

Association Life in Kent and Sussex, 1770-1950*

OURS IS a complicated story. It should begin with the 1640s, and then should tell of the first Kent association of General Baptist Churches in 1657, of the two streams of English Baptist life, Calvinistic Particulars and Arminian Generals, and of the rise and disappearance of no fewer than six different Baptist associations in the two counties prior to the end of the eighteenth century. At that point the story of the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association that we know really gets under way. The front cover of our yearbooks used to bear the rubric "Kent and Sussex Baptist Association, originally founded in Ashford 1779". The fact is that the direct line of association life which reaches to the present day begins in 1835 with the East Kent Association of Particular Baptist Churches. It is necessary to tell the story attaching to these two dates.

As evangelical vigour returned to the Particular Baptists towards the latter decades of the eighteenth century, so association life amongst them reawakened. In 1779 four churches (Ashford, Rye, Sandhurst and Smarden) came together in a Kent and Sussex Association of Particular Baptist Churches. In the counties as a whole they were less numerous than the General Baptists but the latter body were becoming increasingly Unitarian in outlook and testimony, and the Particulars had few or no dealings with them. The records of the 1779 Association clearly show the purposes the founders had in mind:

We, the ministers and messengers of the Baptist denomination representing our respective churches, holding the Doctrines of personal election, particular redemption, effectual vocation and the final perseverance of the Saints, being met together at Ashford in Kent this second day of March 1779 have entered the several churches we represent into an Association . . . The general end and design of this Association is to cultivate friendly and mutual acquaintance between the Ministers and Churches for their edification, to aid and assist each other in the work of God and for the cementing and joining of the Churches of this Association in love and harmony one with another for God's glory, the advancement of his interest and the peace and prosperity of each other. The ministers and messengers representing the several

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Churches entirely disclaim all manner of superiority and lordly authority, one over another or the Churches they represent, either in faith or practice, but their intention is by way of advice and counsel to strengthen their respective churches.

The Association proved to have the secret of steady life. It grew slowly but steadily by defections to it from the ranks of the General Baptists and by the adherence of other Particular Baptist causes, so that by the end of the century there were twelve churches in association together. It had much to offer the churches, for by it there was fellowship to be had. The Association was a place of recourse in the settling of uncertainties and doctrinal disputes and questions of church practice: it is perhaps significant that of twelve clauses in the foundation document quoted from above, no fewer than four dealt with the settling of disputes between the churches and their members. The Association enshrined a spirit of concern for the churches which expressed itself in the care of pastorless causes and the raising of funds for the erection of meeting-houses. The Assembly at Sandhurst in 1816 resolved as follows:—

It is desirable that a Fund should be raised for the assistance of those churches which particularly need and those places where there is a probability of raising new Churches. That those persons who subscribe 2/6 per quarter or 10/- per annum or upwards be considered members (of the fund); and that the business connected therewith be attended to on the Wednesday afternoon of the association. That the brethren Knott, Shirley and Rogers be a Committee to carry the above design into execution. That as Larkfield calls for immediate assistance, the case thereof be drawn up and sent to the Churches to request their help.

All that we read of the fifty-six years of the life of the 1779 Association speaks of growth and vigour. For example, the Baptist Missionary Society had been founded in 1792 and was keenly supported from the first. The minutes of the Association recorded:

We note with pleasure the affectionate attention which is given by our Churches to the support of the Baptist missionaries . . . we urge the formation of a Missionary Auxilliary in every church . . . we believe that in proportion as missionary Zeal prevails or declines in an individual or community, the state of religion can be fairly ascertained.

The formation of "A general Union of Particular Baptist Churches" had been resolved upon in London in 1812 and the suggestion was cordially approved by the Association in the following year. Home Mission was placed on the agenda by the Association and a Home Missions Society was formed and cordially commended to the churches. As the founding and sustaining of smaller causes became an increasing feature of this work, so references to it are warm and heartfelt. Thus in 1826 the Fund which had been set up in 1816 reported gifts to six churches (Gravesend, Hadlow and "4 poor churches") amounting to £45 in all and declared:

The Treasurer and Secretary of the Association Fund cannot omit this opportunity of congratulating its friends on its increasing usefulness. By its means one Church in a very populous town has been formed and another in a populous city in all probability would not have existed but for its proffered assistance. More recently a newly-formed church in a considerable village has been materially assisted and a fourth is likely to be planted in a market town where appearances are highly encouraging. Nor can they omit to remind their friends that the Fund has afforded important assistance to several needy churches to enable them to maintain public worship among them. The friends of Christianity at large and the Baptist denomination in particular must rejoice in these things. It is therefore confidently hoped that each of the Churches will exert themselves in favour of the Fund which is now nearly exhausted.

