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IRISH BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

VOLUME NINETEEN 1986'87

IRISH BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JOURNAL

VOLUME NINETEEN 1986-87

EDITOR: JOSHUA THOMPSON, B.A.

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EDITORIAL

The growing interest and increased attendances reported last year have been maintained during the session just ended. Once more four instead of five meetings were held for the reason reported last year. However, it has been possible to arrange five meetings for the 1987-88 and details of the programme will be made available in the usual manner.

This nineteenth volume of the *Journal* offers parallels and contrasts in terms of men and methods during the last 150 years. The paper on post-World War II Baptist evangelism in Ireland was heard with intense interest by a large audience at the annual meeting. Many of those present were hearing for the first time of the strong evangelistic thrust begun in 1944 by the Irish Baptist Home Mission and continued for 25 years. Part of the charm and interest of this paper was that it was written and delivered by James McManus, one of the staff evangelists of the period. Malcolm Coles paper on 'Irish Congregationalism' was extracted from his 40-page booklet reviewed here and published in 1979 to mark the ter-jubilee of the Congregational Union of Ireland. The account of Congregationalism in Ireland raises some interesting points of contrast with the history of Irish Baptists. In the case of the papers on Thomas Berry (c1802 -1877) and James Hodge (1856-1928), they are a good example of the continuity and consistency of the Irish Baptist witness through times of political, social and religious change.

The Society, through its honorary secretary, has continued to offer assistance to researchers and others seeking information related to Irish Baptists. Help has also been given to our churches wishing to produce or preserve some reliable account of their history. Material for the Society's archives is always welcome.

Pastor James Hodge (1856-1928)

The Annual Meetings of the Irish Baptist Association in 1892 were held in Harcourt Street Baptist chapel, Dublin on May 24th, 25th and 26th. Pastor Archibald McCaig, until recently the pastor of Brannockstown church, Co. Kildare, but then classical tutor-elect of the Pastors' College, London, was in the chair. The report of a business session on Wednesday, 25th May states that:

> 'The President had the joy of giving the right hand of fellowship to several pastors and delegates who were for the first time present at the meetings. The names of the pastors received (were) F.G. Eland, Athlone; J.W. Pearce, Lisnagleer; J. Hodge, Ballykeel; P.A. Hudgell, Waterford; J.H. Boyd, Lurgan; A.S. Woodward, Cork; and R. Clark, Mountpottinger, Belfast. The new churches added (were) Mountpottinger, Cork and Limerick.' [1]

The Association secretary in his report commented:

> 'Ballykeel, which formerly was linked with Lurgan, now rejoices in a pastor of its own - Brother Hodge, formerly of Harcourt Street Evangelists' Society. We trust that he will soon see the work revive under his ministry.' [2]

Pastor and Mrs. Hodge came to Ballykeel from Dublin in March 1892. [3] His pastorate was to last for twenty-seven years. During that time, in addition to pastoral ministry, he also fulfilled the apostolic injunction to 'do the work of an evangelist', indeed he engaged in a phenomenal amount of evangelism.

Local people refer to James Hodge as Ballykeel's 'first pastor'. In a certain sense they are correct because he was the first pastor to live and work in the district with Ballykeel as his only charge. It is not clear where he lived at first. His address was simply "Ballykeel, Dromara, County Down".

When his ministry commenced the church had 33 members, the Irish Baptist Home Mission paid a grant of £72 and the church raised another £16 towards his salary. [4]

His ministry was fruitful from the start, and soon converts were requesting baptism. A baptistery was installed in the wooden hall (which housed the church) and it was in frequent use thereafter. Reporting on 1892 Hugh Chambers, the church secretary, noted that 'five of the converts have confessed their faith in baptism'. The *Irish Baptist Magazine* reported 3 baptisms on 4th September, 1 on 27th November and 1 on 8th December that year. In 1893 there were 2 on 12th March, 1 on 24th

March, 1 on 30th April and 2 on 16th July. Mr. Hodge evaluated his first year at Ballykeel :

> 'Work here goes steadily forward, members are united and prayerful. Our Sabbath evening meetings are well attended. The number of children attending our Sunday-school has doubled since the previous year. Several of the children profess conversion, two of whom have been baptised. Our Cottage meetings are held in various districts and well attended.' [5]

It was a chilly winter for the Hodges. Perhaps the editor of the magazine needed a space-filler and therefore he inserted the following note in the December 1893 issue:

> 'We regret to learn the roof of pastor Hodge's house was partly blown off during the late gales. It is wise at times to survey the heavens, but for a man to study the stars through his roof while the bitter winds of winter are playing through the rafters, is not pleasant. We trust no ill effects resulted to our loved brother or his family.' [6]

The church had grown to 39 members, had raised £33 and received a grant of £72 towards Mr. Hodge's salary and, in addition, had contributed £27 to the Home Mission. [7]

The evangelistic missions which are the main feature of his pastorate seem to have been inaugurated about 1894. His report to the Home Mission for 1895 stated:

> "Our work here is very widespread. We have had missions in different parts of the country, all attended with tokens of God's blessing. We might say that the country for miles round constitutes our parish. There is hardly a case of sickness we are not called to, and it has been my joy to point not a few dying ones to their Saviour.' [8]

In 1896 the Hodges moved to Lagan Green, Drumiller, Dromore, to a house which one visitor described as 'formerly an old baronial hall'. There were seven children in the Hodge family - James, Bella, Jeannie, Norah, Mary, Fred and Carey.

The New Chapel

The big event of 1896 was the erection and opening of the new chapel. The site for the building, on the Hillsborough road about two miles from the village of Dromara, was a gift from a Miss Alderdice. The ground belonged to Charles Wolfenden Alderdice (presumably her father) and was leased to the church for 999 years.

Mr. Hodge explained to the Home Mission, 'The old building having been pulled down, we met for the breaking of bread in a barn for some time, and had no evening meetings, but my time was fully occupied in preaching in other parts of the country'. The fact was that he travelled the country, north and south, to collect funds for the new chapel. The

subscription list [9] includes some interesting details : 'Collection at Opening Services £11 7s. 6d.; Tickets sold, £8 9s.; . . . Wood Sold of Old Building, £5 5s. 6d.; . . . Total Income, £217 19s. 8d.; Total Expenditure - Material, Wages, etc., £220 12s. 4d.; Balance due Treasurer, £2 12s. 8d.'

Mr. Hodge was his own 'architect, clerk of works, manager, collector, parson and clerk'. [10] In all his journeys through the country, and his daily visits to the chapel while it was building, he was accompanied by "Deacon James" - a true yoke-fellow. He told a visitor that he could never have got through the business of each day without "Deacon James". The visitor expressed a desire to see this uncomplaining, useful deacon 'that had never once said an unkind word'. He was taken to the hall door of the manse where he discovered that the trusty "Deacon James" was none other than Mr. Hodge's faithful little pony. A most neat little pony, trap and harness stood at the door.

The chapel was opened on Thursday, 17th December 1896 by Pastor Hugh D. Brown, M.A. of Dublin. On the Sunday following the opening Mr. T.R. Warner, secretary of the Home Mission, preached. The report states that 'although the chapel is only built to accommodate about two hundred, there were three hundred packed inside, and almost as many more outside. It is not often that a speaker has to take his overcoat off outside the chapel for the reason that if he once got into the building with it on, it would be impossible to remove it. However, such was the case at Ballykeel. With great difficulty the speaker squeezed his way through the vestry, on to the platform, having first removed his coat outside.' Service times were 12 noon and 6 pm.

The first Trustees of the property were Hugh Chambers of Cargygray, Anahilt , James Andrews of Mullaghdrin, Dromara, and John Greer of Tullynore, Anahilt. [11]

Pastor Hodge's Mission Work

The completion of the chapel was not an excuse to relax in the work, rather Mr. Hodge threw himself into evangelistic labours with apparently inexhaustible energy. In February 1897 a mission was held in the chapel. The *Irish Baptist* carried a preliminary report :

> 'We often hear of all-night sittings in the House of Commons, but at this centre the people are sitting up to the "sma' 'oors" to hear of the "things concerning the kingdom". Pastor Hodge writes, "I know now why God laid it on my heart to build the new chapel. Never since '59 has there been such a revival of religion".' [12]

It is worth reproducing the report of that mission and another at Edentrillick which immediately followed it. The report is by Mr. Robert Graham, Tullyglush.

