The Nottinghamshire Baptists and Social Conditions

VICTORIAN chapel-going business men are not infrequently portrayed as hard-fisted, self-centred hypocrites, ostentatiously religious, exhibiting an excessive care for the souls of the poor but with little concern for their bodies. They may have shed fervent tears for the benighted African, but beneath their benevolent exterior lurked the hearts of true business tycoons. This is, of course, a caricature, but does this caricature contain important elements of truth? Were these men knowingly blind to the poverty and social evils around them, and were they unwilling to allow the fundamental changes in the industrial system which were necessary if these evils were to be remedied? The men to be described were of this class. They were prosperous business men with many demands on their time, they took a very active part in civic life and yet they found time to take part in church life where they often exercised leadership. How far did they apply their religion to the daily life of commerce and public life? Did they display their Christian principles, not only in the spending of their money, but in the making of it, and did they carry out their civic responsibilities with a spirit of stewardship?

Certainly there were periods in the nineteenth century when religion had friends of doubtful sincerity, there were church-goers whose religious convictions did not go very deep, and there may have been more than the occasional hypocrite. Hypocrites, however, are fairly easily recognised, and it is inconceivable that any substantial number of such people could have been accepted as members of a Baptist church, have undergone baptism, have spent a period within the church fellowship and then have been elected to the diaconate unless they had genuine religious convictions. Indeed, there is an example of at least one Nottingham wealthy business man, Richard Birkin, who had proceeded thus far, and then was actually excluded from a Baptist church for a time when found guilty of a moral misdemeanour.

To describe a typical Nottingham Baptist of this class, we may say that he would almost certainly have been a Particular Baptist, a member of the Calvinistic section of the denomination. Particular Baptists had been in Nottingham since the seventeenth century, and thrift and industry had made some of them prosperous. He would almost certainly have been a member of the Friar Lane Church, which later moved to George Street, and in the latter part of the century he would probably have belonged to the more radical group which split off and formed the Derby Road Church. He would doubtless have been a deacon and, for much of the century, he and

his fellow-deacons, together with deacons of the Castlegate Congregational Church, would have formed the majority of the town council. He may have been an alderman or have served as mayor, and he certainly was one of a group which controlled much of the trade and administration of the town. At the same time it must be made clear that, though this man was typical of his class, he was not altogether a typical Baptist. As has already been shown, the great majority of the rank and file of the Baptists were working class or lower middle class. He and his class, however, would have formed about ten per cent of the membership of a church like Derby Road.

From where did these prosperous Nottingham Baptists come and where did they go? The answers are that these manufacturers and merchants of the nineteenth century were the more able sons and grandsons of manual workers or, more especially, of the retail traders of the early part of the century. As families became rich, however, there was a tendency for later generations to move into the Anglican Church or even out of church life altogether. Richard Birkin, who laid the foundations of the Birkin lace mills, was very active in Baptist life. His son, Sir Thomas Birkin, baronet, and subsequent generations do not appear in Nottingham Baptist records. The Bayleys, on the other hand, remained active Baptists for four generations. Their leather factory still prospers. Others who continued as Baptists included two generations of Ashwells, dyers and bleachers, whose business also still exists, and two of the Barbers, John Houseman Barber, grocer and chandler, and his son Richard Gresham Barber who was agent and manager for Thomas North at the Babbington Colliery. Few prosperous families stayed within the Baptist fold for more than a generation or two. An exception is the Bright family, a family of lawyers, one of whom became Sir Joseph Bright and mayor of Nottingham.