In the years from the turn of the century to 1834 some churches entered the Association for the first time and a few later failed or seceded: but there was a substantial balance on the credit side of the ledger, so that by 1834 the Association numbered 29 churches all told.

So when much seemed bright, there came about 1835 a melancholy event which was in truth creative in the fullness of time. If despite the internal combustion engine the distance between Chichester and Ramsgate makes Association life difficult, with horse power alone the difficulties presented by the extent of the Association area were many times worse. Although the notion of division had previously been rejected by considerable majorities, in 1834 five Kentish churches, (Deal, Dover, Folkestone, St. Peter's and Ramsgate) declined to accept the majority view and seceded to form the East Kent Association of Particular Baptist Churches, which first met in Assembly in 1835. The secession was accepted with good grace by the remainder, which renamed itself the West Kent and Sussex Association of Particular Baptist Churches. Although one might suppose that the parent body, remaining the larger by far, would continue upon its progress, in fact it was the smaller body which throve, whereas the parent so declined as to dissolve itself in 1846. Undoubtedly doctrinal dispute was a major factor in this rapid twelve-year decay. The old argument about open and closed communion, which was disturbing the churches elsewhere in England, was raised so sharply that seven of the churches withdrew to be part of a "Kent and Sussex New Association" practising only closed communion, and yet others joined themselves to this group upon the failure of the West Kent Association in 1846. It is fortunate that in general this was a period of growth, nationally speaking, in the vigour and influence of the Free Churches, and this undoubtedly carried the Baptists of South-east England through a period of internal argument and dissension.

From the beginning in 1835 the East Kent Association was very much a going concern and the atmosphere of the very first annual circular letter conveys a sense of assurance. The writer, the Revd.

J. P. Briscoe of Folkestone, chose boldly to assert the purposes of the association and its aspirations, then invited the churches to accept fully their responsibility with regard to matters of public debate (no hint here of a later compulsion to "separate religion and politics") and called upon the churches to share in every way with one another. He summoned the churches to ensure that the "Sabbath Schools" were a true nursery of the church, and called upon everyone to undertake Christlike self-denial in the pursuit of these aims, in order to prove their genuineness and piety. He went on:

Assembled then periodically with one accord in one place; beholding the zeal and devotedness of brethren around us; listening to the accounts of their works of faith and labours of love; charmed with the tidings of souls renewed and sins forgiven; animated by the prospects of fields white already to harvest and borne away by the excitements of the whole scene; is it too much to hope that we shall imbibe a considerable portion of this spirit, and return to our sphere of exertion to diffuse it extensively around us?

The purpose of an annual assembly could hardly be more admirably put. The sturdiness of this beginning is amply matched in the records of the succeeding years. Thus in only the second year of its life the Association directs to the Baptist Union a stinging resolution against slavery practised by American Baptists, with the request for the exercise of influence to bring about its end; they transact the detailed affairs of the new East Kent Auxiliary Baptist Missionary Society, and consider in detail the affairs of the East Kent Baptist Home Missionary Society, confirming a contribution to the maintenance of the work at Romney Marsh and seeking to regularise the way in which the churches in need bring their requests for assistance to the whole body; they complain about the decision of the British and Foreign Bible Society not to fund Scripture work undertaken by the Baptist Missionary Society in Calcutta; and record a clear increase of membership of 26 in the churches. Then they listen to a fiery address by the Revd. Ebenezer Davis of Deal on the theme "On the Adaptation of Christian Character to the Existing Circumstances of the Church". It is all wonderfully alive and, though small, vigorous. That there was a record of real growth comes as no surprise. In 1843 the Association recorded an increase of 125 members, a far larger recorded increase than in any previous year. There was a moment of faltering in the following year, when five of the churches went over to the Kent and Sussex New Association in the interests of an exclusively closed communion practice; but such was the vigour of the East Kent body that this was no more than a temporary setback. From an original five churches in 1835 it had become twelve by 1847 and twenty-eight by 1869. The adherence of churches from Sussex had necessitated the inclusion of the word "Sussex" in the title of the Association, and the desire to indicate the form of church polity induced the Association to rename itself "Kent and Sussex Baptist Congregational Association"

in 1869. The word "Congregational" was dropped, however, in 1878.

