke of *'the great sadness felt among the people on the loss of their endowment'*.

The following tables supply interesting information about the fluctuation in membership and the change of ministry -

Membership		*Ministers*	
Year	*Members*	*Name*	*Opening Year*
1881	*20*	*F.J. Ryan*	*1880*
1887	*34*	*J. Stubbs*	*1882*
1897	*9*	*A.McCaig,B.A.,LL.B.*	*1884*
1902	*8*	*S.A. McCracken*	-
1905	*7*	*F.G.Buckingham*	-
1907	*4*	*S. Lamont*	-
1908	*6*	*J.D. Gilmore*	*1893*
1933	*6*	*J. Pearce*	*1898*

Membership (Cont'd)

Year	*Members*
1956	*14*
1970	*24*

Minister (Cont'd)

Name	*Opening Year*
A. Bird	*1902*
A.U.G. Bury, M.A.	*1904*
S.G.Godkin (Hon)	*1912*
J.A. Ritchie	*1947*
S.W. Blackwell (Hon)	*1952*
M.J. Fenton	*1956*
R.F. Dunlop	*1964*

The first part of the 20th century did not present a hopeful outlook for the little group of Baptists left to carry on the work of their noble founder. It is quite remarkable that in spite of all his abilities and attainments, John La Touche left only a handful of church members in Brannoxtown after his death. Perhaps this reveals the weakness of raising a church around one man, no matter how good or great that man may be. Or can we detect a deeper reason? Is it possible that a solid work of evangelization was done without the complementary ministry of instruction in church affiliation?

From its earliest years the church at Brannoxtown enjoyed the pastoral leadership of gifted and sincere men. Among the outstanding ministries were those of Archibald McCaig and J.D. Gilmore. Pastor McCaig was a Scot, who came to Brannoxtown at the invitation of John La Touche and on the recommendation of C.H. Spurgeon. He was a man of intellectual skill and spiritual strength. After about seven years in the pastorate at Brannoxtown, he went to Spurgeon's College in London where he held an honoured place as a Professor.

J.D. Gilmore returned from New Zealand to accept a call to the Brannoxtown pastorate. He was born in Co. Down and became a leading figure in the Irish Churches. For many years he was Secretary of the Home Mission and it was largely through his initiative and energy that the present church building at Phibsboro was erected.

Ambrose Bury only stayed at Brannoxtown for a short time and eventually became Principal of the Irish Baptist College in Dublin. He was well read in law and proved a suitable assistant to H.D. Brown in Harcourt St., who was also well trained in legal affairs.

The unremitting faithfulness of men like S.G. Godkin cannot be overlooked. His work in the church was done in an honorary capacity. For a great number of years he travelled weekly from Dublin to conduct the Sunday services and kept the door open at a time when it was in danger of being closed. In the mid-thirties the church was revitalised following an evangelistic mission when a number of people were converted. The membership was then lapsed and the church was re-formed. It has grown steadily since that time in spite of many losses and stresses.

At the present time the witness of the church is widespread and it stands as a lasting monument to the labours of John La Touche and above all to the goodness of God. In saluting the faithfulness of the founder we step into the unknown future which to us is as bright as the promises of God.

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2. The Journal of the County Kildare Archaelogical Society Vol. 7, No. 1; January 1912.
3. See Note on David La Touche under section 77 of 'Church Disestablishment 1870-1970', published by the National Gallery of Ireland, May 1970.
4. A full description of the La Touche Bank and its transfer is found in Hall's History of the Bank of Ireland.
5. From Letters of a Noble Woman edited by Margaret Ferrier Young and published by George Allen & Sons London 1908 Now difficult to obtain, this remarkable work provides clear insight into the La Touche family. It was consulted constantly and produced the main source material for this paper and also Plantation of Renown the fuller story of the La Touches and Brannoxtown Church.
7. Excerpts from Ruskin's letters, in Letters of a Noble Woman pages 84 & 118.
8. Written from Harristown in 1886.
9. See Plantation of Renown pages 8 & 9 for a fuller treatment of this matter.
10. Letters of a Noble Woman, page 19.
11. The Freeman, 5th January 1883.
12. The Irish Baptist Magazine, August, 1898.
13. There is a full description of the transfer in Plantation of Renown, pages 19 & 20.
14. Letter of May, 1892.

Baptist Education in Ireland

1814 - 1970

A *'Coffee House'* and *'a Tavern'* may sound strange to the ears of 20th century Irish Baptists as places where decisions of momentous import are made. Yet it was at a meeting of the Metropolitan Baptist Ministers in the Jamaica Coffee House in St. Michael's Alley on the right hand side of Cornhill on the 5th April 1814, [1] and at the first general meeting a fortnight later in the New London Tavern, Cheapside, that decisions were taken which had their effect in Ireland for half a century and more.

At the first general meeting of the Baptist Irish Society, or the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland, held on the 19th April, 1814 the resolution was adopted that *'the principal object of this Society be to employ Itinerants in Ireland, to establish schools and to distribute Bibles and tracts, either gratuitously or at a reduced price'.*[2] For the next twenty years the educational programme was to be the spearhead of all their activities and for a further thirty years it had its part to play in the work of the Society.

What were the factors that induced the founders of this new project to lay such emphasis upon an activity which today is largely

regarded as outside of the churches' responsibility? We may consider at least three. Firstly, the terrible conditions which existed in the educational field amongst the people in Ireland. *'There is no country in which larger sums had been expended ostensibly for the purposes of education. There were seven royal schools, thirty-nine charter schools, many endowed schools and diocesan schools, and it seems, if the funds had been properly administered, there would have been ample to provide instruction for a large proportion of the people. However, most of these funds had been totally misapplied or perverted, e.g. when Mr. Wakefield was in Ireland the rental of the estates belonging to the Cavan School (one of the Royal Schools) was £900 but there was not a single scholar'.* [3]

Commenting on the Charter Schools, J. Bernard Trotter said: *'The charter schools were formed on a weak system. The great tide of religious opinion has flowed on, undiminished and unchecked. The buildings remain - useful chiefly for a few individuals and instructive as a lesson to tyrants that the mind is beyond their reach, and that though man may be exterminated, religion cannot be conquered. As the system is long ago abandoned these schools must be looked on as very expensive encumbrances, in times like these when the difficulties of the State are great'.* [4]

Added to this was the fact that due to the Penal Laws the education of Roman Catholics by Roman Catholics was greatly restricted.[5] Though there had been some relaxation from 1782 onwards, [6] the main source of education was by way of the 'Hedge' schools. Christopher Anderson could write, *'Children have been known to acquire the first elements of reading, writing and arithmetic without a book, without a pen, without a slate - indeed the place of meeting was no other than a graveyard. The long flat stones with their inscriptions were used instead of books while a bit of chalk and the gravestones together served for all the*

rest'. [7] Again there was the very real problem of a language barrier. Teaching in the schools, apart from the 'Hedge' schools was carried on in English but according to estimates in 1812, *'it cannot be supposed that calculations on this subject be perfectly accurate but it has been calculated on good grounds that there are about 2 million people in Ireland who are incapable of understanding a continued discourse in English'*. [8] This meant that approximately one third of the population was outside the scope of any education.