In considering how these men applied their Christian principles as employers and civic leaders, we must do them the justice of judging them in the light of their times. Ideas and ideals develop gradually and a later generation, with longer experience of the industrial scene and with the advantage of hindsight, will have clearer ideas on how ethical principles should have been applied. Another fact to remember is that the men we are considering were in business as private individuals or as partnerships. Until 1835 there was no limited liability. A shareholder of a joint stock company, or a partner, was liable to the full extent of his possessions for the debts of any company in which he had a holding. He could not sit back, as many people can do today, and spend other people's money lavishly without suffering the financial consequences. He could not shelter behind limited liability and retain a private fortune if his company went bankrupt. In a bad year he could be stripped of all he possessed and any one of the frequent fluctuations of trade could reduce him to poverty. Indeed, mortality among the Nottingham hosiery firms was high. In 1815 a hundred and twenty-seven went bankrupt; in 1844 fifty-six collapsed, and there were Baptists among them. A

business man's only safeguard against periods of trade depression seemed to be to build up sufficient capital to withstand them. This is not to justify wrong practices but to give something of the background to trade in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Church minute books, especially those of Friar Lane, often refer to bankruptcies. The reason is interesting. A man unable to pay his creditors became subject to church discipline. This was not because he had failed in a society which set a high value on business success, but that the question would arise as to whether he had conducted his affairs with honesty and diligence. On 30th September, 1811, for example, three members of Friar Lane were deputed to investigate "friend Bestall's failure". They reported that "he has acted as an honest man, having given up all for the benefit of his creditors". He was, however, excluded three months later. On 27th November, 1815, William Leake was excluded, the church judging that his failure was due "to a want of industry and attention to his business and that he had been guilty of falsehood and lying to a great degree". In other cases where no blame seemed attached to the individual, no disciplinary action was taken. As late as 1873, when S. S. Sully, a deacon of Broad Street, became bankrupt, he was expected to resign from the diaconate, but the church hoped that he would retain his connection with them and that his affairs would prosper, enabling him to meet the just claims of his creditors.

The reason why the church took a serious view of bankruptcy was not that undue value was placed on industry and thrift; hard work and the ability to manage money were certainly valued, but what was actually condemned was dishonesty and carelessness where other people's property was involved. For instance, John Elwes of George Street, although not actually bankrupt, was excluded on 30th October, 1850, "for having acted disreputably in business matters". Furthermore, to expect a bankrupt to pay his creditors in full, should he ever be able to do so, was going beyond what the law required. In these matters, one thing at least stands out clearly, the Nottingham Baptists expected Christian standards to be applied in daily business relationships.

Nottingham Baptists and the Industrial Revolution

The examples quoted above illustrated the business principles of relatively small firms and their relationship with other businesses and with the public. Larger factories, however, were coming into being, and some of them were owned by Baptists. How far were the operations of these larger undertakings modified by Christian principles? The two main industries of Nottingham were hosiery and lace. Both had existed since the sixteenth century and both, while remaining cottage industries, expanded rapidly toward the end of the eighteenth century. Hosiery was traditionally made on a pedal-operated stocking frame invented in 1589 by William Lee, a clergyman of Calverton, a village near Nottingham. The stocking frame eventually brought immense trade to Nottingham. In 1812 there were 25,000 frames in the town.

The great demand for yarn led to the invention of Hargreaves's "Spinning Jenny", based on the spinning wheel. It was worked by hand but produced several threads at once. A few years later Arkwright introduced a new process by which yarn was produced by roller spinning, his mill being operated literally by horse power. Both these men established factories in Nottingham, but later Arkwright moved to Cromford and erected a mill operated by water power, which is still in existence. Steam power was applied in 1785.

Lace making received a great impulse in the 1770s when it was found that cotton net could be produced on a stocking frame. Later, machines were developed which produced a patterned lace on a net background. It was the invention of the bobbin net machine by a Baptist, John Heathcote, in 1808, which established the lace industry on a really substantial scale. Heathcote set up a factory in Loughborough which, in 1816, had fifty-five hand-operated machines. That year the factory was destroyed during the Luddite risings, and Heathcote transferred his operations to Tiverton in Devon where the company still flourishes with a diversified range of products and provides the main industry in the town. Power-operated machines were gradually introduced into lace manufacture, steam power coming in 1825, but hand machines continued to operate for a long time thereafter. Power-driven machinery came into use in hosiery manufacture in the 1830s.