Throughout the early decades of the history of the East Kent Association the spirit and pattern of life inherited from the past was sedulously maintained and built upon. The ministry of small causes was supported financially. So was the work of the Colportage Societies, from which the churches in outlying areas would in any case benefit. The annual report of the Association contains ample record of grant aid offered to churches whose buildings required repair or renovation. A vigorous spirit of evangelism was found in the churches, which reached out energetically into the surrounding districts. The Eythorne church sustained no fewer than 12 mission stations together with other village ministries besides. The Canterbury church supplied preachers for the New Romney cause even though that village was at the time some seven miles distant from the nearest public transport.

It was not only evangelistic and expansionist vigour which tended to bring about growth. The churches thrived because of their active self-consciousness and the sense that their very existence depended upon the defence of their faith and upon a lively distinctiveness from other church bodies whose tenets they abhorred. Thus in 1841 much space is given in the assembly records to a resolution entitled "Popery and Puseyism"; the attempt by "Papists" to diffuse their beliefs both at home and abroad is strongly deplored and it is asserted that, of all Protestant groups, the Baptists have a special responsibility to oppose Romish errors. The third paragraph of this resolution reads:

. . . that regarding baptismal regeneration as a soul-destructive heresy of fearful magnitude perverting the gospel of Christ; contradicting the scripture doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men; exalting priestly power; and nourishing hopes which must issue in deception and ruin; and considering that this mischievous doctrine is maintained by the majority of those who practise infant baptism and is justly reckoned to be a main pillar of the papacy; it is peculiarly obligatory on the Baptist body to use their best endeavours for the diffusion of scriptural sentiments on the subject, in the hope of aiding thereby to restore the Christian Church to its primitive purity, and Christian worship and ordinances to the simple and spiritual character which they bore in the first ages.

It therefore comes as no surprise to read in the records of the Church meeting at Deal in the ensuing decade the following minute: "It being reported that brother . . . and sister . . . have taken their infant child to the Established Church to be christened (so called) such conduct being altogether unbecoming in members of a Baptist Church, it is therefore unanimously agreed at this meeting that they be suspended."

In 1843 the annual meetings of the Association passed unanimously a strongly worded resolution approving the separation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland from the Presbyterian establishment in that land, deploring heartily the interference of the state in ecclesiastical matters there and greeting cordially and with encouragement

the new Free Presbyterian moderator. Truly they believed that the day lay with protest and dissent and that it was their business to foster these wherever springing up, amongst groups large and small alike. At the same time there was the awareness of a responsibility to maintain what they saw as a New Testament ordering of local church life and inner practice. In the Canterbury church a member brought a friend to Communion who was a believer, but not baptized by immersion: he was urgently reprimanded for the offence. The same member was a troublesome individual, for he was also observed to use "a public conveyance" following his attendance at the service, and this was the occasion for a further rebuke since by his action he was deemed to "cause evil to be spoken of religion". Strict order was preserved in the matter of public female participation, so that in 1865 the subject of the Association letter was "Female Agency in connection with our churches". In this document the Revd. J. Wilkins, minister of the Queen Square church at Brighton, was concerned to make the case for some genuine share by women in the public offices of the church, and the fact that it was necessary to make such a position clear shows that many churches were uncertain about their attitude. However, Mr. Wilkins felt it necessary to say: "We shall not be guilty of encouraging female preaching, for we regard the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit so indispensable for the Christian female that, in the true Pauline spirit, we 'suffer not a woman to teach but to be silent' ". The ladies, he argued, are indispensable as a pastoral arm of the work of the church—they may teach the children, collect monies, visit the sick and needy, care for the magdalenes, visit the female candidates for baptism and keep a watchful eye in general on the young females! In 1883 the Association thought it right to insist in the rules that delegates should be chosen from the ministers and male members of the churches, and in 1887 the introduction of personal membership was specifically restricted to Christian men. However, by 1894 the rule that delegates should be male was altered, and by 1938 matters had so changed that in that year the Association elected as moderator Mrs. Frank Lefevre of Canterbury, the only lady to have been called to the office.