Secondly, the Baptist Missionary Society had been active for more than twenty years by this time. As early as 1794 Carey had set about educating a few local youths, studying mainly the three R's, but Baptist educational endeavours in India were largely the story of the efforts of the Marshmans and schools were established at Serampore and beyond that city early in 1800, and by 1818 approximately 10,000 students were enrolled. Again the sagacious example set at Serampore concentrated on vernacular rather than English education; they maintained that it was 'completely fallacious' to hope to teach efficiently the people of any nation in a language not their own. [9] The conviction held by these pioneers that *'if the ordinary person was going to be reached he needed to be able to read and reason'*,[10] had its influence on the thinking of the founders of the Baptist Irish Society. It was expressly stated by the Committee of the Baptist Irish Society that *'acting upon the principles of the Baptist Missionary Society they hope to prove that they are influenced by far higher than sectarian motives, that they wish to unite with other Christians, e.g. they hoped with some degree of confidence for co-operation with the respectable Society of Friends whose zeal and liberality for educating poor children in that country have been so prominently and successfully employed.'* [11]

A third factor was the London Hibernian Society which had been formed in 1806 and had established schools in the province of Connaught as in other provinces. The reports of this Society's progress and the inspection of their work at first hand by Ivimey and Anderson in 1814, confirmed the decision of the leaders of the Baptist Irish Society to pursue their educational policy. The choice of Christopher Anderson to accompany Joseph Ivimey was also to have great implications. Anderson had travelled through one half of Ireland in 1808 but like too many travellers the condition of the aborigines scarcely if ever crossed his mind. [12] But it was to this group that he paid particular attention in 1814. In 1810 the Gaelic Society for Promoting Schools in the Highlands of Scotland had been set up and in this Anderson was one of the driving forces. Now his interest in education was turned towards Ireland and he and Ivimey were seeking to elicit information about the establishment of schools. Two main recommendations followed this visit and these stated that the schools to be established should be on the pattern of the Circulating Schools of Wales and the Highlands of Scotland which had proved so successful in the teaching of the native dialects. Secondly, they argued that instruction should be exclusively in Irish, not only because of the large number who used this language but also because of the attachment which was felt for it. [13]

There is little evidence to suggest that the first of these recommendations was ever fully implemented. The circulating school system was probably ideal in a scattered and rural community where the numbers to be reached were not large, but the schools under the control of the Baptist Irish Society were set in towns where there was a fairly large concentration of population and always more to follow, in the best Irish tradition. It seems more likely that the system followed was that suggested by Joseph Lancaster, the Quaker educationalist, whereby a system of monitors was used. [14] It was also true that the policy of teaching exclusively in Irish was later amended. It was found that when the native people had acquired and mastered Irish

there was often a desire to go on to gain facility in the use of English. J.B. Trotter says, *'There appears the tinge of the scholar very much through this Province of Connaught. A book or a little drawing always commands respect and attention from the inhabitants. They have an instinctive reverence for the implements of the scholar. There is no vulgar antipathy here to strangers or to English but a wish to receive and give information accompanies pleasing manners which are devoid of shyness and impertinence.'* [15]

To many the contribution of Baptists to Irish education appears to be of little or no significance. Histories of Ireland either ignore it, or else write it off in a cynical fashion as did S.L. Lampson who described Baptist efforts *'as having been attended by inappreciable results with the exception of furnishing material for three or four loud and echoing cachinnations (loud laughs) at the expense of their educational methods.'* [16] Many regarded it as a proselytizing society with the avowed aim of destroying the Catholic system and establishing a Baptist community. [17] It is true that the contribution Baptists were able to make was small in relation to the terrible need which existed, but it is also true that the part they played was out of proportion to those who claimed Baptist connections. In 1826 the Baptist Irish Society Report claimed 90 schools with about 8,000 pupils, though the second report of the Royal Commission (16th September 1826) set the figures at 88 schools and 4,377 scholars. [18] The educational work which was done by the Baptist Irish Society was gratefully received by those they were able to help.

The mainspring of the educational work in the early days of the Society was undoubtedly Christopher Anderson, at that time minister of Richmond Court Baptist Chapel (later he and the congregation moved to Charlotte Chapel). He argued for the expediency of teaching people to read the language they generally speak and best understand as being

self-evident. He claimed:

1) The time necessary to teach them to read the Bible in their vernacular language is so short, not exceeding six months in general. To teach English would require two to three years.

11) Previous instruction in their native tongue helps them to learn English much sooner instead of proving to any degree an inconveniency.

111) Having acquired new ideas by reading a language they understand excitement is naturally produced to seek for knowledge, thus a desire to learn English for the sake of increasing their stock of ideas and adding to their new found knowledge.

1V) By teaching them the vernacular first we prove to them that we are principally concerned about their souls, that most important point is totally out of sight by teaching them English, for the acquisition of the English is connected only with their temporal concerns'. [19]

It was originally his intention in implementing the system of circulating schools that when a schoolmaster had performed his duty and taught the people to read in Irish, he should then remove, and intimation be made to one of the other benevolent institutions for instruction in the English language. [20] But with the idea of the circulating school apparently a non-starter, this meant changes as far as the teaching of the language was concerned, and ultimately the Society's teachers were giving instruction in English. The Annual Report for 1818 stated, *'In addition to the Irish schools and readers the Society have some English*

schools in parts where that language is more generally spoken'. [21] The teaching of the Irish language had its opponents - Dean Swift had maintained that it would be a noble achievement to abolish the Irish language in the kingdom, and that it could be done effectually in less than half an age and at a trifling expense. [22] Other opponents argued that Irish was not sufficiently extensive to make instructing its speakers a duty; they claimed it was a barbarous language, and the teaching of it discouraged the use of English; they maintained it was difficult to learn, and that *'the teaching of Irish will excite disaffection for the king and disincline towards the English connection; it will impede the amalgamation of the two classes in this country, those who speak Irish and those who speak English'*, and therefore many political motives were presented against teaching it. [23]

For about a century there had been almost complete neglect of the teaching of Irish at Trinity College, Dublin. No-one had been appointed to teach the native Irish or Erse language from 1714 until the period under consideration. Such teaching of the language as was done was carried on in foreign countries far from the native soil and seat of the language. This meant that the clergy of the Established Church were generally ignorant of the Irish language and therefore incapable of discoursing with the mere natives. [24] During the 18th century there had not been a single copy of the Scriptures printed for the native Irish. In 1811 the New Testament and in 1817 the Bible in Irish were printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society but these were in the Roman letter and it was not until 1828 that one edition of the Bible complete in the Irish character left the press. [25]

Anderson's insistence on the use of the vernacular had its supporters. John S. Taylor of the Middle Temple speaking at the Baptist Irish Society Annual Meeting stated, *'Of all the plans which have been completed for this great purpose of pouring out upon the young minds of Ireland*

the liberalizing spirit of education and instruction, yours (Baptist Irish Society) appears to be the best calculated not only for the speediest but for the most permanent success. In the South and West of Ireland there is to be found the posterity of a people, the first possessors of the island, inheriting a strong animosity against the English name, full of cherished antipathy to your language, your manners and their dreaded innovations. Is it strange that such a people, influenced as they are by traditions of ancient times, should love a language which bears with it the endearing memory of their independence - breathing the spirit of their bards, celebrates the achievements of their heroes - contains the names which embellish their romantic history and in their legendary songs, is full of mournful fascination.' [26] The most effectual means to introduce to the Irish peasant a salutary influence which must correct an injurious and hereditary feeling, is to make the language of truth address him - in what? In his own tongue. When you introduce the Gospel to him in his own language, there is something too congenial to his feelings, too agreeable to the patriot passion in its aspect to allow him to refuse its invitation, no matter what sentiments he may be told it contains. It has at least a charm in some measure capable of counteracting the charm that has enslaved him. Will you not take advantage of the prejudices in favour of the language that it may gain admittance for the sentiments which destory all prejudice. [27] By adopting this plan, i.e. instructing the Irish in their own language, the Committee concluded that the Society would keep out of the way of all antecedent institutions and by teaching the varnacular tongue prove a useful auxiliary to each of those societies whose object was to teach the English language only. Contemporary historians could write: *'They have resolved to*

establish schools for teaching exclusively the Irish language and are in fact the only Society as they justly assert who have taken this precise and exclusive ground. In this project they had much to encounter from the prejudices against teaching the Irish language which existed amongst the friends of education in Ireland and the difficulty of finding proper persons to become school-masters'. [28] The Committee soon found out what an arduous task they had undertaken as they faced such prejudices, even among the many friends of education in Ireland, against teaching the Irish language. [29]