It is at this point that a small amount of information becomes available about the relationship between Baptist employers and their employees. Heathcote appears in a favourable light. William Felkin says that he paid higher wages than was normal in the trade and that when Nottingham factories worked twenty hours a day, Heathcote's factory worked only fourteen—from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Some of the advantages gained by his new invention were evidently shared with his work people. At Tiverton he built a model factory for his employees and in 1843 provided a school for their children. Paternalism perhaps, but the story of the Industrial Revolution would have been very different if paternalism had been more widespread. Felkin, writing in the 1870s[1], says: "His invention gave to Nottingham a trade which within fifty years assisted to double its population, giving employment at a fair wage to probably 150,000 workpeople, and for the past 30 years has made an annual addition of £4m. to the trade of the country."

Luddism

William Felkin was himself an industrialist. He came from a line of William Felkins, most of them Baptists. His father who was minister of the Ilkeston Baptist Church combined his ministry with the work of framework knitter. William Felkin entered the employ of Heard and Hurst, merchant hosiers, as an apprentice in 1809. John Heard of that firm was a member of Friar Lane Baptist Church.

Traditionally, stockings had been "fashioned" by reducing the number of loops with each course, producing a selvedged edge. The loops were then joined together by sewing. A practice had developed

in which the yarn was knitted into lengths which were cut with scissors and then sewn together. This produced a cheaper but inferior stocking likely to give way at the seams. The process reduced prices and brought higher wages to the stockingers actually engaged in the process. It was an attempt to meet, by price competition, the situation of a falling market which followed the Napoleonic wars. With the falling market, however, there was great hardship among those making fashioned hosiery and about 1811 dispossessed stockingers and others began to break the new, wide frames. Their leader, real or supposed, was called "Ned Ludd", or "King Ludd", with headquarters said to be in Sherwood Forest; they themselves were called "Luddites". Suffering increased during the winter of 1811 and by January 1812 half the population of Nottingham was on the poor rate. Felkin wrote of this period[2]: "Luddism and its mysterious destructive outrages on every hand mingled with the sufferings of the starving, unemployed framework knitters and the almost universal cry 'Give us work at any price'."

These words indicated the sympathy with the poor that Felkin displayed all his life, though he was no supporter of the violence of Luddism, indeed he served as a special constable during the disturbances. As Luddite tension increased, Felkin's employers, Heard and Hurst, decided to raise wages, and Felkin was sent to inform the scattered knitters. He spent seventeen hours in the saddle and described how "by riding through a tempest of wind and rain to Kimberley, Heanor, Smalley, Ilkeston, Long Eaton, Gotham and Ruddington, in which places we had a thousand or more frames, and giving notice of an advance in wages, not one was destroyed". It may be argued that self-interest prompted this Baptist firm to raise wages, but it should be remembered that few firms adopted that course, especially when frames were under-employed, and that stockings made at higher wage rates would still have to compete with those made more cheaply. Some factory owners, indeed, resorted to armed resistance of the frame-breakers rather than make concessions—such an incident is described in Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Shirley*. Heard and Hurst had, in fact, acquired a good reputation for their treatment of employees and it is reasonable to infer that they were actuated at least partly by sympathy.