With the place of the Association secure in the hearts and minds of the churches, which belonged to it, the situation was well prepared for the expansion of religious concern which coincided in the nation with the rapid growth in population and townships in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. The records bring to us a story of rapid church expansion, the founding of new causes, vigorous work amongst young people who were themselves taught to evangelise, the formation of Christian Endeavour Societies and Bible classes, the increased establishment and funding of colportage work and the constant reaching out of the churches into the growing areas around them. By the end of the century the number of churches in membership of the Association had grown to sixty, of which well over half were new causes. Whether in the founding of new churches or in the re-establishment of older ones, the name of C. H. Spurgeon is indelibly

written upon the record. Either through his personal agency, or an agreement by him to raise funds, through personal generosity or by the directing and encouragement of students, his direct intervention is the key factor in the life and establishment of many churches in the counties, some of which were to become very strong causes indeed. Gillingham, Newhaven, Portslade, Rochester, Shoreham, Whitstable, Worthing—these and many more look back either to “CHS” himself or to a student trained, encouraged and deliberately sent by him for the establishment of the work. The remarkable ability of Spurgeon to discern the truly necessary was such that it was not too small a thing for him to arrange for the purchase from the south of France of specially required seating for the Shoreham church, or to rent the only room available for worship in Portslade—in this case, the rear upstairs room of a local public house—if only the work could be furthered thereby. So incalculable is the debt owed to Spurgeon that it seems doubtful if it could ever be repaid other than through the constant honouring of all that is to this day a true memorial of his spirit and work. At the same time the people of the Association rose to the challenges of the hour: given the vital leadership, they were ready. To read the Association records of this period is to be granted a rare kind of excitement. The annual report would always incorporate a separate Home Mission Society report, in which is recorded the determined outreach of the churches to the people of the counties in the conviction that it was their undeniable mission from God to do so. The people were urged on by the leaders of the Society, sometimes indeed upbraided for suspected inactivity or alleged want of success. Thus in 1880, when the Association minutes contain a resolution heartily rejoicing in the recent return to Parliament of a Liberal majority under Mr. Gladstone, the indefatigable secretary of the Home Mission Society, the Revd. W. Barker, professed regret that the work had been “neither extensive nor liberal enough to furnish a very interesting report”, and he suggested that “it is doubtful whether we (Baptists) are keeping pace with the rapid increase of the population”. He went on to lament that church giving to the Society was at a rate of only about 5 pence per head. However, his report showed that in the previous twelve months the number of preaching stations had increased from 34 to 41, that the number of preachers had grown from 95 to 110 in the same period and that the Society had expended £185 as opposed to £160 in the previous year. Fourteen churches are mentioned specially in connection with extension work, and it is recorded that a further 26 churches besides are engaged in regular mission work. One may suppose that this was not too bad a record even if from Mr. Barker’s point of view it was a lean year. No summary can really convey the spiritual zest and enthusiasm of these records, which must surely seem amongst the most heartening reading from everything that the past of the Association offers the present day.

An expanding work was costly, for then as now buildings and halls were expensive to erect. Yet the members of the churches were aware

of their responsibilities and well prepared to carry them out. In 1879 Mr. Barker laid before the Association the following notice of motion:

That in view of the increasing need for money for chapel building purposes this Assembly urgently recommends each church, by donations and an annual collection, to assist in the formation of a fund from which each yearly accepted case may be assisted by the vote of the annual assembly: and that to obviate the necessity for personal appeals by the pastors this shall be the method by which in future such cases shall be assisted.

The Chapel Building and Enlargement Fund, as it came to be called, was brought into being in the following year, with a rider reinforcing the suggestion as to the method of collection of monies, thereby avoiding the expense of appeals by itinerant ministers. All member churches were duly expected to make their contributions, and a church chosen annually should benefit by the sum of at least £100. But the churches undertook extensive building operations and accepted the need to fund such work quite apart from the recommendations of the Association for its own Fund. In 1893 the Association secretary, the Revd. N. Dobson of Deal, responded to a request made to him for the provision of statistical information regarding building work and expansion in general during the previous twenty years. There was an impressive report to make, beginning with an increase in membership from 2,685 to 7,522 and of Sunday School scholars from 2,537 to 11,789. Sixteen new churches had been formed and 25 new chapels erected. Twenty-five other churches had undertaken major building or repair work besides, at a total cost of £112,421: of this sum only £10,000 approximately remained to be raised. Mr. Dobson said: "I venture to say that even those who know our Churches best would not have imagined that so large an amount of money would have been raised and expended on our buildings since the year 1873". That the sums were indeed considerable can be seen when they are put into economic perspective: in the early 1890s the average weekly wage for a skilled industrial worker was 22 shillings and for an agricultural worker about 17 shillings.