> 'Pastor Hodge and some of the Ballykeel friends were desirous of having Special Services for a fortnight in their new chapel. Pastor Jardine was invited,

and came, intending to stop for two weeks, but remained a few days longer, because of the success attending his labours. After he left, the meetings were continued by Pastor Hodge till the end of the fourth week. Pastor John Taylor of Tandragee was invited to assist Mr. Hodge. He came promptly, was cheered by the manifest blessing attending the mission, and for three successive nights proclaimed the "glad tidings" as *he* is wont to do. The Lord made bare His arm, and the blessing was marvellous. The weather was unfavourable during the first week and the attendance was rather small, but afterwards, until the close of the mission, the building was too small to accommodate those who came. I had the pleasure of being at the meetings pretty often. From the beginning of the second week I saw many whose countenances indicated deep soul trouble; later on I saw the same faces beaming with delight. Every night we were meeting with fresh cases of anxious enquirers, and were cheered by hearing of others being converted.

'The last Friday night of the mission was one to be remembered. The building again proved to be too small. It was delighful to see so many young converts coming early this evening to get front seats, and to hear them tell in the presence of their neighbours and schoolfellows what the Lord had done for them. A pleasing feature was the unanimity that prevailed. Representatives from Presbyterians, Covenanters, Episcopalians, Methodist, Brethren, and Baptists were there, and testified (with a cordiality that I have seldom heard) to their experience of the saving grace of God.

'I need not say anything about the preaching. I have already given the names of the preachers, and that is sufficient to let you know that the "glorious Gospel" had the "old-time ring".

'Mr. Hodge, instead of being greatly fatigued by his labours in the mission, seemed almost ready to fly, if he had the wings. He was invited the following week for a two weeks' mission in Edentrillick Schoolhouse, and instead of going a mile he has gone twain. Showers of blessing from the Lord were falling so abundantly that he continued the meetings for four weeks. Some Christian men of age and experience say that they have not witnessed such a marvellous awakening in their neighbourhood, not even in '59 ... ' [13]

And so the work went on. Mr. Hodge had a tent hall which he took round the country. It had wooden walls and a canvas roof, and so, unike an all-canvas tent, the structure could be left on a site for a lengthy period of time. Of a tent mission at Drumiller in the early summer of 1897 Mr. Hodge wrote:

'It was hardly possible to get home some nights, the people were so anxious to be spoken to. There is a hunger in the hearts of the people for salvation which enables them to brush aside "the fear of man". They seem only anxious to press into the kingdom. My voice gave way, but Brother Thompson from Killyleagh came to the rescue.'

The tent was then moved to Tullyglush in July:

'On the opening night there the people evinced no desire to go to their homes on the conclusion of the meeting. There they sat, to be spoken to about the things that make for their everlasting peace.' [14]

Pastor Morton M.V. Dawson from Banbridge assisted in the Tullyglush mission. Of it a Mr. W.J. Adams of Dromore wrote, 'A large proportion of those attending the meetings professed conversion, and some backsliders have been restored. We have had no such blessed time since 1859.' [15] Next Mr. Hodge moved to Ballygowan for four weeks, and then to Closkelt in the Derryneil area for four weeks. At the same time he preached in Ballykeel each Sunday and had numerous baptisms in the church.

Every year thereafter, for as long as he was able, this was the pattern of his work in Ballykeel. He seemed to be free of any party spirit. Unsolicited testimonials to the benefit and blessing of his work were written by ministers of other denominations. [16] During a sad bereavement in his family, the death of Bella, his married daughter, Mrs. Lawther, in December 1914, the Rev. W. Gregg, minister of Second Dromara Presbyterian Church, stepped into the breach during Mr. Hodge's absence and for three weeks continued a mission near Dromara. [17]

About 1900 the first "Deacon James" died and the church made Mr. Hodge the gift of another pony which he also called "Deacon James". This animal was to log many miles in the Lord's work in the years ahead. Anahilt, Garvaghy, Shankill, Londonderry, Lurgan, Bleary, Gransha (Dromara), Ringsend, Edentrillick, the Diamond, Quilly, Edengo, Kinallen, Dunseverick (Co. Antrim), Kilrea, Burren, Coleraine, Poyntzpass, Ballmacarn, Bellshill (Scotland), Drumaknocken, Enagh, Loughaghery, and many other places which are not named, were the scene of Mr. Hodge's labours, many of them receiving repeated visits every few years.

What kind of preacher was he? Some senior members of the Ballykeel church have vivid recollections of his use of humour when preaching. His sermons were not lengthy, but direct and powerful. One writer described his preaching in these words:

> 'Raciness of style, originality of thought, an effective and impressive manner, and, at his best, an intense earnestness that burns like a live coal. These are the features in Mr. Hodge that seem to catch and hold his audiencess, while his direct thrusts at and fearless denunciation of the evils that beset human nature are well calculated to carry conviction.' [18]

Not only was he a gifted preacher himself, he sought to develop preaching gift in others. He had a local preachers group in the church. These, mostly young men, assisted him in his missions. Unfortunately we do not have any clues as to their names but we know that in 1916 there were nine preachers in the group.

As the years passed Gospel missions became less frequent and Cottage meetings on a regular basis were maintained. For example, for many years the church notices in the *Irish Baptist* indicated that in addition to the Sunday service at 12 noon, and the Prayer meeting on Thursday at 7.30 pm in the chapel, there was at Ballymacarrin a Sunday school at 4.30 pm, an evening service at 6 pm and a meeting every Wednesday at 7 pm; at Kilmartn there was a meeting on alternate Sundays at 6.30 pm; at Drumaknocken a meeting on alternate Wednesdays at 7.30 pm; at Crossgar

a meeting on the first Friday of each month at 7.30 pm; and at Loughaghery a meeting on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.30 pm. In 1909 the tent hall was erected permanently at Ballymacarrin, near Ballynahinch. Cottage meetings were held in other places not included in the above notice, such as Gransha, Dromara.

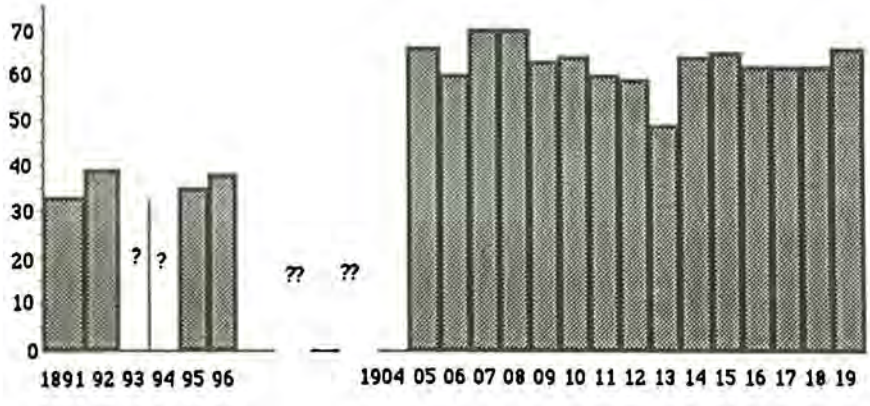
A mission which Mr. Hodge held at Bleary near Lurgan resulted in a Baptist church being formed there on 10 June 1903 with about 20 members. There was a good relationship with the Baptist church in Lurgan, and Pastor F.E. Bury, B.A. of that church took part in the service.

The Church

Hugh Chambers of Cargygray, Anahilt, was church secretary when Mr. Hodge came in 1892. He was succeeded by Samuel Scott, Leapoughs, Dromore, about 1905. Robert Graham, Tullyglush, Garvaghy, Banbridge, was appointed about 1908. Samuel McManus, Dromara, was appointed in 1916.

When the First World War commenced Mr. Hodge volunteered as an Army chaplain, but was turned down on account of his age (then 58). His three sons all joined the regular Army. [19]

The church members just had to get used to a man who was a zealous evangelist. Sunday evening services were either held or cancelled as Mr. Hodge's evangelistic missions and cottage meetings permitted. Surely there was wisdom in this practical arrangement. The membership which stood at 33 in 1892 reached a peak of 70 about 1908. Reports for 1910 and 1912 mention losses due to emigration. Membership returns published in the Irish Baptist during the period 1892 to 1919 form the following bar graph:



The Manse

In 1912 the Hodge family moved to Belfast to 4 Park View Terrace and later to 5 Ravenhill Terrace. For the remainder of his pastorate Mr. Hodge

travelled between Belfast and Ballykeel, lodging with families of the church during missions etc. The church report for 1917, submitted by Mr. McManus, noted that Mr. Hodge had been ill with 'brain paralysis'. The effects continued for some time and left him in a delicate state of health. Mr. Hodge offered to resign but the church would not agree to him doing so. In May 1918 the following appeal appeared in the *Irish Baptist* :

> 'The Baptist Church at Ballykeel and some friends outside the denomination are of the opinion that a Manse should be built for Pastor Hodge and his successors in the pastorate at Ballykeel. There are strong reasons for entering upon this work, even at such a time as this, and we shall be pleased to receive and acknowledge any donations that friends may be inclined to send towards the building fund. Robert Graham, Tullyglush, Banbridge, Co.Down.' [20]

Mr. Hodge and many others collected money for the manse. Mr. Joseph Coulter of Magheraconluce gave a free site of half an acre, and the church members built the manse by direct labour. Accounts are no longer extant and therefore the total cost of the manse is unknown, but it would appear from some notes in a treasurer's notebook that the reduction of the balance took the church some years and quite a lot of effort. Mr. Hodge never resided at the manse. He gave up the pastorate of Ballykeel about the end of 1919.