Was Heathcote's factory destroyed because he was guilty of unfair practices which had gained him the enmity of his workpeople? It seems unlikely. Luddism arose primarily because of reduced wages. Opinions varied both among stockingers and employers about the new wide frames. M. I. Thomis[3] considers that the issue was not a battle between employers and employees but that there was a real difference of opinion among members of both parties. There was wide sympathy among manufacturers for their employees and the men sometimes recognised this. Gravenor Henson, the most outstanding leader of early Nottingham trade unionism (who indeed has been suspected of being King Ludd himself) after he retired from political activity, said that, as a whole, there was not a better set of employers

in the world than the Nottingham hosiers.[4] To quote Thomis again,[5] Luddism was a complex phenomenon and after a time it lost much of its purity of purpose. Men were becoming Luddites by profession and "systematic terror became another job to be done for wages . . . The willingness of those in employment to subscribe, either through fear or sympathy, to the maintenance of the Luddites made frame-breaking a well-paid job". As has been said, Heathcote paid higher wages than was usual, and in any case, he was not a hosier but a lace maker and was not concerned with the new wide frames. There is a suggestion that "the Loughborough job", as it was called, was the work of Heathcote's trade rival, Lacey, a former partner of his.[6] Heathcote was already planning to move to Tiverton to be out of the way of those who wished to infringe his patent and Lacey wished to destroy the bobbin net machines before this happened. Felkin reckoned that £140 had been offered for the job, and one Nottingham Luddite, John Blackburn, confessed to having been offered £40 but not to having received it. It does not seem therefore that Heathcote's factory was destroyed because he was an oppressive employer.

William Felkin and the Working Classes

To return to Felkin, in 1823 he moved to Heathcote's at Tiverton. Later, he spent two years abroad studying the latest techniques in silk-winding, then returned to Nottingham and in 1832 entered into partnership with another Baptist, William Vickers. At first they were middle men in the lace trade, then manufacturers. An advertisement in 1832 suggests that the firm was considerate of the needs of the cottage lace maker.[7] It states that "in periods of depression they will make adequate advances to Machine Owners on goods deposited with them, and thus obviate the necessity of forced sales at depreciated rates". About 1848 Felkin became a lace manufacturer on his own account and in 1861 was operating fifty-three power-driven machines at Beeston while his eldest son had thirty-nine machines in a nearby factory. In 1856 they were manufacturing hosiery as well. When Felkin was seventy the credit of his firm collapsed, mainly, it is thought, because of the actions of his son, who emigrated to New Zealand shortly after. Felkin was saved from bankruptcy by friends who bought him an annuity which enabled him to spend the next few years writing his *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufacture,* a classic of industrial history. Throughout his life Felkin displayed a genuine concern for the working classes, following the enlightened principles of Heathcote, and, indeed, carrying them further. In the year his firm collapsed his Beeston workmen presented him with "a beautiful timepiece worth eight guineas" as an expression of "our sincere and heartfelt thanks for the sympathy you have ever manifested toward us in consulting our welfare as a body".[8]

Felkin, though he sponsored several movements for fostering independence among the working classes, did not favour trade unions in their early days. In a statement in the *Nottingham Journal,* 10th May, 1833, he refers to a framework knitter aged 87 "who had

always been independent and respectable in his humble station . . . a member of the Baptist community for fifty-five years. He had avoided debt and generally had a few shillings in hand. He had only once joined a combination, about 1790, and, in his opinion, they never had beneficial results". Felkin believed that a man, by sobriety and industry, could so provide for himself that he need never accept an unreasonably low wage. This was not a refusal to face the question of wage rates. The framework knitters themselves at that time did not ask for wages to be regulated. They did, however, claim that rates of pay should be posted up in the master's premises, that they should not be arbitrarily changed and that they should be paid in cash. The problem at that time was to maintain wages in an industry which was over-producing for a falling market. Furthermore, Felkin was by no means opposed to employees having a voice in industry. He frequently advocated joint consultations and was impressed by a system followed in some districts in France where employers and employees met in equal numbers on boards known as *Conseils des Prud'Hommes*.[9] These councils sought to reach agreement on all matters except wages, which were settled between individual employers and employees. Felkin translated an abstract of their regulations into English, and this translation was used in parliamentary committees. Whether he favoured unions or not, the Framework Knitters Union passed a resolution in 1845 paying tribute to him "for the part he has played in laying the condition of the Framework Knitters before Government and the world at large".[10]