As the controversies which had divided the denomination earlier in the century began to abate, there were proposals made for the amalgamation of the Particular Baptist Union with the New Connexion of General Baptists. The Association enthusiastically welcomed the idea, and in 1889 the Association Assembly resolved, ". . . that this Association, convinced of the reality of the unity already existing between the two sections of the Baptist denomination, rejoices in the effort now being made to draw these two sections nearer together, and records its earnest desire for complete success". Just how enthusiastic the Association was for the national life of the denomination can be seen in the support and commendation given to the national funds which in these years began to be raised—the Jubilee Fund of 1886, the Augmentation Fund and the Annuity Fund. It was only because the New Connexion had never made any great impact upon Kent and

Sussex that despite the 1889 resolution the name "Particular Baptist" was retained in the Association constitution until 1904, but then the wording of the first clause was changed to the following:

That this Kent and Sussex Association consist only of Evangelical Churches practising believer's baptism, and whose doctrinal basis includes the Divine authority of the Holy Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Divine abhorrence and punishment of sin, the deity and the atoning sacrificial death of Christ, regeneration by the Holy Ghost, justification by faith and the obligation to live a righteous and godly life.

There was roughly a fourfold increase in the scope of the work in the last thirty years of the century. In 1899 the Secretary reported 61 churches, 8,168 members, 263 local preachers, 1,231 teachers and 11,557 Sunday School children. The annual reports from the churches are reported in the yearbooks, and they record an urgent spirit of outreach and constant rejoicing in conversions obtained. There must have been the sense that, as it were, the churches were surfing on the crest of a wave which was never going to break. When the secretary of the Ashford church recorded in 1894 that "... we have to mourn the lack of conversions . . ." and in the same year Canterbury reported "... conversions are comparatively few . . .", it must have taken considerable courage to declare oneself to have had little share in the contemporary trend. In the same year the Revd. N. Dobson (now Moderator) urged upon the Association the desirability of establishing five districts in order the better to administer the increasingly more complex and sizeable Association structure. Eventually the Assembly decided to make four districts, each of which would choose two laymen and a minister to serve on the Association committee.

With the arrival of the twentieth century the Baptist Union, aware of its potential strength, turned more decisively to the churches and sought a clear response to initiatives of its own. It had come to represent the aspirations and progress of the Baptists of the land in a way no county association was equipped to do alone. In the south-eastern corner of England its initiatives were accepted loyally and responded to energetically. It would be wearisome to quote one by one the resolutions in the assembly yearbooks which relate to Union matters, but it is right to list them. Many of them were concerned with finance, but this is only because the Baptist Union could fairly claim that in seeking to carry out its appointed tasks for the churches, the raising of large funds was essential to its mandate. Support is pledged for the Twentieth Century Fund, designed for extension work; the national Free Church mission of 1901; the Sustentation Fund of 1912, designed to augment the stipends of the worst paid ministers and to finance the new institution of the Superintendency (for which the Association raised £12,000); the Baptist United Fund, destined to relieve the strain upon ministers and missionaries alike in the decade after the end of the first world war; and the Personal Evangelism Campaign of 1922. In the same year the Revd. Thomas Woodhouse,

first area superintendent in the south, drew the Association's attention to the lack of an adequate retiring fund for ministers. In further response to the leadership of the Union, the Association established departments within its life responsive to particular needs. Thus the Baptist Women's League made its appearance in 1916, in due course a Young People's Committee was established, and special Sundays began to be devoted to particular matters such as Temperance and Education. The Association began to be aware of the work of Baptist people in continental Europe, and references to European Baptists make their appearance in the yearbooks. Not all the new ventures of these early twentieth century years were in response to London leadership. The minutes of the annual meetings held on 7th and 8th June 1904, at Ramsgate under the moderatorship of Revd. J. C. Carlile contain the following item:

On the motion of Mr. S. J. Hart and seconded by Mr. G. H. Dean, it was decided to establish a Loan Building Fund from which grants could be made to churches, free of interest, and that the sum of £50 be asked for as the nucleus of such a fund. So heartily was the matter taken up that under the stimulating example of the generosity of Mr. G. H. Dean and Mr. G. Osborn the noble sum of £105 was promised.