So, under the influence of Anderson, the Baptist Irish Society became the first Society to give instruction and carry out its programme of education in the native language. In this it was a leader in the field and in 1818 the Irish Society, which belonged to the Established Church, was founded for the purpose of instructing the native Irish in their own language as a result of convictions produced by Anderson's Memorial in the minds of pious churchmen. [30] The origin of the Achill Mission sprang from the interest excited in its founder, the Rev. E. Nangle, by the study of Anderson's Historical Sketches of the Native Irish. [31] Other associations then in existence which had contemplated the improvement of the natives, through the English tongue alone, saw reason to modify their measures and include instruction in the people's vernacular as part of their design as a result of Anderson's publications. [32] Thereby it was hoped to speed the process of learning, even as Anderson could claim in writing to a friend in India: *'It is a fact that in the space of ten days adults have learned to read Irish, that in three months members have learned to read distinctly not only in Irish but English - these are not children but parents.'* [33] Again by teaching through the medium of Irish, it was hoped to overcome the prejudices of the native Irish to all things English. The

Society seems to have adopted as its motto Acts 2:12, *'We do hear them speak in OUR TONGUE the wonderful works of God'.*

A policy of educating in the vernacular immediately raised the problem of teachers, and here again the Baptist Irish Society were to play a leading role. It probably comes as something of a surprise to us, if not a shock to our systems, to know that the vast majority of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses were Roman Catholics. The Protestants who could speak Irish seem to have been few and far between, so that Anderson could claim that there was not a Protestant preacher to address the three millions who spoke the Irish tongue. [34] Ivimey could say in the course of a lecture given at Bristol on 3rd June, 1818, *'we were told that we should not find any persons who could teach the language, nor was it until four months after our return that we could procure any Irish scholars who could read and write and teach others to read and write the Irish language.'* [35]

At the end of the first year of operations the number of day-schools was ten, and this number was doubled the following year, but the Committee commented that from the comparatively small number of schoolmasters in Ireland who could read the Irish language it was not to be expected that a very large addition would speedily be made to the number of Irish schools. [36] Even as late as 1830 some 50% of the school teachers were Roman Catholics or former Roman Catholics. [37] In addition, the Committee welcomed the help of clergymen of the Established Church in Ireland and viewed their accession as beneficial to the welfare of the schools; they had offered to act as inspectors of the schoolmasters in their neighbourhoods and these offers were gratefully accepted. [38]

Initially the schoolmasters had been paid the sum of twenty guineas per annum but a reduction in the price of provisions was claimed to be responsible for a reduction in the salary to £16 per annum. [39] Attempts were made to obtain the help of resident Irish gentlemen who would be willing to co-operate with the Society by founding Irish schools and employing Irish readers, on the condition that one half of the allowance to masters should be granted from the funds of the Institution and the other half supplied by themselves. In this way, it was hoped not only to relieve the finances of the Society but also to obtain a respectable and vigilant superintendence. [40] The Committee could inform the Society that they had lately received applications for 40 schools upon this principle. Messrs. West and Dobney state in a letter dated May 29th, 1818 - *'We have appointed 37 schools all at £8 each'*. [41]

Support for the work of the Society in its schools was also forthcoming from other independent sources. For instance, in May 1816 the Courier, a newspaper published in Liverpool and edited by a Mr. Thomas Kaye recommended its readers to render pecuniary assistance and minister to the necessities of the people of Ireland through the work of the Baptist Society. The Society, it claimed, not only instructs the natives in the elements of the English language, it also instructs them in the Irish, which is stated to be spoken by near 2,000,000 who otherwise must continue in the darkness of ignorance without any hope of change of conditon. [42]

To promote order, and some consistency throughout their schools, the Committee published a Teachers' Guide which was compiled from

that used by the Ambulatory Gaelic Schools in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. These directions relate to the arrangement of schools, the attendance, classes, progress of good scholars, punishments, rewards, schoolhouse, etc. - it also contained a plan for a suitable and economical schoolroom where it can be accomplished.[43] In his Memorial, Anderson put forward some hints on the management of Irish Circulating Schools.[44] Three of these hints are of relevance to us, the other two related to the plan for circulating schools which it seems was never implemented.

(1) *The schools to be opened should be for the sole and express purpose of teaching the inhabitants of those districts where Irish is spoken, particularly in the south and west, to read their NATIVE LANGUAGE.*

(2) *Alphabet Boards, containing the letters of the Irish Alphabet, in the Roman and Irish characters in parallel columns, to be used in teaching the alphabet; and syllable boards of two and three letters to succeed these.*

(3) *The Elementary Books to proceed gradually with 'spelling and reading lessons', each short set of lessons advancing only by one letter, up to the longer and more difficult words. The Irish New Testament might succeed and after that the Old, WITHOUT NOTE OR COMMENT, beginning with the easiest parts.*

In a letter to Joseph Ivimey dated 18th June, 1817, Anderson revealed himself as an advocate of the Irish character in writing as being more acceptable to the people, not so likely to destroy the use of the language. It was also more economical to print than the Roman characters.[45]

The curriculum of the schools consisted in the main of the three R's and as a reading book the Bible was basic to all their studies.

The Society had been active in the field of printing and produced 1st and 2nd Spelling Books, Table Books, Primers and a selection of Aesop's Fables. [46] Scripture portions, Testaments and Bibles were supplied by the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Bible was to be taught without note or comment. This was an endeavour to surmount the opposition of Roman Catholics who objected to their children having to learn the catechism which was taught in most other Protestant schools. However, the Society was soon to discover that the reading of the Bible, even without note or comment, was not in favour with the Roman Catholic clergy in particular (it took another 150 years and the advent of Pope John before an appreciable change was to come). One contemporary complained that *'some Protestant schools, in order to attract the attendance of Roman Catholics degraded the reading of the Bible into a mere form. A child reads it, no explanations were given , no questions asked. It might as usefully have been read in Hebrew or in Greek.'* [48]
The reading of the Bible was regarded as a Protestant principle. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin said: *'The Biblical instruction of this kind Protestants believe to be good, but Catholics however believe it to be bad'.* [49] *'Reading the Scripture without comment is contrary to the Catholic principle which states that the Scriptures should be read only as interpreted by the Catholic Church'.* [50] In addition, the version of the Bible used was regarded as adulterated,since it omitted the Apocrypha, and added to the Lord's Prayer. [51] But the whole matter is summed up in a letter by an unknown writer who says, *'In this country Protestants are not permitted to deal in the slightest degree with religious matters amongst the Roman Catholic children. Not even the Douay version of the Scriptures is allowed to be read. Protestants are only then empowered to teach to READ, but not to read the BIBLE'.* [52] It was against such attitudes that the Society carried on their work, and

while their method of learning by rote large passages of the Bible would be frowned upon by modern educationalists, it must be set against the background of contemporary educational methods.