Some Nottingham employers did support union action on wages. As early as 1820 an effort was made to place the Framework Knitters Society on a firmer financial footing. This society was a "combination" of knitters in the three Midland counties, one of whose aims was to obtain fair minimum prices for their work. The rules of the society were "sanctioned" by the larger hosiers, including Heard and Hurst (Baptist), I. and R. Morley (Congregationalist), and two others who formed a committee to co-operate with the men and donated annual sums. The trustees of its funds included Fox and Gill (Quakers), Thomas Wakefield (Methodist) and the Revs. A. Alliott (Congregationalist) and John Jarman (Baptist).[11]

Felkin investigated carefully the life of the working classes and published several papers on the subject. In 1837 he investigated the earnings and expenditure of 11,000 families and published reports on a sample of 1,043 of them under the title *Remarks on the Importance of an Enquiry into the Amount and Appropriation of Wages by the Working Classes*. He continued his investigations, visiting Thomas Ashton's model community at Hyde and the poorer districts of London and Norwich. In 1840 he published *Statistics of the Labouring Classes and Paupers in Nottingham* in which he emphasised that the prime cause of poverty was trade depression, and he drew attention to the rapid increase in mortality between 1800 and 1840, due to poor housing and inadequate sewage. When a local board of health was formed in 1842 Felkin was an obvious choice for membership.

Factory Conditions

One of the most important struggles for improved factory conditions in the first half of the nineteenth century was for the reduction of hours of work. It led to the Factory Act of 1847 which limited the employment of women and young people in factories to ten hours a day or fifty-eight hours a week. It was expected that this would automatically limit the hours of employment of men. Long before this Act was passed Felkin voluntarily fulfilled its provisions. Most factories at that time required women and young people to work the same hours as the men. As early as 1828 Felkin made a determined effort to reduce factory hours. A committee of forty-five owners of smaller factories was formed under his chairmanship which agreed to fix working hours at twelve a day, later reducing them to ten. Manufacturers in Derby and Chesterfield, particularly one firm owning power-operated machines, flouted the scheme, and although seven-eighths of the employers were ready to follow the scheme a minority prevented its success. A Deed of Agreement relating to this in the Nottinghamshire County Archives includes the names of John and William Pole, F. Seals, R. Seals, James Truman, J. Redgate and M. Redgate, almost certainly all Baptists and all in favour of restricting hours.[12]

What was the attitude of Nottingham manufacturers to the attempts to reduce factory hours between 1830 and 1846? The *Nottingham Review,* edited by the Methodist, Sutton, which tended to reflect Nonconformist views, consistently favoured the Ten Hours Bill. Much detailed information is also given in the *Report of Employment Commission,* published in 1833. Although Felkin had tried to secure a reduction in hours in 1828, he was not altogether in favour of a legal restriction to ten hours. By the 1830s there was considerable competition from Belgium and such a restriction would have increased prices with further loss of trade and increased unemployment. However, he was one of the principal Nottingham witnesses supporting a reduction in the hours of children and young people. Nottingham textile factories then usually worked from 4 a.m. to midnight; the men, who did the laborious work of operating the machines, worked alternate four-hour shifts. Women often worked sixteen hours on light work, and many who were interviewed said they did not mind working these hours. This could have meant that they did not want to work shorter hours if that led to a reduction in pay. Children went to work at the age of six or seven and worked six to eight hours a day, sometimes ten hours.

One Baptist firm, Frearson and Vickers, is recognisable among those giving evidence; they seem to have observed similar hours to the others, and in spite of the difficulty of trade they claimed to give constant employment to their people, though at a lower rate of pay than some firms. Two firms, Wilsons and Milnes, attracted notice for their bad conditions of work; neither seems to have been Baptist. The Overseer of the Poor, Absalom Barnett, a member of George Street Baptist Church, strongly supported reduced hours for children.