From that year onward the Loan Fund has been greatly employed for the financing of building works undertaken by the churches and notably by new causes. The Site and Extension Committee set up to help churches in the choice of building sites and to examine districts for possible pioneer work was the complement of the provision of funds.

The condition of the Association, however, gave cause for concern, not (I think) because leadership was being assumed nationally but because of the changed social, economic and spiritual conditions in which the churches made their witness. The 1908 Assembly noted "the partially arrested progress of the Church". A fuller assessment of church life was given in 1914 by the Association secretary, the Revd. J. Lewis of Canterbury. Having commented upon the lawlessness of the age, exemplified by the activities of Trade Unionists and Suffragettes, and exemplified still more in the way certain churches chose to ignore the rule that returns should be made annually, he indicated at great length and with a wealth of statistics that the work of the churches was faltering in almost every respect. Total membership, baptisms, Sunday School numbers, missionary giving, total income, all the figures had dipped downwards that year. The survey is historically important because in part the situation reflects the extreme restlessness of the times; and partly it gives the lie to those who have supposed that all was well with the work in the churches and would have continued to be but for the interruption of the first world war.

Yet new churches continued to be established, and from the very end of the nineteenth century or in the early years of the twentieth the churches at Bexhill, Bognor, Horsham, Littlehampton and Seaford

date their beginnings, while Gravesend began a new lease of life. No history should really ignore the fact that year by year the assembly records contain numerous and lengthy public resolutions which reflect a lively concern for public affairs at home and abroad. These resolutions fall into various classes. There are the special "nonconformist conscience" resolutions which have to do with the drink trade and Sunday observance; there are the issues upon which it is felt that vital interests are threatened, most notably in the long and passionate series of resolutions on national education; there are resolutions affecting affairs in the lands where the BMS has responsibilities, or where Baptists are otherwise under threat of cruelty or injustice; there are loyal expressions of address to the sovereign, and there are from time to time motions expressing concern at some special burning public issue of the day. These resolutions are frequently expressed with great forcefulness and are sometimes very lengthy. Thus in 1914 there were five long resolutions before the Assembly. These concerned: (1) foreign missions with special reference to the Congo; (2) Protestantism and the principles of the Reformation; (3) the necessity of Sunday observance; and (4) the injustices of the current Education Acts and the Licensing Laws. Finally (5) there was a resolution about current labour troubles which read as follows:

That this assembly of the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association is convinced that the payment of wages which are not sufficient to enable the recipient to command an efficient minimum of the necessities of life is morally wrong and economically unsound, cordially approves of the steps taken by His Majesty's Government towards the abolition of sweating, and expresses its earnest hope that the Government will use all practicable means to secure the payment of a living wage in all industries where it is not now paid. At the same time this assembly expresses its recognition of the obligation resting upon every worker to render the best service within his power to those by whom he is paid.

It has been mentioned in passing that these were the years in which the General Superintendency was established, and we should pause for a moment to record the fact in greater detail. To say the least of it, the new office was controversial in a denomination of strong independents, but if there was uncertainty in the matter in the south, it does not appear in the Association records. In 1915 the new Sustainment Fund is warmly commended to the churches and they are urged to accept the proposed methods by which it shall be administered. In the following year the Revd. Thomas Woodhouse is welcomed as "Sustainment Fund Superintendent" for the Southern Area. In 1917 he makes his first report to the Association, in which amongst other matters he expresses his personal gratitude at the way in which he has been everywhere received. This and subsequent utterances are models of business-like efficiency and reveal the initial adoption of what in modern jargon would be called a "low profile", doubtless in order to increase the acceptability of the office held. What is plain is the extent

to which Mr. Woodhouse commended himself to the churches, and when he became seriously ill in 1929, the concern of the churches for him was deep and sincere. The Assembly of 1930 passed a moving resolution of which these are but two sentences:

We take this opportunity to re-affirm our thankfulness for all the ungrudging service which Mr. Woodhouse has rendered both to the Churches and to the Ministers of our Association, service which we fear has cost him dearly and which we can only repay with our unstinted affection. We appreciate more than we can tell the wise, patient, efficient and gracious ministry which he has exercised among us these fifteen years.