Opposition came not only from the Roman Catholic clergy, for in the Annual Report of 1817 the Committee expressed their deep regret that the poor people of Ireland *'should be so much under the influence of gross and infatuating delusions as in some instances to be afraid lest the Society should be influenced by unprincipled motives'.* The same Report goes on to relate *'It will scarcely be credited, that a beggar woman pretending to witchcraft has lately much disturbed their schools by declaring that she received a revelation from the Virgin Mary informing her that the Baptist Irish Society had a wicked design to entrap all their children and send them off by ship to a foreign land! When the people were asked if they believed the woman, they replied that for the most part they were inclined to believe her; as it was unreasonable that any people should go to such cost but with some such intention. Such is the alarm that prevails that the Inspector has not been able since this report has got into circulation to visit the schools on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean as the children would all run away on his approach, supposing him to be the captain of the ship. On this account the master of one of the schools is not allowed by the parents to enter the names of his pupils in his class paper'.* [53]

Looking more closely at the schools we learn that the church at Swift's Alley, Dublin supported two schools - *'A charity school consisting of 14 girls who are clothed, maintained and educated. This is supported by an annual charity sermon producing £190, with*

donations about £2 10. They also support a Sunday School in which 60 boys and 70 girls are taught. This latter school is distinguished by a remarkable feature. A master is provided who teaches Irish and about 20 children avail themselves of the instruction. It has been found that they learn to read the language they have been accustomed to speak with greater facility than a foreign one: they are first taught to read Irish books and learn to read English through this medium.' [54] This school is noticed in the first report of the Baptist Irish Society for 1815. *'A Sunday School is opened in Dublin which is conducted by some zealous young men in which both English and Irish are taught. Several young men designed for priests and schoolmasters have attended to learn Irish. They all read the Irish Testament. An excellent Irish scholar of Catholic persuasion has assured us that he was called upon to examine these scholars and he was highly pleased with their proficiency'.* [55] Outside Dublin, the first attempt was made in the neighbourhood of Sligo where they established two schools in 1814. At the end of the year a Paedo-Baptist minister was strongly recommended to them and they engaged him at a salary of £40 as a reader of the Irish Scriptures. This zealous and laborious man traversed indefatigably the counties of Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon establishing evening schools for teaching Irish and employing those who were capable to read the Scriptures to their neighbours in their native tongue. In this way 16 schools and 16 sabbath readers were instituted at the moderate sum of two shillings per week for each school and reader. To these were added 10 day schools *'in which several young men designed for Roman Catholic priests and schoolmasters attend to perfect themselves in the Irish language'.* [56]

By 1819 the number of schools under the patronage of the Society had risen to 75, of which 55 were situated in Connaught and 20 in

other parts of the country. These day-schools, it was claimed, contain upwards of 6,000 children and were not only under the care of suitable masters but were regularly visited by inspectors and quarterly by the superintendent. [57] At the Annual Meeting in 1819, a recommendation suggested that congregations in England should adopt some of the schools and give them an appropriate designation. This was immediately taken up by two ladies in Norwich who paid £16 per annum and thus there were two 'Norwich' schools. Soon other names such as Harlow, Hammersmith, Chatham, Bristol, Hackney, and Eagle Street began to appear. [58]

The First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Enquiry was issued on 30th May, 1825. This enquiry was largely a result of the dispute between Daniel O'Connell and the Kildare Place Society, but in its report it is claimed by a representative of the Kildare Place Society that a total of 30 schools were connected with the Kildare Place Society and the Baptist Society, and of those three are also connected with the London Hibernian Society. [59] This has led a modern writer to conclude that 30 Baptist Society schools were receiving aid from the Kildare Place Society. [60] But in the Annual Report of the Baptist Irish Society for 1826 it is stated that *'since the Baptist Society has never received any pecuniary assistance from a Society in Ireland supported by the Government, the proposed recommendation of the Commissioners that the Kildare Place Society should in future "withold all grants to schools in connection with or deriving aid or assistance from any other Society" will not at all affect your funds.'* [61] In his evidence before the Commissioners, the Rev. John West, Minister of the Swift's Alley Church, stated that the Baptist Irish Society had not expended any money in the building of school houses - they are generally held in cabins, except for not more than half a dozen created and established by the Kildare Place Society for them'. He stated that no benefit

was received from any charity except the benefit received from the Kildare Place Society - 'now and then when the inspector goes round and finds a very good school he allows the schoolmaster £5 extra, we pay the salary as usual. The giving of money was not confined to schools created by the Kildare Place Society, but other schools where they find them particularly good. No application was made to the Kildare Place Society. We received also aid from the Kildare Place Society in educating a considerable number of our schoolmasters at the Model School.' [62]

By 1824 there were 92 schools and a few night schools, upwards of 100 altogether, while upwards of 20 of these were for females only,[63] and about 8,000 scholars enrolled. Enrolment was to reach its peak in 1832, the year after the Irish Board for National Education was set up, when 91 schools were associated with the Society containing 10,000 pupils. In addition, 25 evening classes with an enrolment of 700 were functioning. At various times the Society had schools in at least 15 counties of what is now the Republic of Ireland, and in 1824 these were under four superintendents: Rev. Joseph Wilson in Sligo, Rev. William Thomas of Limerick, Rev. J.P. Briscoe of Ballina, and the Rev. Isaac McCarthy of Tullamore. These were, in turn, responsible to the Rev. John West in Dublin. The schools as have been stated were usually held in cabins, rather than in buildings erected for the purpose. The Rev. Josiah Wilson wrote, *'Could our English friends picture to themselves a track of country 40 miles in circumference, several parts of which are thickly covered with cabins, wretched in appearance, but rendered more wretched by the immoral and superstitious condition of the inhabitants; sure I am that they would not be satisfied that four cabins in which the schools are kept should be the only exceptions to this painful state of things. These four cabins are filled with children who are receiving such instructions as will, I*

hope, prevent them from being the slaves of ignorance, superstition and immorality.' [64] A visitor to Ireland in 1844/45 describes the conditions typical of so many situations, but not necessarily describing the Baptist Irish Society schools, under which the children carried on their work. *'On the way from Clifden to Diamond Mountain'* she says, *'we entered the schoolroom and may I never see the like again. In one corner was a pile of potatoes, kept from rolling down by stones on which the ragged bare-footed children were seated. In another corner was a pile of cartwheels, which were used for the same purpose and in the middle of the room was a circular hole made in the ground for the turf fire. Not a window, chair or bench could be seen. The pupils looked more like children who had sheltered themselves there in a fright to escape the fury of a mad animal or the tomahawk of some yelling savage, than those who had assembled for the benefit of the light of science. This was a Connemara school and it was all they could do. I had seen sprinkled all over Ireland schools in miserable cabins where were huddled from forty to seventy in a dark room without a chimney, but they had benches to sit upon and their school was by the wayside. I saw many schools of this kind where the child takes a piece of turf under his arm and goes two miles and sometimes three without breakfast. In many parts of the south and west and among the mountains they could eat but once in the day, from Christmas until the next harvest and this meal is generally from two to three o'clock.'* [65] Exceptions to these were the schools provided by the Kildare Place Society as already mentioned. The Society will report that *'Several gentlemen also fitted up convenient school houses upon their estates, and a liberal and indefatigable lady at Nenagh in County Tipperary has built a schoolhouse which contains 346 children, boys and girls, and is about to build another for the exclusive use of females as there*

are great numbers of children there who still need instruction.' [66] But a more remarkable exception was that in his evidence before the Royal Commissioners the Rev. John West could state that one or two of the Baptist Irish Society schools had been held in Roman Catholic Chapels. [67] The attitude of the priests varied greatly from place to place - from going into schools and chasing the children, to praising the efforts of the Society from the altar, and the opportunity to hold the school in the Chapel. [68] The Secretary of the Society, the Rev. J. Ivimey, could claim, *'It is an encouraging circumstance and one which the Committee have no doubt will be properly appreciated by the Society that several of their schools in the County of Clare are kept in Roman Catholic Chapels, a proof of the rigid regard which is paid to the fundamental principle of the Society that no Catechism shall be taught in the schools and that even the priests of the Roman Catholic communion are convinced that the Society are seeking to promote the welfare of the children'.* [69]

'The Committee regret to state that they have been compelled to refuse several schools which have been applied for during the past year in the County of Clare, some of them by Roman Catholic priests, because of the confined state of their funds.' [70]