He had often remonstrated with the masters for employing children so long, but they replied that they themselves worked the same hours in the same workshops. When M. T. Sadler's Bill was before Parliament in 1833, Richard Oastler addressed a public meeting in the Exchange Hall, "by permission of the mayor", J. H. Barber, a Baptist, and the editorial of the *Nottingham Review* of 8th March (reflecting nonconformist opinion) said: "The principles of sound policy and good government, the dictates of humanity and the principles of the Christian religion, all enforce upon us the duty of advocating Mr. Sadler's Bill".

The *Report of the Children's Employment Commission* of 1842, which led to the Factory Act of 1844, limiting women's work to twelve hours a day and raising the age of employment of children in textile factories to eight, dealt more fully with the situation in Nottingham. Again Felkin and Barnett were among the principal witnesses and both were now wholeheartedly in favour of restricting hours. The Commissioner, R. D. Grainger, reported that Nottingham factories usually worked from 4 a.m. to midnight. Some ceased on Saturday at 4 p.m. but worked all Friday night to make up for it. Men worked two shifts of five or six hours each. Children worked intermittently, their work being to change the thread when new work was put on the machine. This took an hour and a half. They were on call all the time the factory was open but sometimes could go home between operations. Some firms considered it a concession if, when work on a machine was finished after 10 p.m., the machine was not re-threaded that night. Five days' holiday a year were observed, excluding, of course, Sundays. Felkin testified that children were away from home thirteen hours a day and for years were not in bed before 10 p.m. He disagreed with manufacturers who claimed that children between the ages of eight and ten could work ten to 12 hours a day without harm. His opinion was that while shortening hours might cause temporary inconvenience and even suffering, "readjustment would take place so easily and speedily as to secure all fair interests of trade and the just claims of humanity". Barnett stated that children of six worked from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. with an hour and a half for meals, while children of nine worked a fourteen hour day. Young women often worked from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Sixteen firms were interviewed, of which four can be identified as Baptist: Biddle and Birkin, John Heard, William Vickers and John Rogers. Two others, Samuel Burton and Jonathan Burton, may have been Baptists and another two, I. and R. Morley and W. Howitt, were owned by Dissenters of other denominations. All these firms observed factory hours of sixteen a day, but it is possible to distinguish between those which made "concessions" and those which did not, between those who would welcome legislation and those which would not. Most factory owners feared competition if they reduced hours, but some would be prepared to reduce hours if the rest would agree to do so. The firms of Biddle and Birkin and Morleys appear to have provided above average working conditions, indeed

Biddle and Birkin were singled out by the Commissioners as having "a well arranged factory". They were among those who made concessions—they closed on Saturday at 9 p.m. and did not work all night on Friday to make up for it. They did not re-thread machines after 10 p.m., and seldom worked threaders as late as 11 p.m. and never before 5 a.m. They had two sets of threaders on call between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. This suggests overlapping shifts, one only on call before 7 a.m. and the other after 7 p.m. Samuel Burton did not re-thread machines after 9 p.m. and Jonathan Burton did not employ children under nine and intended not to take on any more under ten. Of the firms which were not Baptist, Sewells did not re-thread machines after 8 p.m., and Astills closed on Saturdays at 6 p.m. but worked all Friday night.

Biddle and Birkin supported the prohibition of the employment of children under nine and restriction of the hours of young people under eighteen to between 5.30 a.m. and 8.30 p.m. Both Vickers and Heard supported the restriction of hours of employment of children, while both Rogers and Burton were specific in desiring that children should not be employed before the age of nine, and that hours for children between nine and thirteen should be limited to eight a day, and from thirteen to eighteen to ten hours. Morley and Howitt agreed with this. Of the other firms, Moors, Fisher and Sewell supported legislation; Taylors expressed no views and their evidence reveals no concession in their factory; Corahs and Astills were against legislation on the ground of increased costs.