It is clear that when the Revd. Sydney Morris (who established the annual ministers' retreat in the counties) served briefly as superintendent, followed by the Revd. H. H. Sutton, the ground had been most thoroughly prepared by the first holder and in such a way that Association life in general without the services and pastoral skill of a superintendent had become well-nigh inconceivable.

The years of the first world war were harsh and hard, and their effects deep and serious on the churches. Male leadership declined as war service took its toll, and ministers served as forces' chaplains. War work involved Sunday duties, and premises were liable to be commandeered by the military. Commonplace hardships such as rationing made entertaining almost impossible, and there were no Association meetings at all in 1917 or 1918. But for the work of the Superintendent in encouraging leaderless and uncertain churches, together with the Sustentation Fund's aid to churches immediately suffering from the after effects of war, it is likely that the Association would have emerged from the years of conflict with greater losses than in fact were sustained. To the extent that the difficulties of the time are represented in financial matters, it is clear that the 1920s are years of great hardship, in which the churches are hard pressed in many cases to keep up with their obligations, and the largest of the churches are obliged to shoulder a very considerable burden. In the post-war years only five churches enter membership of the Association, and subsequently two fail, leaving Birchington, Beltinge and Victoria Drive, Eastbourne as the three survivors. The adjustment to the new era was not easy, but the doubts voiced immediately prior to hostilities in 1914 seemed to have been contradicted by events. In 1929 the Association reported 78 churches, 10,209 members, 309 local preachers, 1,753 teachers and 12,899 Sunday School children. These figures represent a substantial advance compared to the position in 1899. Thus despite the disturbed conditions of the time, the churches of the two counties were well able to respond to the two calls to action initiated once again by the Union in the 1930s. The first of these was the Discipleship Campaign, initiated in 1932 with the aim that each church member should lead at least one person to the direct service of Christ and His church. The movement was chiefly successful amongst younger people, and the two years of the campaign saw a moderate increase in baptisms as a result.

The Forward Movement of 1936 was intended to have both an evangelistic purpose and to issue in the raising of a substantial sum for building schemes, for despite the tapering down of overall statistics, new districts were being built which required the construction of churches. As the issue was commended to the churches and enthusiastically taken up by speakers, the atmosphere was one of unfulfilled hopes and uncertain expectation: thus H. H. Sutton, as Superintendent to the Assembly of 1937, declared:

We all rejoiced to hear of the success which has already attended the first year of the Baptist Forward Movement. Already we have the assurance that at least one million pounds will be spent in church extension between the years 1931 and 1941. But great though this achievement is, the greater part of the Forward Movement still remains to be accomplished: in Churches and Sunday Schools already existing we are pledged to cultivate and develop a new spirit of enterprise. The steady decline in Sunday School figures for many years past, culminating in 1937 with the terrible loss of no less than 19,000 scholars from Baptist Sunday Schools alone is the most serious of the challenges we have to face. The decline means the drying up of the sources that feed the Church, and if it be not arrested the Church of the next generation will suffer immeasurable weakening. It may be arrested and if only every Baptist Sunday School sets itself to record an annual gain of ten scholars, the loss would be more than made up within the space of a few years.

In the south as elsewhere the thirties were anxious years: and yet as new districts came into being, so new causes were brought into being to serve them: amongst them Cheriton, West Worthing, Aylesham, Broadwater, Petts Wood, Willingdon, Aldwick, Loose and (in the new decade) Findon Valley. Some of these causes were older work now mature enough to achieve church-hood, and many of them owe their life to the concern of larger, parent churches which had established work in the developing areas of the towns already served: three of the names mentioned just now are of outer districts of Worthing, where the central church was always diligent in this regard. Despite the faltering expectations represented by the decline of some older causes, and the sheer worry of financing the overall work which is reflected in the sometimes desperate appeals for finance contained in the assembly minutes, at no time is there a decline in concern for the unconverted or any loss of confidence in the power of the good news to change and renew. Evangelism remains the lifeblood even when the body appears to be in indifferent health: and the overall situation, as represented in the Association figures, is of steady life with losses amongst children and small annual gains in total membership.

The situation in our counties brought about by the second world war can be judged from the report given by the Canterbury district to the Association Assembly in 1942:

Of the 17 churches in this district, nine have carried on with

about three fifths of their membership away: eight are without the services of a Minister, two have temporarily arranged united services with other denominations, and one has closed for the duration. Many of the churches are, of course, carrying on special work amongst the troops that man England's front line.