Pastor Hodge was respected throughout his own denomination and in many others. He was renowned for his evangelistic gift and was ever a 'fisher of men'. He died on 27th July 1928, aged 72, and is buried in Dundonald Cemetery, Belfast. [21]

J.R. GRANT

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1 Irish Baptist Magazine (hereafter IBM) June 1892, p.125

2 IBM May 1892, p.127

3 IBM April 1892, p.69

4 IBHM Annual Report 1896, p.5. 'The Bally keel station was just on the point of being given up by the Committee, the few people were meeting in a wooden hall.' [Editor]

5 IBHM Annual Report 1893, p.5

6 IBM December 1893, p.257

7 IBHM Annual Report 1893, pp. 13 and 30 (imperfect pagination)

8 IBHM Annual Report 1895, p.5

9 IBM March 1899, p.87

10 IBM January 1897, pp. 9-10

11 Trustees. Hugh Chambers died 13 May 1929; James Andrews died 27 September 1917; James Hodge died 27 July 1928 and John Greer died 6 June 1938. On 19 October 1938 the church appointed as their successors Robert Henry Graham, Tullyglush, Banbridge, John Moorhead, Carricknadariff, Hillsborough, James Chambers, Cargygray, Anahilt and the Baptist Union of Ireland (Northern) Corporation Limited. The latter Corporation is a continuing trustee.

12 IBM March 1897, p.73

13 IBM May 1897, pp. 121-122

14 IBM August 1897, p.194

15 IBM September 1897, p.217

16 IBM November 1897, p.274f.

17 IBM January 1915, p.9

18 IBM January 1914, p.14. The reporter was a certain R. McDonald.

19 IBM November/December 1918, p.143

20 IBM May 1918, p.87

21 His tombstone bears the inscription: "Erected by His Family in Memory of JAMES HODGE, who died 27th July 1928, aged 72 years. Also His Wife, ISABELLA, who died 2nd March 1933, aged 77 years. Waiting in Blessed Hope."

Editor's Note:

The paper that follows was read to the annual meeting of the Historical Society in Belfast on 27 May 1986. James McManus was employed initially by the Irish Baptist Home Mission to drive and maintain the motor-caravan and its equipment, and to assist in evangelism. The caravan carried the latest public address system and was custom built to house two full-time evangelists as part of the ongoing programme for pioneering isolated areas without a viable Baptist witness.

The evangelistic thrust, begun just before the end of World War II, was based on local churches and utilised some of the best evangelists the denomination has been privileged to produce. Their names were known in every Baptist household of the period, and they deserve to be recorded here. Hugh H. Orr, Jim Irvine, John McCrea, James Armstrong, Willie Mullan, Charlie Lutton, T.P. O'Connor, J.C. Keenan, J.E. Tetley, James McManus, Currie Brennan. These brethren were not all employed simultaneously. Some returned to and others entered the pastorate. By 1956 the evangelistic strategy of the Home Mission was changing with more emphasis on personal and open-air evangelism in the cities and towns of the south of Ireland with the appointment of Jim Ritchie, Harry James, Malcolm Fenton, George Thomas, Chris Robinson, Albert Allen in addition to the long-serving Cyril Reid.

The twenty-five years from 1944 - 70 were marked by remarkable fruitfulness in terms of conversions, baptisms and additions to church membership. During that same period 24 churches were formed, a increase of 45%, while the number of church members showed a massive 84% increase. That is not to claim that the whole of this remarkable growth was due to the Home Mission programme of aggressive evangelism, but that programme certainly revitalised the life of many existing churches and opened up counties Tyrone and Fermanagh to Baptist witness as well as focussing prayer and effort on the opportunities presented by the more open attitude engendered among Roman Catholics in the south and west by the effects of Vatican II.

This is the context in which Mr. McManus' paper is set. Its spirit breathes the atmosphere of those years.

∞∞∞

'Caravangelism in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties'

I would begin by saying that there were years of my life that I would rather not recall; years of my life as a Christian that were not glorifying to God. Times, when I should have been witnessing for Jesus, I was silent, because the inconsistency of my life was sealing my lips. Professing Christianity, there was little evidence that I was really a Christian.

In those days I was employed as a bus driver, coming into contact with scores of men each day; men who were without God and without hope; yet I knew Jesus could meet their need and give them hope. I was so ashamed. My life was full of things that were not honouring or pleasing to God. Seeking to live for both worlds, I found, is a miserable experience. I tell you there is no joy in it.

In the year 1947 I attended a service where a dear old servant of God was preaching on backsliding in the life of a Christian, and of God's dealings with such people to restore them to peace and joy. The Holy Spirit so spoke to me, convicting me of my sin and disobedience to God's commands, also revealing God's great love and patience to such as I was, that in the quietness of my bedroom that night, weeping bitter tears of repentance, I returned to the Lord, committing my life as fully as I knew how to Jesus Christ and receiving the promise of God from 1 John 1: 9 of His forgiveness.

I had received a new Bible as a gift a few days previously. I opened it, I believe, as the Spirit led me, at Joel 2: 25-27 -

> 'And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.'

What blessed help and encouragement I received from those verses. The Lord came afresh upon me, filling me with love and power as I rose up determined to serve Him in whatever way and wherever He wanted me.

Commencing next morning on early duty at 5.45 am I immediately testified to my conductor of God's work in my heart the previous evening. From then on God put His seal on my efforts; prayer groups and 'testimony bands' were formed among busmen. The hand of the Lord was upon us, and numbers believed and turned to the Lord.

This so encouraged me that I gave myself not only to work among busmen, but became more active in the local Baptist church at Ballykeel, and in the village where I lived, enjoying open-air witnessing and door-to-door visitation. Then a door to full-time service opened to me under the auspices of the Irish Baptist Home Mission, as it was known in those days, which gave me a wider field of opportunity. It came about this way.

One afternoon I waited nervously outside the boardroom in the Baptist Union of Ireland offices at 3 Fitzwilliam Street, Belfast. On the other side of the door were assembled some very important men. They were there to assess if I was a suitable person to assist in evangelistic work. The door opened and I was invited to face some twenty men who were all looking at me and waiting to appraise my worth. A number of questions were asked about my conversion and experience in Christian work. Then the chairman asked, 'Why do you want to leave the job you seem to enjoy so much, and live in a caravan travelling the country to witness for Christ ?' I replied, "Mr. Chairman, because of Christ's great love for a sinner like me. After all the Lord has done for me, could I do less for Him ? That love of Christ constrains me.' 'Thank you', he said, 'that will do. Now shall we engage in a time of prayer. ' After prayer I left the room with an assurance that I would be informed by the Secretary of the Committee's decision. A few days later I had a letter informing me that I had been accepted. My appointment began on 1st April 1950 with the responsibility of driving and caring for the Gospel Caravan and also assisting in evangelistic outreach.

With the Caravan I joined Pastor C.J. Keenan, who was then working as a Home Mission evangelist, in the Poyntzpass area. We commenced visiting the towns and villages within a 15 mile radius witnessing in the open-air, especially in the markets and cattle fairs which in those days attracted large crowds of people. Our itinerary included Newtownhamilton, Keady, Camlough, Markethill, Tandragee, Armagh, Banbridge, Hilltown, Rathfriland, Rostrevor, Warrenpoint and Newry. We also held two Gospel missions at that time - one in a tent at Poyntzpass, the other in Mullaghglass Orange Hall. It pleased the Lord to set His seal on the preaching of the Word by signs following. A number of people at that time were baptised, and I was told that it had been some 16 or 17 years since the baptistery in the Poyntzpass church had been used! We remained in this area for some five or six months.