To summarise: From today's viewpoint hours were excessive in the extreme, even in the best of factories. The Baptist employers, however, were among those who provided slightly better conditions and all were in favour of restrictive legislation. Even though it was difficult for an employer to reduce hours unilaterally, some did, among them John Fielden, Felkin and Heathcote. The two Nottingham men most active in promoting improvement were both Baptists, Felkin, an employer, and Barnett, the Poor Law officer.

Relief Measures in Times of Distress

Some of the worst social evils of the Industrial Revolution were recognised fairly early, and before fundamental changes took place, they could only be relieved by *ad hoc* assistance. It would be unfair to stigmatise such help as merely a salving of the consciences of those who profited by the situation but were unwilling to bring about improvements. Hindsight, with only a partial knowledge of the situation and no immediate experience of the problems, can always pontificate on what should have been done and can condemn those of an earlier period who acted otherwise. There were Christian people in the mid-nineteenth century who were well aware of the social problems, and it would have been no virtue on their part to refrain from giving immediate relief pending the evolution of a juster social order. Poor Law relief was quite inadequate to cope with the situation when trade depression was severe and Baptists were among

the prominent citizens who involved themselves in relief work.

In 1826, during the trade depression, J. H. Barber (Baptist) called a meeting to organise relief and took the chair. Associated with him was another Baptist, John Heard, and the Methodist, Thomas Wakefield[13]. At a similar meeting in 1837 the Congregationalist Richard Morley presided and he and Heard were the largest subscribers to the relief fund. About £5,000 was immediately collected. That year half the lace and hosiery workers in Nottingham were unemployed and 4,400 workmen and their families out of a population of 50,000 were maintained by the fund. The depression continued a long time and the *Nottingham Review* of 8th January 1842 published a letter from Felkin expressing deep concern:

> "Were you to see the meagre, haggard and half-starved creatures that pass through the streets of Mansfield, with scarcely a bit of clothing to shield them from the inclemency of the season, were you to follow them to their homes, that used to be an Englishman's pride, now divested of every comfort, were you to witness the agony of the father when he views the children of his love deprived of those blessings the benign hand of Providence has given in such profusion . . . you would sicken at the sight".

These are two examples of the many occasions in the century when trade depressions occurred and the lead in organising relief was given by the men of the Baptist and other denominations. Poor Law administration provided further opportunities for initiative by church members.

Benevolent societies were a permanent feature of church life. There was hardly a church which did not have one or more of them, supplying coal, food and clothes, and in some cases paying small pensions. Even a small church like Southwell had a pension list of seven in 1841. Soup kitchens were organised, "Dorcas Societies" supplied clothing, blanket societies loaned blankets which were collected in summer for washing and repair (the Derby Road Church had 208 such blankets in circulation in 1884). Such aid was not given as from a distant charitable organisation. The beneficiaries were known personally and visited, and if the members of another church organisation, e.g. the Tract Society, found a family in need, they would report the situation to the Benevolent Society. The account book of the Mansfield Road Benevolent Society in the 1850s reveals a concern for the sick and dying comparable with that of the medieval Roman Catholic orders. One extract will suffice: "William Boulding, 7 Water Lane: dead, very ignorant; wife neglected him, traced, taken to house of relative who gave up her own bed and smoothed his dying pillow".

Encouragement of Self-Help

In addition to providing relief, these religious leaders also took steps to encourage the poorer classes to gain a position of greater independence. In politics they were usually Whigs of the Radical wing: later in the century they were Liberals. R. A. Church[14] states

that "early in the century a small group of humanists and evangelicals, especially men of the Nonconformist chapels, began to concern themselves with the social consequences of industrialisation in Nottingham". It was with the intention of fostering the workmen's feeling of independence that the Nottingham Savings Bank was formed in 1818 by a group of men which included the Wrights, Thomas Wakefield, John Gill and John Barber. Barber, who was mayor of Nottingham 1817-1818, was very active in Sunday School and educational work. By 1830 the Bank had over 4,000 depositors who held £94,000, mostly in sums under £20. Felkin carried out an investigation among those applying for relief in 1837. Over 1,000 questionnaire forms were returned. None of those concerned was a depositor in the Savings Bank and Felkin concluded that lack of diligence and thrift was the main reason for their poverty.