There was much to discourage in such a situation. A whole Sunday School might disappear overnight. Raiding and its destruction was a constant peril (although only two churches, Crawley and Halton, were completely destroyed). Sunday attendances would be disrupted by the various calls and responsibilities upon members as citizens of a nation at war. It was characteristic of the Baptist people of these counties that when hostilities ceased, it should become immediately apparent that the need of the hour was a call to vigorous and expansionist evangelism. Prior to the initiating of the Mid-Century Crusade, however, measures had already been taken for the strengthening of the inner life of the churches and the ground prepared for the hoped-for growth. In 1945 Sidney Walter was elected as Lay Preachers' secretary and soon four Lay Preachers' Districts were formed, together with meetings for study, conferences and the like designed to increase the effectiveness of lay folk called to minister in this way. The office of Home Missions secretary was reestablished and the suggestion of an annual interchange of pulpits was commended to the churches. This was undoubtedly a means of increasing interest in what was now to be called the Home Work Fund, though concern for Home Mission was absorbed in the preparations for the Mid-Century Crusade and the excitements of the period. Young Baptist Associations were formed throughout Kent at this time, while the much increased cost for the churches of building new places of worship was to be offset by the establishment in 1950 of a new Church Extension Fund: many of the new churches which undertook building work after the war were to receive help from this source, amongst them Gillingham (for Twydall), Moulsoomb, Chichester, Findon Valley, and South Ashford. This series of names will recall to us once again that in almost every case these new causes come into being because of the assiduous labours of the older Baptist community in the district. The theme whereby an established church brings another and another into being is a constant one in our story.

The raising of disquieted voices concerning real problems which we encountered already in the thirties is again apparent in these post-war years. The steady dilution of Baptist membership as a consequence of the practice of open membership had by now given a new and less simply Baptist feel to many congregations, and not all cared for the change. There was a steady statistical loss by erasure or withdrawal of roughly 3% per annum in membership which frustrated those who hoped for growth through evangelism, and concern for this feature of our life led in the late fifties to the series of investigations known popularly as the "Hole in the Bucket", a coinage of the Revd. P. N. Bushill (twice secretary of the Association). But these uncertainties

were overshadowed, for a time at least, by the Mid-Century Crusade.

In 1948, the Revd. W. D. Jackson, now General Superintendent, issued the Association a lively call to evangelistic duty. In New South Wales, he said, it took 35 church members to make one new one: amongst the Southern Baptists it took 22 church members, and in the churches of California it took only 6. But in Kent and Sussex it took no fewer than 50 church members to make one more member. He knew, and others knew, that some months previously L. R. Barnard had taken the opportunity of an address to the Hastings district to urge the churches that, confronted with the static condition of many of them, they should engage in a campaign of strong evangelism. The idea was taken up with enthusiasm and a large-scale organisation was put in hand and its work commended to the churches. It was a major effort of inner publicity and outward thrust, and the references to it in the yearbooks and in the "Link" (which began to be published in 1949) are long and enthusiastic. The results were appreciable. In 1952 the Crusade secretary, the Revd. Frank Taylor, reported to the Assembly as follows: "We can confidently say that not one of our churches but is the better for the Mid-Century Crusade. Statistics can mean much or little, but it will be of interest to recall that over the three years we have completed 124 Inner Missions or Crusades. In these we have used the ministers of the Association for 341 Crusade engagements". The figures indeed bear out this report. Membership in 1951 increased overall by 224, baptisms rose from 364 to 448 (the highest since 1911) and in the following year the gain in membership was 281, the highest increase for thirty years. Considered in perspective, the overall effect was to restore a situation which had obtained some twenty years before and thereby had overcome the ravages of war-time. In a comparison of 1952 with 1932 there are almost exactly the same number of baptisms (382 as against 361) and church members (10,540 as against 10,474), with approximately 1,300 fewer children (at 11,294) and 300 fewer teachers (at 1,437). This activity is carried on at 89 churches in 1952 compared to only 79 twenty years earlier. It is beyond question that the Crusade contributed vitality and much zeal to the life of the churches in the post war period, and led directly to the planning of the four year Crusade for Children and Youth which began in 1953: it may well be that its spirit has animated later projects besides.

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