The Society from its outset had to face the charge of proselytism, and many have written of its efforts as simply that of a proselytizing agency with no real concern for the improvement of the peasantry of Ireland, but only interested in making converts to Baptist principles and practice. The Commissioners stated: *'We found that the London Hibernian Society and Baptist Societies were so conducted as to excite a greater degree of distrust on the part of the Roman Catholic clergy than any of the others. It is true indeed that general directions were given by these societies that no attempt shall be made in their schools to instil Protestant doctrines into the minds of Roman Catholic children. Their chief object is to give them*

scriptural instruction. They are required not only to read the scriptures in the schools but to commit considerable parts of them to memory, for which purpose it becomes necessary that they should take the books to their respective homes.' The Commissioners went on to say that *'the Roman Catholic clergy, however, do not rest their opposition to these Societies on the ground that proselytism has actually been affected by them, but on the allegation that such is their object; that such is the tendency of their schools and that such might be the effect of their system if it were allowed to prevail.'* [71] In a letter to the editor of the Irish Observer, a Limerick newspaper, dated May 17th, 1825, the secretaries of the Baptist Irish Societies, Joseph Ivimey and George Pritchard, repudiate a charge 'that the Baptist Society practise and profess proselytism generally,' made by Mr. O'Driscoll, a K.C. in Dublin, before the Select Committee appointed to enquire into the State of Ireland. The Baptist Irish Society secretaries in reply to an earlier critic had sought to repel the charge that the object of the Society was proselytism and not the good of the Irish peasantry. They could say, *'If by proselytism be intended attempts to bring persons over to their own sect, they indignantly deny the allegation; for without undervaluing their own distinguishing sentiments, their only wish had been to make the Irish acquainted with the doctrines of the Scriptures in order that they might become more genuine Christians. But if employing suitable means for making them Bible Christians be called proselytism they admit the accusation to be just.'* [72] As early as 1815 the Society had insisted that all catechisms should be banned from their schools and the principle of teaching the children to read the Scriptures ALONE be adopted, leaving them to attend the place of worship their parents prefer. [73] Of the Rev. Christopher Anderson it was said that 'his works on Ireland were written with a knowledge of the subject, a temperance and philanthropy which does equal credit to the understanding, the judgement and the

heart of the excellent writer. His is the language of a liberal unprejudiced mind whose object is instruction and whose means are conciliation and kindness.'[74]

Mention must be made of the philanthropic work which was carried out in times of need through the schools. In 1829 the Rev. J.P. Briscoe (Ballina) could appeal for £3 or £4 to be laid out in clothing for the children at the Hammersmith school. The Hammersmith church responded generously sending £5. Mrs. Briscoe superintended the making of the articles and the distribution of them.[75] The same area was hit by famine conditions in 1831 and through the appeals of the Rev. J. Allen then in Ballina, a considerable sum of money was raised in England for relief. A total of £2,308.10. 3¾d was subscribed and used between mid June and the end of August. A testimonial to the help given by the Baptist Irish Society appeared in Ballina Impartial of September 5, 1831 with 35 signatories. (The chief opponents to Mr. Allen were Rev. Dr. McHale, 'Him of Maronia', the titular bishop of Killala and the Rev. Mr. Lyons, the Roman Catholic priest of Erris). Help was granted to those who were in any way connected to the 30 or so schools in the district.[76] In the period of the Great Famine (1847-49) the same area felt the worst effects of the disaster but through the schools of the Baptist Irish Society £6,000 which had been collected over the two years from supporters in England was used to buy foodstuffs and to feed the needy.[77]

Having reached its peak in the educational role in 1832 the Society's efforts seem to have gone into decline fairly steadily until, in 1865, the last of its schools, which was situated at Crossmolina, was closed after it had suffered greatly from priestly hostility.[78] But it was not hostility which closed the Baptist schools for they had endured that right from their inception. It was possibly inevitable that with the introduction of a national system of education in 1831

people should feel it was no longer necessary to support such voluntary institutions. Despite the national system however there were those who favoured the work done by the Baptist Irish Society in their schools. In 1833 a letter signed by Magistrates (9), Clergy (6) and Gentry (26) in the counties of Clare, Limerick and Tipperary was sent to the Society in appreciation of what had been done, and appealing for greater effort if funds permitted. [79] Even ten years later in 1843 the Report of Commissioners on population stated that in the combined rural and civic districts of Connaught 64.6% of the males and 79.5% of the females could neither read nor write and for Mayo the figures were 71.9% males and 86% of the females. These figures which were in respect of all persons 5 years old and upwards were only a little better for Munster. Statistically the prevalence of illiteracy was revealed in the 1841 Census; in large parts of the west at least three quarters could neither read nor write. In the four baronies west of Galway city the percentage of illiterates varied from 85% to 91% and the position was very little better in most of Co. Mayo. [80] From this it is evident that there was still room for the Baptist Irish Society and similar bodies to continue their work. Another factor that must have had its effect was the change in leadership of the Baptist Irish Society. For twenty years Joseph Ivimey had acted as Secretary to the Committee and though he was a man uncompromising in his antagonism to the Roman Catholic Church and its activities yet he had a real concern for the condition of the peasantry in Ireland and he was untiring in his efforts to promote the work of the Society. [81] Just over a year later the Rev. John West, the corresponding secretary in Dublin, died also. [82] Ivimey's successor, the Rev. George Pritchard, remained in office less than two years and the Committee decided against appointing a successor to John West. [83] From time to time the Society found itself in financial straits, but in the years that followed 1840 they were persistently in debt, until in 1851 its

debts had risen to £1,828. During this period, much of the Committee's attention was given to financial matters, and ways of solving their financial problems. Perhaps the advice of Andrew Fuller had been forgotten when, shortly after its inception, he had written to the Society: *'Be more anxious to do the work than to get the money. If the work be done modestly and faithfully reported, money will come.'*[84] In the latter part of 1837 there was also a change of policy on the part of the Committee. An enquiry was to be made 'whether the objects of the Society would not be better promoted by employing the funds now expended upon our schools in the increase of Scripture readers and ministers in that country'.[85] As a result of this consideration the following recommendations were proposed and agreed on:

(1) That a letter be addressed where necessary to the parties whose school rooms this Society occupied, stating that the Committee deem it essential to the object contemplated by the Society that its agents should preach or hold other religious meetings in the several school rooms under such arrangements as may be most convenient to themselves.

(2) That under no circumstances will this Society retain any school wherein this arrangement cannot be carried into effect.

(3) That in any case where the government schools may render the Society's schools inefficient by withdrawing the children such schools should be discontinued.

Then follows various recommendations for the efficient running of the schools.[86]

A combination of these factors, as well as the mass exodus which took place as a result of the Great Famine brought about the death, albeit a lingering one, of the educational programme of the Baptist

Irish Society. However, the demise did not occur until some 600,000 of the youth of Ireland had been educated partially or entirely by the Society during its period of operations. Indeed there is reason to believe that this figure which can only be approximate is far below the real total. [87]

We now turn our attention to efforts in Baptist education which lay outside the scope and work of the Baptist Irish Society.

The earliest attempt of which we know in the education of children was that undertaken by the Swifts' Alley Church in connection with the clothing, maintenance and education of female orphans. This school was opened in 1771 for ten girls, and was supported by an annual charity sermon, the first of which was given on St. Patrick's Day 1771 and yielded £59:10:6d. but those were days when potatoes cost 2/6d - 3/4d per cwt, beef was 2¼d a pound and butter 6d per pound.[88]

In the city of Cork from 1792 to 1798 Mr. Richards, the pastor of the church, held classes for young people. Lectures were given on such subjects as geography, science, astronomy, botany, ethics, geometry, zoology, and the British Constitution. These means of improvement continued for more than seven years, were well attended and various young persons, not Baptists but of different persuasions, regularly attended and bore a part. The number was nearly forty. [89]

During the era of the Baptist Irish Society at least two schools were operating in Ulster. One was at Conlig where a Mr. Graham and his daughter Jane were the teachers, and in 1854 there were 80 pupils in attendance. [90] The other school was run in connection with the church in Belfast at that time meeting in Academy Street.