Provident Societies were established to provide the working man with some financial reserves and to help tide him over critical periods. Almost every chapel had its provident society, and a member of one of them, in a letter published in the *Nottingham Review* of 9th July 1833, referred gratefully to four societies, of which two were organised by Baptist churches. The Broad Street Provident Society, one of the largest, had 1,900 members in 1873. In 1835 the District Visiting Provident Society, which catered for an even poorer section of society, was formed, Frearson, Heard and Barnett being among the Baptists involved in this venture.

On a more ambitious scale was the encouragement of life assurance. In 1839 we find Felkin and Wakefield on the board of the National Loan Fund Life Assurance and Annuity Society and in 1856 the Baptists Heard, Wells, Bayley, Birkin and Vickers, all manufacturers, and the Revs. G. A. Syme, J. Edwards and W. R. Stevenson, Baptist ministers, were on the local board of the Christian Mutual Provident Society for the Middle and Operative Classes. In 1857 we find the Rev. Hugh Hunter presiding at the annual meeting of the British Empire Mutual Life Assurance Company, with the Revs. J. Ferneyhough and R. J. Pike taking a prominent part[15]; all three were Baptist ministers. The provision of allotments was another form of self-help. James Orange, partner in an engineering firm and honorary pastor of Salem chapel, on the fringe of Baptist life, was the originator of a scheme for allotments. Felkin gave his support and Henry Frearson made land available for a hundred allotments[16]. The Nottingham Freehold Land Society was formed to buy land for this purpose, and its directors included the Baptist A. J. Rogers. The Nottingham Co-operative Society owes its origin to the Bayleys. In 1858, John Bayley, leather manufacturer and leader of the Scotch Baptists in Nottingham, founded the Lenton Temperance Society. This Society commenced a savings bank and a co-operative society for the sale of grocery and provisions, with Thomas Bayley, son of John Bayley, as its first president. The influence of the Co-operative Society's temperance origin long remained—it was not until the 1930s that the society dealt in alcoholic drinks. The unpaid, disinterested service

of these men, actuated by idealism, had something to offer which seems missing from much of public life today with its insistence on toeing the party line and the possibility of public service being financially profitable.

NOTES

[1] S. D. Chapman, "William Felkin" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Nottingham University, 1960), p. 124.
[2] "MSS. of the Felkin Family", typed copy in Nottingham University Archives, p. 64.
[3] M. I. Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785-1835* (Oxford, 1969), p. 85.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[7] Chapman, p. 28.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[10] *Nottingham Review*, 10th January 1845.
[11] *Nottingham Journal*, 26th May 1820.
[12] "Deed of Agreement for Restriction of Hours", 1829, Nottinghamshire County Archives.
[13] *Nottingham Review*, 19th May 1826.
[14] R. A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (London, 1966), p. 107.
[15] *Nottingham Journal*, 13th December 1839; *Nottingham Review*, 18th November 1856, 13th November 1857.
[16] J. D. Marshall, "Nottingham Labourers in the early 19th Century", *Transactions of the Thoroton Society, 1960*, p. 74.

F. M. W. HARRISON.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Raymond Brown, M.Th., Ph.D.,
Principal, Spurgeon's College, London.

T. E. Dowley, B.A., Ph.D.,
Editor, Lion Publishing, Berkhamsted.

F. M. W. Harrison, M.Phil., B.D.,
Hon. Lay Pastor, Newthorpe Baptist Church.

Ernest A. Payne, C.H., D.D., LL.D.,
President, Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland; President, Baptist Historical Society.

Reviews: Alan Betteridge, L. G. Champion, E. A. Payne.