On invitation we then moved to the Ards peninsula for missions at Kircubbin, Cloughey, and Ballyhalbert. The Caravan was used to reach a number of villages for open-air witness and door-to-door visitation - Ballywalter, Greyabbey, Portavogie and Portaferry. The indoor missions nromally lasted for four weeks. Again the power of God was evident giving salvation. For example, at Cloughey one afternoon an old man by the name of McNamara invited me into his home. He told me that, as a young man with two other men, he had owned a boat which they used to ship cobble stones to Belfast for paving the streets. One afternoon on a trip the boat sank and his two partners were drowned while he was rescued just

as he was about to go under for the third time. 'Last night', he said, 'God spoke to me in your meeting. When I got home I couldn't sleep. Please explain the way to be saved.' I did, and that afternoon he entered into the joy of God's salvation at 84 years of age.

Leaving county Down Mr. Keenan and I went to county Tyrone where we remained for 18 months, working in conjunction with the Dungannon, Lisnagleer, Knockconny, Gortmerron and Omagh churches. With the Caravan we visited all the monthly cattle fairs in the county. How thoroughly the county was covered may be guaged from the list of places visited - Moy, Pomeroy, Ballygawley, Aughnacloy, Augher, Clogher, Fivemiletown, Fintona, Beragh, Sixmilecross, Castlecaulfield, Drumquin, Dromore, Castlederg, Newtownstewart, Strabane, Plumbridge and Gortin. As in other areas missions were arranged. These were held in the Tullyvannon Hall connected with the Knockconny church, in the old Mullycar church building and in Ballygawley Orange Hall. A farmer, who attended for four weeks at the mission in Tullyvannon, continued to attend for another three weeks at the mission in the Orange Hall in Ballygawley. On the very last night of the mission after seven weeks, he remained in his seat after the rest of the congregation had gone. He was weeping. I sat down beside him and enquired about what was troubling him. He said, 'I came firstly to the Tullyvannon Hall to mock and disturb the meetings; now I'm afraid to leave this Hall tonight in case God would abandon me.' I told him again of the Saviour who would receive him and never leave him nor forsake him. That night before leaving he received Christ as Saviour and went home rejoicing.

In those days the church at Omagh had no building of its own, and held its services in the local Orange Hall. This hall was not available during week-nights and so we preached the Gospel for four weeks in the home of Miss Susan Jane Allison. We also had some house meetings in a home in the townland of Cavan just a few miles from Omagh. With 40 to 60 people present each week-night we considered these meetings worthwhile, and knew of some who came to a knowledge of Christ as Saviour. Similarly, the Cookstown church had at that time no building of its own and met in a hired hall. The church invited us to hold an open-air campaign in the town. The weather was sunny and warm. We were greatly encouraged to have the support of many Christians of different denominations as for two weeks we visited a different part of Cookstown each night for an open-air service. Much liberty was enjoyed in the preaching of the Gospel to the crowds who gathered. Hundreds of homes were visited with literature. I am pleased to report that in all this activity, both indoor and outdoor, numbers professed faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Immediately after the Cookstown mission Mr. Keenan, whose health was poor, resigned from the Home Mission and emigrated with his family to Jersey Shore, New York. I continued with the Mission for a further 15 years in direct evangelism. I was assisted from time to time by students employed by the Home Mission on summer vacation appointments. Some

of their names come to mind - Stanley Todd, John Lloyd, Cecil Bradley, James Henry, Raymond Compton, Raymond Arnold and Norman Baird. They were fine godly young men with a will to work.

After Mr. Keenan's departure my activities were mainly in counties Fermanagh and Londonderry. I served a few months in Kildare and Limerick. I also crossed the Irish Sea to Liverpool for an evangelistic mission there. Thinking of Fermanagh and Londonderry, the open-air witness in the fairs and markets was maintained on a regular basis. Through the goodness of God I was enabled to visit all the towns and villages from the Moy to Garrison, from Newtownbutler to Belleek, from Castledawson to Londonderry city. Right across the board thousands and thousands of homes were visited and opportunities were found to present the claims of Christ. To God's glory I have had the unspeakable privilege of counselling hundreds of souls of all ages, and have reason to believe that the vast majority of those counselled came into an experience of eternal life.

During these years of service God kept constantly before me two very important things - the need to be Christlike and the need to cultivate prayerfulness.

Christlikeness is something distinctive and attractive. We read that 'the world took knowledge of the early believers that they had been with Jesus'. While it is good and desirable to witness to the saving power of Christ with the lips, yet a life lived for Christ's glory always speaks louder and more effectively than words. Let me illustrate with a sad story and a joyful story from my own experience. The sad story first. While conducting a mission in Bushmills, I visited a Christian lady whom I had known for some years. Owing to ill-health she was confined to her bedroom. During our conversation she spoke of her daughter and her son, one a doctor, the other a chemist, both unsaved. In a spirit of brokenness and with tears she said, 'James, my husband's vile temper is hindering my family from coming to Christ.' There was no likeness to Christ in this man. Now the joyful story. One evening in the church at Londonderry where I enjoyed a fruitful mission, a number of enquirers waited for counselling. Among them was a young lady, who asked me bluntly, 'How can I enter into this so-called salvation ?' My immediate reply was, 'Why do you want this salvation ?' She answered, 'There is something lacking in my life. There is an emptiness. I am unhappy. I am missing something that Meta Mercer (a young lady member of the church) seems to be enjoying.' That evening Faye O'Brien received Jesus Christ as Saviour, and to-day He is filling and satisfying her with a life of useful service in Africa as the wife of Dr. Carson. Such is the influence of Christlike behaviour. Another story comes to me that illustrates how Christlikeness is distinctive and attractive. At Ballynahone Cross-roads in south Derry it pleased the Lord to bless richly the preaching of the Word in a tent campaign. A young lady was the means in that mission of causing others to seek the Saviour. She had professed faith in Christ some two years previously and, in the factory where she was employed, she had lived a life

that was glorifying to God. Many spoke to me of the reality of her faith and of the influence she had had on their lives. Her Christian life was distinctive and attractive. The one thing that matters wherever one is placed is the quality and beauty of life we are revealing. The strongest argument for Christianity is not cleverness and intellectual ability in preaching, but likeness to Christ.

Equally, prayerfulness is something which I believe is absolutely necessary in evangelism. I have witnessed times of blessing in places where many were gathered together praying. This spirit of prayer, I am afraid, is absent today, and, instead of many gathering to pray, this important ministry is left to the few. Outstanding in my memory are missions where 'the many' gathered for prayer - Ballymena, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Carndaisy, Carginagh (Kilkeel), Ballynahone and Londonderry. In each of these places there was an unusual consciousness of God experienced with signs following the preaching of His Word.

As far as Fermanagh is concerned, on my second period of service there I covered the entire county preaching in the open-air in every town and village. At the same time I held missions at Carrickapolin, Clabby, Stonepark, Lisbellaw, Garvery, Tamlaght, Newtownbutler, Rosscor, Belleek, Derrygonnelly and Enniskillen. I met much opposition in this county, not where I expected it but, sad to say, from those who professed faith in Christ. Many of them seemed determined to keep Baptists out. There were nights when I retired to the Caravan with a very sore and heavy heart. I did not expect help and encouragement from the world, but I did look for some love and co-operation from Christians in reaching souls without Christ. In many parts of the county I seemed to be treading a lonely path. My prayer was, 'Lord, deliver me from a hypocritical spirit. Give me more of Thy love. Enable me to love these brothers and sisters as a true child of Thine.' Yes, God did answer and undertake for me, so that I began to live with the victory of the risen Christ within. For example, I was invited to Newtownbutler for a mission. Immediately there appeared in the local press an advertisement for another mission in the district. I learned that this mission was only arranged when it was known that I was coming into the district, and the conflict was deliberate. With a sore heart I went ahead with my mission. During the third week of it I received an invitation to a prayer meeting on a Sunday afternoon. A number of brethren were to be there, all belonging to the group which arranged the mission in opposition to mine. I attended the meeting, nevertheless, and was asked to 'speak a word'. I did so, making reference to the things which I thought were hindering the Lord's work in the district, and speaking of God's dealings with me personally in the matter of co-operation between Christians. The Lord came among us in power as I spoke, melting and breaking our hearts. What a time of prayer followed! I believe we parted that afternoon as true brethren in Christ.