In 1880 a school under the patronage of Mr. John La Touche was commenced at Brannoxtown and five years later a new school house was built. A residence was also provided for the teachers Mr. and Mrs. Hilton. [91] But unfortunately Mr. La Touche's son Percy did not share his father's Baptist convictions. He was instrumental in having the grants transferred from Brannoxtown H.S. to Carnalway and this meant the closure of the school in 1905. [92]

The National School in Lisnagleer which had been in existence for a number of years came under Baptist management in December 1884 when the Rev. J. Dickson was recognised as patron and manager of the schools. The Principal of the school, Mr. Robert McCausland, and his wife carried on the work of the school for a number of years. [93] This often seemed to be a feature of schools - husband as Principal and the wife as a teacher or work-mistress to instruct the girls in the art of sewing, plain and ornamental knitting, sampler and crochet work. In 1885 there were 79 pupils on the roll. [94] The school continued until December 1955 when it was leased to Tyrone Education Committee who used it for about 5 years. [94]

In connection with the church at Antrim Road, two schools were carried on for many years. The first of these was opened in Fairfax Street in 1892 and used the premises of the Mission Hall, here as many as 150 children were in regular attendance. The school ever suffered from a lack of accommodation and constant attempts were made to reduce the enrolments. [95] But if the school suffered from lack of accommodation the pupils suffered in other ways - one recalls the building heated by a single coal fire, and on frosty mornings the pupils marched round the room singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' in an attempt to keep warm. The school at Antrim Road was opened in May 1897. Here again the mind boggles at the idea of an enrolment of 353 pupils in the school, and to those of us who are familiar with the premises it is hard to know just where they put them all, or how teaching was ever successfully

carried through under such circumstances. However generations of teachers met the challenge of the difficult surroundings so successfully that people who had their earlier education at Antrim Road School could be found lecturing in universities as far apart as Leeds and Bombay, practising medicine in Belfast's leading hospitals and teaching in every part of the Province. [96] It speaks highly for the school that in 1931 while referring to the insufficiency of accommodation at Antrim Road, the Secretary of the Education Committee could speak of ample accommodation in two nearby schools. The 'Bap.' as it was known always managed to maintain a high educational standard and was always sought after by parents anxious for their children's education. Though the award has fallen into disfavour with some teachers in more recent years, Mr. David P. Figgins, the Principal, was awarded on behalf of the school the Carlisle and Blake Premium for the year 1938. [97]

To complete the picture of Baptist education in Ulster mention must be made of the school which operated for about ten years at Gortmerron. This school was due to the efforts of Mr. Rainey, and received financial assistance from his brother-in-law in South Africa. It had an average attendance of about 30. Due to opposition it was never recognised by the National Board of Education and eventually closed for financial reasons.

Rockefeller House, the brain-child of Hugh D. Brown, was opened in Dublin in October 1892 largely due to the generosity of the American millionaire, John D. Rockefeller. The institute had among its aims the provision of a sound education under healthy moral and spiritual conditions for a limited number of boys. [98] Some at least of these were boarders and altogether about 70/80 boys were receiving a first class Classical and English education at the end of the first year. [99]

Baptists' sole excursion into the realm of intermediate education took place in the town of Banbridge where the Pastor of the Baptist church, Dr. Morton V.F. Dawson, early in 1902 made it known that he was willing to undertake private tuition in a variety of subjects in preparation for University, banking and other preliminary exams.[100] From this small beginning, later in the same year he opened the Excelsior Academy in the Temperance Hall in Banbridge and in so doing he went into competition with the already existing Banbridge Academy. The Excelsior catered not only for intermediate education but also had a Kindergarten and Preparatory Department and offered special tuition for backward children.[101] The institution compared very favourably with schools in larger towns and with greater advantages and could boast of a great number of successes as far as examination results were concerned.[102] Some 80% of all who were entered had been successful. The most famous sons of the Excelsior were probably Sir Clarence and Mr. James Graham of Dromore. Dr. Dawson left Banbridge in 1909 and the Excelsior carried on a separate existence for a further five years before amalgamating with the Academy.[103]

But what of Baptists and theological education? In 1828 Thomas Berry and John Bates entered the service of the Baptist Irish Society and were required as part of their duties to devote part of their time to studies under the direction of the Rev.J.P. Briscoe then in Ballina. (The Baptist Irish Society Report for 1831 could speak of the expense of tuition as borne by the Trustees of the property belonging to the Baptist church in Swifts Alley, Dublin, bequeathed many years since for the education in Ireland of students for the ministry.)[104] Briscoe's successor, the Rev. James Allen, came to Ballina in 1830 with the express understanding that he would prosecute his intention of acquiring the Irish language, so as to be

able to preach in it and in the event of any of the natives, who have been converted giving evidence of their having suitable gifts, to take them under his care for a short period, to direct their studies with a view to devoting themselves to the Christian ministry.[105] So began the Ballina Baptist Seminary and though it remained small and did not survive for more than ten years it was the training ground of several who left their mark on Irish Baptist Churches in the 19th Century. One other experiment along this line was carried on by Dr. Alexander Carson in Tobermore who in 1842 supervised the studies of a Mr. Moore of Coleraine for two years with a view to the latter being employed in the ministry.[106]

The Secretary of the British and Irish Home Mission in his annual report for 1878 had this to say about the work in Ireland: *'The great want of this mission is men, men if not of Irish blood, of strong sympathy with Ireland, and trained for ministerial work. Were it possible to create a 'school of the prophets' either at Belfast or Dublin or both, making use of the advantages offered by the Queen's University for the secular education of the students and committing them to our missionary in either city for spiritual and theological training, such an institution would give increased strength to our mission at once and in a few years would prove of incalculable value in the warfare we are waging with superstition, ignorance and sin. May He, whose are the silver and the gold and in whose hand are the hearts of all men, incline some of our wealthier brethren to favour and promote this project'.*[107] The Church in Dublin, then meeting in Lower Abbey Street could report in 1886 that the Education Fund now stands at £300 with an annual income of £30. Two young men have been accepted as beneficiaries who are about to enter Trinity College, with a view to the Baptist ministry. It is hoped that this fund will become the nucleus of

a Baptist Theological College for Ireland. The demand for thoroughly educated men is becoming more imperative every year.[108] It was another six years before this hope was to be realised, for in the opening of Rockefeller House, already alluded to, we have the commencement of the Irish Baptist Training Institute, as it was known in its earliest days. Mr. T.R. Warner Dep. Secretary of I.B.H.M., had visited America in 1891 to further the interests of Irish Baptists and in co-operation with Baptists in America it was hoped to raise $75,000 (about £15,000) for a training school in Dublin. John D. Rockefeller promised that for every $1,000 raised in America he would add $500 up to a maximum of $10,000.[109] This institution, the forerunner of the present Irish Baptist College, was opened on 4th October, 1892. It had been hoped that Archibald McCaig, the Pastor of Brannoxtown, would accept the post of principal, but he received an invitation from Spurgeon's College to become a tutor there and accepted that post.[110] However, Mr. Ambrose U.G. Bury, B.A. was appointed principal and the Institute had the avowed aim of giving such help as will equip promising and approved young men from the churches more fully for the work of the pastorate; and where other Christian workers may receive stimulus and assistance in any path of Christian service.[111] By the end of the first year, five young men were undergoing a course of training, and the first missionary candidate Charles D. McCarthy, finished his course at the college in 1897 and went to Brazil, but he was spared less than 18 months in that country before he died.[112] Concerning one student, it was written: 'We cordially welcome Mr. Alex Graham from Derry. If he finds the curriculum a bit stiff at first we hope the motto of the 'prentice boys will help him'.[113] (Which by interpretation means - No Surrender!)

In 1901 Hugh D. Brown decided to re-constitute the college. The old premises at 16 Harcourt Street were sold, and the proceeds allocated to the Home Mission, and Mr. Brown bought other premises at 45 Harcourt Street with the purpose of carrying on the work of an Irish Baptist

College on much the same lines as before. Mr. A.U.G. Bury was appointed principal and Mr. James Willoughby as student-tutor. Six students continued their courses from the previous establishment and two others were accepted for the new term. [114] It may come as something of a relief to the present day students that there has been a considerable change in the curriculum since those early days. Apart from those subjects which one might expect to find at any theological college such as Introduction to the Bible, Systematic Theology (based on Hodge), Church History and Hebrew Grammar and exercises, students were expected to wrestle with all branches of Mathematics, the Classics, Greek and Latin and English Grammar, Composition, History and Geography, and students were prepared for University Matriculation and Second University Examinations. But changes at the Irish Baptist College were by no means at an end. Mr. Bury resigned as principal in 1912 [115] and Mr. Willoughby was appointed in his place, but his stay in that position lasted for only three years. [116] Then in 1916 a name appeared which was to feature for more than the next forty years in the life of the college. I refer to the late Principal T.H. Spurgeon. He was appointed tutor in Classics, English and Hebrew in 1916, [117] and in 1921 he was appointed principal. [118] That same year saw a further reorganisation of college life. The syllabus was revised and for a time it seemed as though the whole future of the college was in doubt. Despite attempts first mooted in 1918 to bring the college to Belfast, [119] the college continued in Dublin until 1962. The rest of the story is known to the present generation of Irish Baptists and under the blessing of God we commence this new year (1970) with the highest enrolment ever attained in almost eighty years of the college's existence. Like the Apostle Paul of old we have good reason to thank God and take courage.

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A History of the Baptist Irish Society

(A summary of the paper given by Rev. I.J.W. Oakley to the Historical Society, 17th December 1970).

A Brief History

At the time when the Baptist Irish Society was formed at a meeting in London in April 1814, there existed in Ireland only five of the original eleven Baptist churches which had been founded during the administration of Oliver Cromwell over 160 years before. Even in these remaining churches spiritual life was at a very low ebb and the prospect for Baptist witness in the 19th Century was bleak indeed. Together with other factors, the advent of the Baptist Irish Society was under the hand of God to create a revolutionary change in this apparently hopeless situation and to lay the foundation of our modern Baptist witness in this island.

The men chiefly responsible for the formation of the Baptist Irish Society included Rev. Andrew Fuller, the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and others who had already proved to be warm advocates of overseas missions. The founders of the Society aimed to employ itinerant evangelists, to establish schools and to distribute Bibles and tracts among the people. One of the first workers of the newly formed Society was Rev. Isaac McCarthy who had earlier been ordained as an evangelist in the Baptist Itinerant Society with which the Baptist Irish Society was merged in 1814. McCarthy,and his friend Condel, had already been instrumental in the conversion of at least 70 people in the villages and towns within a 30 mile radius of Dublin in the year 1813. When they began their new work with the Baptist Irish Society they were soon assisted by men from England and Wales and also by the Baptist ministers in Dublin and Waterford as their duties allowed.

The work gradually expanded and in the year 1833, when numbers reached their peak, there were 10,000 children in the Society's Schools. They were instructed in the elements of reading and writing, with the aid of alphabet boards in Roman Irish characters, and then they received teaching from the Scriptures. Prodigious feats of memory were performed by some of these children. In the Ballina district of Co. Mayo, where there were 31 schools, 1000 children learned 3 to 20 chapters of the New Testament in one quarter. In some places the pupils were taught over a period to commit the entire New Testament to memory.

The Baptist Irish Society was also one of several agencies used by the Spirit of God in the establishment of 38 new Baptist churches, mainly in Southern Ireland, between 1804 and 1846. Some of these churches saw quite outstanding blessing on their witness. In the period of one year ending in March 1848, 4 Protestants and 28 Roman Catholics joined the Ballina Church. Furthermore, in the district of which this church was the centre there were 120 enquirers meeting weekly for instruction in 5 classes, and also a Sunday School of 120 scholars. Unhappily this promising work in

the South of Ireland suffered severe setbacks from the Famine and subsequent emigration. During that period over 3,000 people were lost to the churches.

The work and witness of the Baptist Irish Society continued until 1865 when it was merged with the Baptist Home Missionary Society to form the British and Irish Home Mission. Ultimately it became inevitable that important changes would have to be made in the organisation of Baptist witness in Ireland. Owing to the changing character of the work, a shortage of funds and a deteriorating political situation it was decided in 1887 that henceforth the work should be placed completely in Irish hands and administered from Dublin rather than from London. As a result of this decision the Irish Baptist Home Mission was formed in the following year.

The Work, the Workers and the Supporters of the Society.

(a) Strategy

The workers of the Society saw the need to be completely identified with the people to whom they ministered in their life and need. This was absolutely essential if they were to win the confidence and interest of these people. It was noted by one keen observer of Irish affairs that the Roman Church was the church of the native Irish not because of persuasion or instruction but because it *"has ministered in their sorrows, mingled with them in their tears, shared their perils and afflictions, has been hunted with them among the mountains, and has bent the knee by the side of the wretched pallet on which the dying sufferer breathed out his groans amid the pangs of death."*

In addition the Roman clergy were the adored pastors of their people *"because they labour with them by night as well as by day, during the week as well as during the Sabbath, because they are among them and are part of them; they suffer with them, share their sympathies....."* The influence of this observation is obvious.

The Society's own attempt to show true Christian sympathy and practical concern was supremely demonstrated during the Famine when food and clothing were generously given to an average of 2,000 persons daily without regard to sect or party. This recognition of the practical implications of the Gospel was to reap a rich spiritual harvest. Many of those who enjoyed the Society's beneficence and who had been neglected by their own spiritual leaders during this period, went on later to profess faith in Christ and confess him in baptism.

Another important aspect of the Society's strategy was the use in its schools of the Irish language, which was spoken in the first half of the last century by 2 million people. In doing so, the Society was probably the first among Protestant educational institutions to use the native language. Yet this step was not taken without opposition from certain friends of the Society for reasons which however, really amounted to prejudice. Later when English became better known, the Society was equally happy to employ that medium for instruction also. Although many of the early evangelists were Englishmen it was recognized in London that Irishmen ought to be increasingly used if possible. *"Such men"*, said Fuller, *"should not only be men of heart but gentle, prudent and ingratiating manners and well affected to the constitution and government of the country."* The Society aimed to employ as scripture readers, men who were above all mighty in the scriptures and humble and prudent in their dealings with others. *"For such men,"* said one leader, *"there is always a cordial welcome in their cabin. Their language, their manners, their customs, and (where they are known) their object, will ensure them the warmest corner, the pipe, the potatoe, and, if they have it, the milk and the lodging. To hear the scriptures explained in their own language, is the delight of the pessantry; their ready and appropriate expressions, during the exercise, fully demonstrate their attention to the subject."*

It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the Society's history when Irish was taught exclusively, members of the church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church had to be employed among its teachers otherwise progress could not have been made. These men used the Bible as their text book and

as they instructed others, they themselves frequently derived much spiritual benefit as they meditated on the message of the Scriptures. (Indeed there was a generosity and breadth of outlook among members of the Society and its supporters which might surprise some 20th Century evangelicals. This is apparent from a lecture given on behalf of the Society in Falcon Square Chapel in April 1844 by the Rev. J. W. Massie of Manchester. He told his fellow Baptists *"I do yet hope that there is more of good doing in Ireland, than we are at the first blush disposed to credit."* He noted the considerable number of people in the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian church who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. But he went further :-
"When I mark how the greatest men that ever trod the soil of our own land, or of other lands, have been honest, consistent members of the Roman Catholic Church, and many of them for a long time after they had obtained what we call evangelical notions; when I find a Wycliffe dying in the bosom of the church of Rome; when I hear a Luther preaching the doctrine of justification by faith, and subscribing himself an obedient son of the pope; when I read the elegant and beauteous thoughts of a Pascal, where he traces the glorious mystery of redeeming love; when I listen to the sweet tones and silvery eloquence of a Bossuet and of a Fenelon, and recall the benign character of many such men, in their associations, and sympathies, and exertions with their fellow men- I am contrained, shall I say to hope? - I am warranted to believe, that there have passed into the brighter and better world, through the portals of the church of Rome, those who shall cast their crowns at the feet of the Lamb and say 'Thou art worthy'.")