Often I have been asked if I found open-air and door-to-door activity profitable. Yes indeed, and I would encourage both methods at the

present, but I would add there must be prayer and adequate preparation beforehand so that the message comes as a word in season with the power of God resting on the speaker. I saw evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in open-air witness, for instance in Ballygawley, Moy, Brookeborough, Markethill, Tandragee, Poyntzpass, Bellaghy, Portrush, Rathfriland, Armagh and Hillsborough. In these places some people came to me and testified to receiving Christ during the course of the meeting. Others came into the Caravan and were counselled on their spiritual needs and condition. Some examples taken at random may serve to illustrate the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit as I experienced His grace in contacting men and women with the Gospel.

One afternoon, during visitation work in Bushmills, I went into a draper's shop. The lady who was serving said, 'I was in your meeting last night. I am a Sunday school teacher but I am not saved. Can you give me some help?' From the Word of God I pointed her to Christ.

During the Bellaghy mission I was asked to visit an old woman who had heard me speak in the open-air on God's love from John 3:16. Her grandson took me to see her in her bedroom. This old woman of 84 years had never been in a Gospel meeting in her life. That day I had the joy of leading her to Christ. God spared her for some months to witness to what God had done for her. Today there are a number of her friends who trusted Christ through her testimony.

I was very conscious,too, of the Holy Spirit leading me during the Cliftonpark (Belfast) mission as one after another I found prepared for the Gospel and longing for someone to visit them and point them to the Saviour.

An interesting case happened during the Clabby mission. Three aged sisters by the name of Mills, the youngest 77, the eldest 83, did not attend any place of worship. They were the children of a mixed marriage. The local parish priest called with them from time to time and was paid for his services. The sisters were the subject of prayer by two godly women, who had visited them for some years. They asked me to visit the sisters, warning me to be careful of the watchdogs about the place. I share most people's nervousness of snarling dogs that don't like strangers. However, the Lord protected me and I paid the first of many visits to that home. God, in His own time, answered prayers for their salvation, and I have no doubt in my mind that all three trusted Christ as Saviour.

While in Lisbellaw I visited a man who had once been wealthy, but had squandered most of his money in sinful pleasure. He still owned a large farm but was unable to work it himself because of failing health. I spent an afternoon with him discussing many Bible topics. After prayer I left him promising to call and see him again. Four days after this he arrived at the tent where I was holding the mission some five miles from his home. The Spirit of God was answering prayer for his conversion. That afternoon,

kneeling on the platform in the empty tent, he acknowledged his sin and confessed his need. God, being merciful, saved his soul.

During the Carrickapolin mission I was visiting in the area and came to a farmhouse. I saw a young woman, made myself known to her and invited her to come to the mission services. An aged woman appeared and soon let me know in no uncertain terms that I wasn't welcome. She was a good Churchwoman and didn't need my visits. I did my best to reason with her but to no avail. I left her, but as I walked up the lane to the road there came upon me the spirit of prayer. Stopping in the lane I began crying to the Lord to open those blinded eyes that the dear woman might see her need. Two nights later her neice began attending the mission. Speaking to her after one of the meetings she told me about buying a portable organ but the bellows were leaking. That gave me an opportunity and I was invited to the home to repair the bellows. I did so and at the same time had a conversation with the old lady. God gave me favour in her eyes in an interesting manner. She had lived in southern Ireland for many years. Her brother had been a member of the Orange Order, and she produced a well-preserved flute that had belonged to him, asking if I could play it. I obliged and she was greatly pleased. That was the beginning of greater things and when, about eighteen months later, she died in the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen, a message was sent to me by another Christian that I was 'to be assured that she died trudsting in Christ'.

In conclusion, I think of numbers of people saved during my time with the Home Mission now serving Christ in Ireland, Holland, Austria, Canada, Africa and say wholeheartedly, It was the Lord's doing and to Him be all the glory.

JAMES McMANUS



l to r: R.A.L. Mann (Home Mission chairman), John McCrea (evangelist), H.A. Johnston, ? ? (representative of Caravan suppliers), B.A. Jenks (President, Baptist Union), Frank H. Forbes (Home Mission secretary).

The Caravan was commissioned at the close of the annual Home Mission meeting during the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Ireland on 26 May 1948.

THOMAS BERRY (1805-1877)

Connacht Evangelist Extraordinary

Ireland's most westerly province of Connacht has, in Irish history, been the symbol of isolation, abandonment and social distress. In the twentieth century there has never been more than a handful of Baptist Christians resident in the province. Largely through the efforts of the Baptist Irish Society in the nineteenth century this remote and barren part of Ireland became the arena of sustained educational, evangelistic and pastoral work. The subject of this paper, Thomas Berry, was Connacht-born and trained. His long ministry, which was of a high calibre, was characterised by devotional integrity, intellectual ability, evangelistic zeal and organizational skill. From tiny beginnings in the little hillside hamlet of Coolaney he pursued his ministry to the east of his native Connacht in the midland towns of Abbeyleix and Athlone. In order to evaluate the contribution of this dynamic Gospel itinerant to Irish Baptist life and history, it is important to place him in the context of his own times.

Ireland in Berry's Times

When Thomas Berry was born in the quiet Connacht village of Easkey, Co. Sligo, in 1805 the convulsions of the 1798 Rebellion had died down considerably and the effects of the Act of Union of 1800 were beginning to tranquillise the stormy waters of Irish social and political life. Religious controversies were far from dormant and the polemical style of nearly all the evangelising agencies and societies remained unabated throughout the nineteenth century. Even the most elementary examination of Berry's ministerial labours and historical significance must fall within the ambit of the religious and social atmosphere of the times. Religious polarisation was copper-fastened by a series of events which included the formation of the United Irishmen as a secret society in 1796, and the foundation of the Orange Order in the early autumn of 1795 after a clash between the Defenders and the Peep o' Day Boys. In 1790 Theobald Wolfe Tone and Henry Joy McCracken, along with a few other liberal-minded Protestants, stirred by the fall of the Bastille, began to advocate the establishing of a new social order in Ireland founded on principles of civil, political and religious liberty. When the French landed at Killala in August 1798 they were

welcomed by a people inspired by old millenarian hopes of a deliverer from beyond the sea who would emancipate them from the tyranny of the "Sasanaigh". All this activity created not only communal turbulence but also precipitated parliamentary action in the form of the Act of Union which came into effect on 1st January 1801. This new arrangement raised expectations for the final demise of the penal laws and the arrival of Catholic Emancipation. The Act of Union had a calming and consolidating effect and, significantly, not only opened the way for Catholic Emancipation under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell, but also initiated an ascendancy reversal. The contemporary Irish historian, Patrick Corish, has commented helpfully on this rôle change:

> 'Protestants learned not only to live with the Union but to support it actively, as the Catholic majority in Ireland inevitably made a growing impact on public and political life. In the eighteenth century Irish patriotism had been very much a Protestant preserve. After the crucial decade of the 1790's it was well on the way to becoming a Catholic one.' [1]

In spite of the comparative calm with which the century was ushered in, many traumatic events would leave ugly pock-marks on the landscape of nineteenth century Ireland. The ancient agrarian agitations would raise their heads mainly under the *baton* of Michael Davitt and the invention of the 'boycott'. The Irish Question became the shuttlecock of British politics and the government of Ireland became not only complex but increasingly controversial. Henry Grattan used colourful language to describe conditions after the Act of Union:

> 'To find a worse government you must go to Hell for your policy and Bedlam for your methods.' [2]

On the religious front the eighteenth century has closed with few optimistic signs of a spiritual awakening:

> 'The Established Church presented a most melancholy spectacle to the eye of the Christian observer. Being considered by British statesmen rather as a political engine than an instrument of instruction in evangelical truth, its dignities and benefices were bestowed as a reward of political desert rather than moral and religious worth . . . The days of Ussher, Bedell and Jeremy Taylor were past; and scarcely one bishop can be named who laboured to promote the spiritual interests of his diocese.' [3]

Allowing for the pessimism of a hagiographical historian, it seems clear that things were in a state of disarray. On his third visit to the country George Whitfield declared, 'Not one clergyman in all Ireland is yet stirred up to come out singularly for God'. John Wesley exclaimed, 'O what a harvest might be reaped in Ireland, did not the poor Protestants hate Christianity more than either Popery or heathenism', and chided the Protestants who 'can find no better ways to convert them (the Catholics) than penal laws and Acts of Parliament.'

Events at home and abroad were to chart the course of everyday life in the Ireland of the nineteenth century. There was a population explosion from just over 4 million in 1785 to a record high of 8.2 million in 1841. In this century the usage of Irish also fluctuated - in 1845 about 50% spoke Gaelic; this was reduced to 23% in 1851. The era of the Great Famine during the 1840's led to the scattering of millions of Irish men and women to form a Gaelic *diaspora* . Words like "coffin-ship", "boycott" and "souperism" originate in this dark period of Irish history. In the decade 1851-1860 1,163,418 people emigrated and the population of Ireland fell from a high of 8,196,597 to a low of 6,574,278 in 1851. Th century was also marked by the rise of the national schools, the emergence of the Protestant missionary crusade and the consolidation of ultramontane Catholicism spearheaded by Cardinal Paul Cullen in the wake of the Synod of Thurles in 1850. The American Civil War and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1870 were other important events.

Perhaps the most interesting happening from the perspective of twentieth century Irish Baptists was the activity of the Baptist Irish Society characterised by remarkable enthusiasm and moderated by comparative failure in terms of numerical growth

Early Influences in Sligo

The subject of this study, Thomas Berry, found his feet spiritually through the Baptist Irish Society and became a strong advocate of their methodology. It is important to situate Berry in the social and religious milieu of his own period in order to assess his effectiveness. He represents a batch of Irish Baptist ministers who deserve an honoured place in our spiritual archives. These include Rev. J. Allen of Ballina, Rev. Josiah Wilson of Sligo along with M. Mullarky and I. McCarthy.

Thomas Berry was the son of a schools inspector, Denis Berry, who was appointed by the London Hibernian Society to superintend their schools in Sligo, Mayo and Roscommon. The village of Easkey on the Atlantic seaboard was his birthplace. His father's early death left a great gap in the formation of his spiritual character but it seems clear that Denis Berry made an impression on his early life. His father had identified with the Galway-born Methodist enthusiast, Gideon Ouseley, whose skill as an open-air evangelist and religious controversialist was widely recognised in the West of Ireland.

There is little doubt that Berry owed his conversion and early nurture to the Baptist Irish Society. The first report was published in 1815 and noted that the Committee resolved 'to establish two schools in the neighbourhood of Sligo'. By 1830 there were 57 readers of the Irish Scriptures and 102 day schools. It is estimated that over 600,000 children were taught in the Society's schools.

Agents of the Society were often enthusiastic evangelists and church-planters. Since the Society had its beginnings in Sligo it is no surprise to discover that even the small and isolated village of Easkey became a centre of activity. When Thomas Berry was in his late teens the work at Easkey

had shown signs of decline and renewal. The following extract from a report sent from Ballina by Rev. Mr. McKaag, dated November 20th 1824 contains an overview of the Easkey church:

> 'Easkey will now be mentioned as one.of the places where I often preached where a wonderful change has lately taken place; there was (I was going to say) a resurrection at Easkey within the last few weeks, and the dead continue to rise out of their graves in that neighbourhood. When brother Wilson introduced me to this place, we preached to thirty or forty careless or indifferent hearers; after this, instead of growing attached to me and my preaching, the congregation dwindled away to nine or ten hearers, and four or five of these were readers or school-masters under our Society. In this state Easkey remained for at least twelve months during which it appeared to me, that no man in the parish felt inclined to read the Scriptures except those who were paid for so doing.' [4]

The report goes on to speak of 'an open attack on the Baptists and for eight successive Lord's Days (the Rector) dwelt upon the subject of infant baptism.' A chain of prayer meetings within two miles of Easkey was set up and a central service was held weekly in a house in the village.

This modest little community cradled Thomas Berry in his spiritual infancy and when he attained the age of 23 years he, along with John Bates entered the service of the Baptist Irish Society, and devoted part of their time to theological studies in Ballina under the directon of Rev. J.P. Briscoe. This little Western Baptist Seminary, which had a life of about 10 years, came under the leadership of Rev. James Allen in 1830, who had as one of his objectives the training of young men to preach in Irish and also to procure some knowledge of the classical languages. In a note from Ardnaree dated 15th October 1830 an Irish reader (who may well have been Thomas Berry) wrote to the Committee:

> 'At present I have some little knowledge of the Latin, but as that pious and intelligent person, the Rev. Mr. Allen has taken so much care of my improvement, I hope he is able to acquaint you of my desire to be improved. Gentlemen, God prosper you, and may your exertions have a tendency to promote the advancement of the period, when all shall hear in their own language the wonderful works of God.'

After preparation in Ballina Berry, with characteristic trepidation and determination, entered the service of the Baptist Irish Society. His inner feelings on setting out to preach at a country station in Connacht have been chronicled:

> 'I found myself filled with awe as I was about to speak in the presence of Him who knows the secrets of all hearts and into whose service I was then about to publicly enter . . . I found myself relieved of all embarrassment whilst I was preaching Christ and Him crucified, as the only propitiation for sin and although I commenced with timidity, I was surprised to find myself filled with greater courage than I expected, for I practically experienced the promise of my Redeemer. [5]

The ministry of Thomas Berry spanned a period of almost half a century from his early beginnings in Ballina until his death in Athlone in 1877. It fell into three distinct parts - in north Connacht in his native county of Sligo and neighbouring Mayo, at Abbeyleix in the south midlands, and astride the Shannon in Athlone, the heartland of Ireland. From the fairly limited data available [6] we are able to reconstruct an over view of his work and draw some conclusions and historical perspectives from it.

The Rural Ministry in Coolaney

The tiny mountainous hamlet of Coolaney, in the heart of the picturesque Ox Mountains of Co. Sligo, was the setting for Berry's early work as pastor and evangelist. Three years before the little church was formed in 1833, an agent of the Baptist Irish Society wrote to Rev. Josiah Wilson:

'Coolaney, August 11, 1830

> Every Lord's day, before and after mass the people assemble in the house of M. M'O who is also a Roman Catholic. He has a Bible and reads it and is anxious to have it explained to himself and others ... Now they proposed going to mass and I went to church, having just agreed to meet on our return. I was not first back having the Sunday school roll to call, and my own class to attend; however when I did come I found them attentively engaged in discussing the matter between themselves, one party having the Bible and the other a Testament. I fell in with them and so we remained until late in the evening. No bad feeling seemed to arise in the breast of any; some admitted and others extolled the force of the Scriptures, and the plain simplicity of their statements.' [7]

Eventually a small church of 8 members was formed in 1833 with Thomas Berry as its pastor. There were occasional baptisms during his four year's ministry and he carried out an extensive evangelistic work along the lines of a circuit style. He kept a diary of his activities and the following entry shows a sensitivity to the stewardship of time:

> 'My time is thus employed:- On Lord's day, prayer meeting at eight, preaching at twelve, and at half-past-six in this town, and also at seven o'clock on Wednesday evenings. I preach alternately on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at Kiloran, Dinoad, Durish, Cloonacura, Beltra and Drumnagoole . . .'

This initial pastorate formed the pattern for Berry's larger spheres of work in Abbeyleix and Athlone under the aegis of the Baptist Irish Society. He never abandoned the itnerating method or the aim to establish stations.

Just Beyond the "Pale"

Abbeyleix is a small estate town astride the Dublin-Cork road, the seat of the de Vesci family. Situated in the centre of Queen's County (now Leix) it formed part of the plantation of Leinster in the reign of Edward VI. Rural

in character it has always had a substantial quota of tenant farmers and estate workers. The Baptist Irish Society judged that their youthful Connacht pastor/evangelist would be a suitable person to pioneer this new evangelistic post.

On 2 June 1838 Berry commented revealingly about his difficulties:

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

By 1839 Abbeyleix had 19 members, a net increase of 2 over the previous year. Berry had baptised seven, three had 'removed to another place' (whether by migration or defection is not stated) and two had joined the Ballina church by transfer. In 1840 he baptised five, and, following an appeal in the *Irish Chronicle* of February 1840, he anticipated sufficient financial support to allow for the employment of 6 Scripture Readers in his 'district'. By 1842 the church had grown to 26 members, ten having been added that year, among them four Roman Catholics. It was in 1843 that Berry had the assistance of 5 Scripture Readers, the upshot of his appeal three years earlier. This help, however, appears to have ended soon afterwards.