Finally, it is worth observing that the workers of the Society carefully avoided giving nedless offence by expressing political opinions which had nothing to do with the Gospel. Furthermore, they made no attempt to excuse what was wrong in nominal Protestantism and in the rule of the Protestant ascendancy. As it became apparent that they were *"stern foes of oppression and monopoly by whatever name they may call themselves"* and as

they uncompromisingly adhered to the principles of civil and religious liberty, they found among the people a growing readiness to hear and receive the Gospel which they preached.

(b) The Character of the Workers

The English pioneers of the work were deeply moved by the fact that Ireland was a land of misery arising from political injustice and a perverted Christianity. Observing on every hand, ignorance, superstition, suffering and degradation, one agent of the Society heard the cry of millions *"Come over and open to us the treasurers of Heaven, for we are on the brink of destruction for lack of knowledge."* He fervently hoped that this cry might inspire the brethren in England with pity and compassion.

The evangelists of the Society were men of great energy, conviction, and self-sacrifice. McCarthy himself between the years of 1814 and 1818 alone, travelled 20,000 miles on horseback and foot preaching sometimes three times a day. He regularly preached at 30 stated places in 5 counties. Using his fluency in Gaelic to good effect he was instrumental in founding or reviving a number of churches. During his years of service he baptized at least 191 persons. Many were the privations and discomforts which such men endured. When tempted to complain, they said they remembered whose they were and whom they served, the objects they had in view and the fact that when he was on earth, the Son of Man had not where to lay his head. Their labours and sufferings were not in vain. There were recorded many thrilling episodes in which quite remarkable cases of conversion took place and open-air baptisms were held before the eyes of great numbers of people.

(c) Message and Convictions

As might be expected the message of the Society's evangelists found its centre in the doctrine of justification by faith in the all sufficient

sacrifice once offered by Christ without the works or merit of men. They insisted that religion was a personal matter whose seat was in the heart. No rites, even those of divine appointment, had any inherent efficacy to secure the divine favour. Their utility depended on faith, repentance and the right spirit in using them. The preacher proclaimed that the glad tidings of forgiveness and salvation were for all who believed in the Son of God. They did not over emphasize their Baptist convictions but when asked, they explained them to Roman Catholics who frequently saw them as the only consistent answer to Roman Catholicism.

The Scriptures were accepted as the means whereby light entered the darkness of men's souls and banished error. Because of this conviction the agents of the Society widely distributed the Word of God in the sure conviction that it would not return to Him void. They also had confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit whose gracious and powerful energy was imparted freely to all who sought it in faith. They believed that the Gospel when applied by the Holy Spirit would heal the most inveterate moral maladies of Ireland. They argued that if the early Church so preached Christ that the Roman Empire fell before it, the same phenomenon could well be repeated now. Men's hearts might be the same now as then, but it was equally true that the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit were also the same. To quote Massie again :- *"If your work and if your gospel be of God, and your manner of preaching that which He in his word describes, and the spirit of prayer and faith be with you, such as He has promised to bless; I doubt not that the Baptist Irish Society may occupy a truly, honourable, and blessed position among the institutions of the day."*

As we rejoice in the achievements of the past and yet also realize the extent of the gound which we have lost in certain areas, the story of the Baptist Irish Society should challenge this generation to go forward in the name of our fathers' God to serve him as wholeheartedly as they did in making known to men the unsearchable riches of Christ.

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Christmas day almost exactly two years after he left home and was baptized into the fellowship of Eagle Street Baptist Church.'[6] The idea that he might become a preacher appears to have first come to him from Mr. Ivemey; and later under that pastor's direction he read theology and took up the study of Latin and Greek.[7]

'In four years from his arrival in London the labourer's son was an ordained minister of the Gospel, without the benefit of University or Divinity School.....'[8] Susequently he offered himself to the B.M.S. for service in Jamaica, but his offer was not accepted for health reasons. It was following this that the opportunity to work in Ireland presented itself to him.[9] This would appear to have occurred about the year 1832, since K.S. McLaurin places it at five years after he left home. He landed in Dublin. From there he went to Ballina and subsequently Coolaney. This small community is situated some four or five miles west of the village of Collooney, Co. Sligo. While there, he met and married Sarah Stuart, whose father was a linen merchant in the district. In all, John Bates is said to have spent seventeen years in Ireland before he emigrated to North America - presumably in 1849. He was accompanied by his wife and five children, all born in Ireland.

His first settlement in the new world was in the village of Cascade, Iowa, U.S.A., where a sixth child was born. Here John Bates combined the roles of preacher and farmer. A number of years appear to have been spent in Iowa, before he finally moved to Ontario, Canada. Meanwhile, one son, Samuel, died of wounds received while serving in the Federal forces in the American civil war.[10]

In Canada, Bates was Field Secretary - Treasurer for the Baptist Missionary Convention but found the travelling too much for his health. This was followed by a period as pastor of the Park Street Baptist Church, Hamilton, Ontario and then to the Dundas Baptist Church.[11]

From there he was called to the influential Woodstock Baptist Church, Ontario. 'During his term there the Church membership had more than doubled. They were loath to let him go and even tried to secure an assistant for him for 'all felt there was a blessing in him', the History of Woodstock Baptist Church (1892) says.'[12] 'After a year's rest he took up the work again at St. Georges but within the year, after a very short illness, came the end.'[13]

At this period Woodstock was the site of a Baptist educational institution, then called The Canadian Literary Institute. While a student there, one of John Bates's daughters, Mary, met and subsequently married, a fellow student John McLaurin. This daughter Mary was born in Ballina, November 16th 1846 and married October 12th 1869. She and her husband served as missionaries in India first with American Baptists and later with the Canadian Baptists - after the latter formed a spearate society. John McLaurin died in 1912 in Toronto. His widow returned to India in 1923 to live with some of her family, who were missionaries there, and died there in 1939 aged 92 years. One of John Bates's sons, Joseph, was the principal of the Woodstock College for a time. The youngest of the family, and the only one not born in Ireland, became Dr. Stuart Bates and was Field Secretary for McMaster University, then in Toronto.[14]

The missionary calling was present again in the family of John and Mary McLaurin. Their son, John Bates McLaurin, was born in 1884 in India.[15] Following his graduation from McMaster University and a brief pastorate in Toronto, he too went to India as a missionary.[16] During part of his service he was a teacher at Ramapatnam Seminary, 17 and subsequently organized a new seminary for the Canadian Baptists at Kakinada.[18] He was appointed Secretary of the Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission work in 1939.[19] Between this and his death in 1952 he was active in many Baptist gatherings including the Baptist World Alliance Assembly in Cleveland in 1950 and the Baptist Commonwealth Congress.[20]

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1. op, cit. p. 22.
2. ibid.
3. "Mary Bates McLaurin" p. 11
4. ibid.
5. op. cit. p 13f
6. p. 15
7. p. 16
8. ibid
9. p. 17
10. p. 27
11. p. 32f
13. ibid
14. p. 43
15. "J.B. McLaurin" p. 5
16. p. 19f
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