The Abbeyleix chapel had a baptistery and Berry held frequent indoor baptismal services. Commenting on this aspect of his work, he wrote in 1843:

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

It is interesting that Berry used public curiosity to his advantage in spreading his message and that he used the ordinance of baptism as a portrayal of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, i.e. a proclamation of the gospel. His tactics met with a measure of success. In 1844 the church membership was 27; in 1845, 32; in 1846, 35; and in 1847 (the worst year of the Famine), 37. These increments were small and hard-won, and conceal heavy losses through death and emigration over the period. In 1847 Berry personally visited 1,200 families in the area with famine relief supplies. He rapidly found himself busily engaged in maintaining up to eleven preaching stations, often travelling on foot and working late into the night. He managed to find time for annual visits to Lancashire in the interests of the Baptist Irish Society and also travelled to Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Clonmel to encourage the churches. In addition, he and his family had to face the horrors of the Great Famine and especially the destitution of 'Black Forty-seven' which decimated the Abbeyleix church. Baptists were diligent in distributing food to the starving, especially

Rev.Charles Hardcastle of Waterford and Rev. Thomas Berry. Soup kitchens were operated mainly by private relief societies, particularly the Quakers. The level of distress in the winter of 1846-7 was so great that a new Relief Commission was set up by the Government. The prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, secretly purchased supplies of Indian corn from the U.S.A. and stored it in depots around Ireland. Because of its raw taste it became known as "Peel's brimstone". In August 1847 up to three million people were receiving relief from soup kitchens. The Famine had immense social, medical, psychological and political ramifications:

> 'Many more people died from infectious diseases during the Famine than from starvation. The general name of "famine fever" covered several different types of diseases of which typhus, relapsing fever and dysentery were the most widespread. Though famine was confined to one class - the poor - and was concentrated in certain parts of the country, most particularly in the west and south-west, fever spread to all areas and all classes. Workhouses, soup kitchens, the holds of emigrant ships and all other places in which people were crowded together became conducive to the rapid spread of fever. Displaced persons who flocked to the towns and cities carried it with them. Many people who were engaged in administering relief became infected and died. [8]

The suffering and unrest caused by the results of the potato famine impinged upon the kind of work in which Berry and his companions engaged. They were faced with a social disruption which had appalling consequences as the following assessment portrays:

> 'All over the country large iron boilers were set up, in which what was called "soup" was concocted; later on Indian meal stirabout was boiled. Around these boilers on the roadside there daily moaned and shrieked and fought and scuffled crowds of gaunt, cadaverous creatures, that once had been men and women made in the image of God. The feeding of dogs in a kennel was far more decent and orderly.' [9]

In Abbeyleix the ravages of the famine put heavy demands on those who ministered the Gospel. The total number of deaths in Co. Leix from 1841-1851 was 22,861. In 1847 'the black year' 4,616 people died. The Berrys married Christian proclamation with Christian compassion:

> 'During that terible year of want and destitution, Mrs. Berry gave valuable help to her husband in his noble efforts to feed the hungry. In response to earnest appeals, the English and Americans sent over large supplies of food for distribution. Some of Mrs. Berry's surviving daughters can remember their mother three days in the week standing for hours at an open window dispensing food to the starving crowds that came from every quarter.' [10]

Evangelical mission work in nineteenth century Ireland was often charged with proselytism or 'souperism'. Those who 'took the soup' were sometimes ostracised and charged with selling their souls for the soup. In March 1856 the *Kilkenny Journal* ran a series of editorials with headings like "The Soupers At Bay" and "The Great Souper Conspiracy" [11] The

Baptist Irish Society was spared the most severe charges of 'souperism' and Berry recorded only one incident of this kind in Abbeyleix and the man involved was 'restored publicly after 24 years' to Baptist church life. In 1848 the church membership declined to 33, two members having died and sixteen emigrated, these losses being offset by 13 additions (4 by transfer from other Baptist churches, 8 by baptism and 1 by profession), a net decrease of 5. The following year another six emigrated, one died and two were excluded, but the church still reported 31 members, which meant that seven had been admitted. In 1850 there were 37 members, 19 had been baptised and added, 13 emigrated. By the end of 1850, the drain of emigration continued to sap the membership, another nine members leaving - 3 to Bradford, England, and 6 to the United States. The following year saw a further decline to 18 members, and late in the year the congregation had been completely scattered by emigration, leaving only Berry and his family. Although Berry stayed another year, the church never recovered from the effects of the mass emigration which depopulated the whole vicinity of Abbeyleix, and by 1853 was defunct. Berry was moved from Abbeyleix to Athlone in 1852.

Long Labour At Athlone

The last centre of Berry's notable ministry was the large midland town of Athlone where Baptists had first settled in the Cromwellian period. The present chapel was erected in 1845 and was only seven years old when Berry arrived in 1852. He quickly established a circuit of eight preaching stations and built up a substantial evangelistic enterprise. He was instrumental in building up the work at Moate and also the largely rural congregation at Rahue near Kilbeggan. It was always his ambition to 'die in harness' and the closing years of his life were marked by incredible energy and faithfulness. His labours fanned out in every direction from Ireland's most central town and laid the foundation for a style of ministry which prevailed in Athlone well into the present century. Berry was a man with a vigorous constitution who won the affection of his fellow-Baptists and the respect of the townspeople in general. His last sermon at Rahue, the little Baptist oasis in the south-eastern corner of Co. Westmeath, was preached at the funeral of the church's oldest member. He returned to Athlone worn out physically and, after fourteen weeks in bed, died on Sunday 9th December 1877 'as sweetly and gently as a little child'. It is recorded that Thomas Berry travelled forty Irish miles to fulfil a preaching engagement on the Sunday before his last illness. His funeral to Cornamagh cemetery on the outskirts of Athlone was attended by 'a great company of the townsfolk, leading tradesmen and ministers of all denominations'. The shops closed as a mark of respect but his departure from a long and useful life was lamented most by his scattered flock. Mrs. Berry, who like her husband Thomas, was a native of Sligo survived him by 16 years and spent her final days at Ballymena manse in the care of her daughter, the wife of Rev. Thomas Whiteside, pastor of the Hill Street church. She died in her 88th year and her body was brought back by train

to Athlone for burial. Rev. J.W.D. Freeman, minister at Athlone, and her son-in-law, Rev. T. Whiteside, conducted the service in the plain little chapel where her husband had ministered so faithfully for almost half of his ministerial life.

Some Lessons From His Life

In assessing Berry's life and ministry we are able to assemble a collection of impressions which may be situated in the context of nineteenth century Ireland and then recalled and positioned within the ongoing task of Irish Baptists at the end of the twentieth century. The following set of observations is offered as a contribution to the task of formulating a strategy of advance and consolidation in the modern context.

1. Thomas Berry is representative of a whole procession of ministers in the service of the Baptist Irish Society who were characterised by devotional fidelity to the person of Christ and courageous commitment to the evangelistic task of the Church. It is noteworthy how he achieved such extensive penetration into the rural communities and small hamlets of the countryside - such as his visits to Achill Island where he was one of the first missionaries to preach the Gospel in the Irish tongue.

2. Berry's life illustrates the importance of training and preparation for the Gospel ministry which was part of the policy of the Baptist Irish Society. Although the little seminary in Ballina was modest in strength and short in duration it was by no means elementary in its curriculum. There was also a pattern of serious study linked with in-field experience.

3. The overall picture of Berry's work suggests considerable flexibility accompanied by a carefully planned strategy. While much of the work was weakened by defection, emigration and death, its decimation came about mainly through extraneous circumstances rather than defective planning.

4. As an itinerating agent of the Baptist Irish Society with its base in Great Britain, Mr. Berry and his associates displayed remarkable versatility and sensitivity to the cultural and religious atmosphere of their age. His nurture in the west of Ireland gave him a natural aptitude for co-operation and the recognition of the prevailing climate of religious thought in the country. There was a close relationship in many places with the clergy of the Established Church, other Dissenting ministers, and where possible, courteous attitudes to Roman Catholic priests. Berry, within the custom of the period, was an innovator who took advantage of every situation by showing considerable pragmatic prowess. He preached at wakes, funerals, "keening houses" (mourning rites) and rural gatherings of every kind.

5. Modern Baptists cannot fail to be challenged by Berry's strong social conscience. In some ways the ravages of the famine left him little

choice and his spiritual flock in Sligo, Leix and Athlone was composed largely of small tenant farmers and labourers. He made their needs his own and took them to his heart. Spurgeon's dictum that "theology is cold stuff on an empty stomach" would have been well received by Berry. He busied himself with feeding the hungry, finding work for the unemployed and even arranging passages for the emigrants. All this was done without losing an ounce of zeal or departing a hairsbreadth from fidelity to the Gospel of God.

6. Above all, Thomas Berry was an example of courtesy and personal godliness. His life was filled with the beauty of Christ and gave validity to his words and preaching activities. The memory of Thomas Berry inspires us to emulate the example of one who, in the lineage of Barnabas, was 'a good man and full of the Holy Spirit'.

ROBERT DUNLOP

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1 Patrick Corish, The Irish Catholic Experience, (Dublin, 1985), p.150

2 Seamus MacCall, A Little History of Ireland, (Mountrath, 1982), new edition p.40

3 C.H. Crookshank, History of Methodism in Ireland, (Belfast, 1885), pp.4-5.

4 Baptist Magazine, December 1830.

5 Irish Baptist Magazine, January 1891.

6 I am indebted to Joshua Thompson, (Honorary Secretary of the Irish Baptist Historical Society), for some of the information that follows.

7 Baptist Magazine, 1830, p.443.

8 The Famine in Ireland 1845-51, Facsimile Documents. PROI, Dublin. Facsimile 10, p.27.

9 Quoted in Memoir of Thomas Berry in The Baptist Handbook for 1877, p.336.

10 Obituary of Mrs. Berry in the Irish Baptist Magazine.

11 Desmond Bowen, The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-1870, (Dublin, 1978), p.241.

Editor's Note:

It was a pleasure to welcome Rev. Malcolm Coles, secretary of the Congregational Union of Ireland, as one of our speakers during the past year. The invitation was prompted by the appearance of his account of the Congregational Union from its formation in 1829 (reviewed in this issue). His talk was largely based on that publication and for that reason is not printed here. Instead we reproduce the handout Mr. Coles prepared for the meeting, and refer those who are interested to Mr. Coles' booklet for detailed information.

The history of Independents (later called Congregationalists) in Ireland has parallels with the rise and progress of the Baptist churches there, but those who obtain and read Mr. Coles' pamphlet will be struck more by the differences than the similarities of the two communities in nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland. For example, English Baptists showed more perception and sensitivity than their Congregational counterparts in dealing with Irish Baptists, though, like them, they controlled their operations and expenditure in Ireland from London. Also the tensions, which bedevilled the relationships of the Congregationalists, were absent from those obtaining among the Baptists.

A Survey of Congregationalism in Ireland

1. INTRODUCTION

   The Celtic Church
   "Brownists" and "Burrowists" - Separatists in Ireland by 1594

2. CROMWELL'S ARMY AND PREACHERS

   Independent Ministers in Government service
   Scholars at Trinity College - John Owen 1649
   Preachers 1651-1659 : Samuel Winter, the Mather Family, Stephen Charnock
   The Restoration 1661 - Episcopacy and liturgy re-instituted

3. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

   Dublin Churches: New Row, Eustace, Cook and Wood Streets
   Provincial Churches: Richhill 1799, Cork 1750, Moy 1796, Youghal, Carnmoney, Kilkeel, Aughnacloy, Glenvale.
   Countess of Huntingdon: Plunkett Street, Dublin 1772. Rev William Cooper.
   Thomas Kelly : Maryborough and Waterford

4. CONGREGATIONALISM AND THE HALDANE BROTHERS

   Ballycraigy 1805, Richhill 1799, Donegall Street, Belfast 1801

5. THE IRISH EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

   London Hibernian Society 1806
   Irish Evangelical Society 1814 - Control leading to conflict

6. FOUNDING OF THE IRISH UNION

   26 November 1829 in Donegall Street church, Belfast
   Pattern - Founding Members - Constitution
   1830 accessions Moy, Armagh, Bangor, Limerick, Mallow
   1831 do. King's Inn Street, Dublin, Londonderry, Sligo
   1833 do. York Street, Dublin
   Academy re-opened 1832

7. DISSOLUTION OF THE UNION 1848

Internal dissension North/South polarisation
External opposition from IES - Liverpool Conference 1841
Famine and Emigration

8. CONGREGATIONAL HOME MISSION (formed 1853)

Help from Scotland - Congregational and United Presbyterian Churches
Amalgamated with IES 1861
Transferred to Irish Union 1899

9. REVIVAL AND RENEWAL

Effects of 1859 Revival
Renewal 1860 - Union reformed
Denominational consolidation
Irish Congregational Magazine 1862

10. YEARS OF DECLENSION 1880-1940

Evidences: Life - activity - death
Causes: Doctrinal - Rationalism/ Liberalism/ Social Gospel
Ecclesiastical - Organisation/ Trusteeships/ Councils / Accreditation/ Presbyterian ethos
Political - The Irish Question/ Home Rule
First World War
Easter Rising 1916 / Irish Civil War
Second World War
Closures of churches

11. YEARS OF RECONSTRUCTION 1940-1986

Churches revived: Donaghey, Larne
Churches opened: Abbots Cross 1952, Newtownards 1971, Moneymore 1976, Raphoe 1986, Knockbracken extension
Ecumenism
Missionary endeavour 83 missionaries and candidates with various missions
Constitutional revision 1984
World Evangelical Congregational Fellowship to be inaugurated in London, October 1986
Currently, 25 churches throughout Ireland.

MALCOLM COLES

BOOK REVIEWS

Jack Hoad, *The Baptist* , (Grace Publications, London, 1986), 368 pp. £10.95 (hardback), and £7.95 (paperback).

Knowing the author of a book both helps and hinders a reviewer. Jack Hoad is known to and respected by the older generation of Irish Baptists through visits to our annual Pastors' Conference and his involvement in FEBE (Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Europe). He writes as a Strict Baptist and from that viewpoint.

The thesis of this book hangs on the author's definition of a 'baptist'. "The baptist is neither a heretic nor is he sectarian but wholly orthodox. He neither adds nor subtracts from revelation but is the upholder of mainstream christianity as defined in the all-sufficient Word of God." (p.3) This definition allows the author to argue that early Christian churches were 'baptist' , to claim as 'baptists' a variety of radical religious groups and movements prior to the seventeenth century, and narrow enough to enable him to reject as 'truly baptist', in the twentieth century, "large numbers of churches in Britain, and elsewhere, which retain the descriptive 'baptist' . . ." (p.9) By the same process he rejects the documented conclusions of historical research which firmly place the origins of Baptists in the early English Separatist movement. Consequently *The Baptist* (as to the first five chapters) is not to be read as a history of Baptists, but as yet another attempt to trace an early Baptist ancestry.

Chapters 6 - 13 are a kind of 'Cook's tour' of Baptists around the world. Of particular interest to Irish Baptists are pages 156-7 devoted to Baptists in Ireland. Alas! here is our own home-bred Alexander Carson described as 'a Scot', while (based on a misreading of Whitley) that revered Scot, Christopher Anderson, is given far more credit for the formation of the Baptist Irish Society than he himself would have allowed. To place the 1859 Revival "towards the end of the nineteenth century" and to state that Irish Baptists "formed themselves into an Irish Baptist Union with 86 churches and 4,400 members" are but two examples of distortion by compression that mar this brief, disappointing section.

Other inaccuracies scattered throughout the book suggest that Mr. Hoad on occasions, has relied too heavily on outdated sources.

Perhaps the value of *The Baptist* lies in its apologetic rather than its historical sections.

Malcolm Coles, *I Will Build My Church: The Story of the Congregational Union of Ireland 1829-1979* , (Belfast, 1979), 40pp.

This modest publication written by the minister of Connsbrook Avenue Congregational church, Belfast, is not a history of Congregationalism in Ireland but a history of the Congregational Union of Ireland. The Union was formed in 1829 as a response to 'the rigid control and interference from London by officials of the Irish Evangelical Society who denied the Irish Churches their liberty in the Lord and the right to seek assistance from the

English churches'. (p.19) Mr. Coles is open and forthright about the organisational and doctrinal tensions and conflicts which beset Irish Congregationalists subsequently.

It must be a cause for rejoicing among Irish Baptists that (as Mr. Coles shows) our Congregational friends are now manifesting more strongly the evangelistic and missionary fervour which characterised their early witness. They have severed formal links with English and Scottish Congregationalism and the Congregational Council for World Mission, and affirmed their conservative evangelical stance. They have also extended the hand of friendship to other evangelicals in Ireland, including the Baptist Union of Ireland. They deserve encouragement in the interests of the Gospel.

Vincent Abbott, A Place Called Rahugh , (1986), 60pp. IR£2.50.

Vincent Abbott was born and reared in Rahugh, Kilbeggan in Co. Westmeath and has lived there all his life. A lifelong interest in local history and tradition lend flavour and atmosphere to this lively, little production. Two short but valuable sections deal with 'The Baptist Colonisation in Rahugh' and the 'Baptist Church in Kiltubber' and there is useful data about Major William Lowe, a Baptist officer in Cromwell's army, who received a grant of land and established and endowed the Baptist church at Rahugh. Among the many photographs is one of the Baptist chapel ruins at Kiltubber!