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The Baptist Denomination in Wales.

BY THE REV. DR. THOMAS.

The principles of the Baptists, introduced into this country in Apostolic times, appear to have taken deep root among the Ancient Britons. They seem to have withstood the encroachment of continental errors and corruptions until the commencement of the seventh century. The millennium of darkness and death which followed the mission of the monk Augustine did not utterly extinguish the light of evangelical truth among our people. Early in the seventeenth century Baptists made their appearance in South Wales, formed themselves into churches, and evinced commendable zeal for the spread of the Gospel among their benighted countrymen. They were, however, but few and scattered; and, for a long time, made but slow progress. The first church was founded on the borders of Herefordshire about the year 1633; and in 1650 the first Welsh Association was held at Histon, near Swansea, and consisted of only three churches. These increased to thirteen before the Restoration of Charles II.; and though, during the infamous reign of that Prince, they were much persecuted and dispersed, yet the number of their preachers and members increased. In 1689 the Welsh churches joined the London Association, and had six or seven messengers at the meetings held in the autumn of that memorable year. In 1692 they became united to the Bristol Association, and sent representatives to its Conferences both at Bristol and Taunton. In 1695 the first Baptist chapel—unless a building fitted up at Hay, in 1649, might be so called—was erected at Llanwenarth, near Abergavenny; so that for sixty-two years the people had met and worshipped without chapels, and had found in the farmhouse, the cottage, the barn, and the open air, "the house of God and the gate of heaven." In the year 1700, when there were several mixed-communication churches, that Association, consisting at first of only eight strict churches, was formed, which held its annual gatherings uninterruptedly for ninety years, and has since 1790 branched out into ten large Associations, and multiplied into 665 congregations. Several of those early churches, as those of Hengoed, Blaenau Gwent, and Llanwenarth, were large, respectable, and active long before the rise of Welsh Methodism. Our most remarkable success has been achieved in the present century. In 1790 there were only forty-six associated churches in all Wales. They then amicably divided themselves into three Associations. Since that date our denomination has grown much more rapidly, and especially within the last thirty years. The Baptists, if not so numerous as the Independents and Calvinistic Methodists, have certainly taken an important position in the land. They number at least 65,000 members, 75,155 hearers, 67,651 Sunday-schoolers with 9,209 teachers in 607 schools, making a total of upwards of 217,000 souls connected with our body. There are in the Principality

- 545 churches and
- 120 branches, or 665 congregations.

These are served in the Gospel of Christ by

- 351 pastors; and
- 258 preachers, or 609 ministers.

They assemble together in

- 576 chapels and
- 181 stations, making 757 places of worship.

There are three colleges. The oldest is that at Pontypool, Mon., founded at Abergavenny in 1807. It has sent forth 246 pastors, and has thirty-three students reduced from thirty-seven at Christmas last. The second was established at Haverfordwest in 1830; it has educated 102 ministers, and has twenty-nine students. The third was opened last year at Llangollen as a Bicentenary Commemoration, under the title of "The North Wales Baptist College," and has at present nine students. Here are seventy-one students, nearly all from the Principality, while there are about forty candidates for admission, and a few continue to be received

into English colleges. There are in Wales itself about 130 churches without pastors. Many of these, indeed, are too weak to support a minister; but there are scores which are well able to do so, and among them several of the largest and strongest congregations in the country. New churches also are springing up in all directions in the manufacturing districts, and on the lines of railway. In fact, the supply has not yet met the demand, and the committees of our colleges are frequently pressed to allow their young men to leave before the expiration of their time, and none possessing ordinary qualifications remain long unengaged.

Another singular feature in our collegiate system is, that the larger part of the funds is collected every year from all parts of Wales by the students themselves. It has been so for fifty-six years. The young men are deputed by the committee to visit the churches during the vacation; and received as cordially and entertained as hospitably as ordinary missionary or other deputations. The Associations sanction, and the churches expect, their visit in due course; and the pastors universally accept their services. Nearly all the churches that are able contribute, and most of them make two annual collections for Pontypool and Haverfordwest, while some are making a third for the new college in North Wales. The habit of contributing to this object, the periodical visits of the young men, and the countenance of the Associations serve to produce and to sustain a degree of popular interest which is not, perhaps, shown to similar institutions in any other country.

The Welsh Baptists have made good use of the press since the early days of Joseph Harris, of Swansea, the originator and conductor of "Seren Gomer," the oldest and one of the ablest quarterlies in the land. Two magazines, the "Bedyddiwr" and the "Greal," are monthlies, as well as two small ones, the "Athraw" and the "Gwyllydydd," intended especially for the young. A weekly newspaper, "Seren Cymru," is extending its circulation, and it is deservedly popular as a medium of general intelligence, and an organ of denominational information and discussion.

A great work has been done in Wales, especially within the last half-century. The evangelisation of the people has been carried on to a large extent by the free churches of different denominations; and in this sacred enterprise the Baptists have taken a leading part. But we must glance at the particular means by which it has been achieved. Our fathers in the ministry of the Word were peculiarly qualified for the work of dispelling the deep darkness of the people and rousing their attention to their eternal interests. They also acted as missionaries, and traversed the whole country publishing the Gospel of the kingdom of heaven; they were joyfully welcomed and entertained by every church they visited, and preached in farm-houses, cottages, barns, and the open air. They did not discountenance in their assemblies the free expression of thought and feeling; but rather felt inspired, not only by the fixed attention, the joyous smile, and the silent tear, but also by the loud "amen," and other emphatic utterances. They held their monthly and quarterly meetings, partly for business and fraternal intercourse, but chiefly for preaching the Word; and they seldom failed to get large audiences. At their annual Associations, many thousands came together from great distances; and from a temporary platform erected in a field or on a hill-side, they proclaimed, two or three at each service, "the words of eternal life." "The sons of thunder" and the "sons of consolation" were always listened to with eager interest; and the texts and most telling remarks were remembered and talked of for many years. The pastors were much aided in their labours by a kind of *lay agency*—a large number of assistant or local preachers, who both supplied branch congregations at home, and made occasional excursions into distant parts. At an early period they also promoted the establishment of Sunday-schools, in which large classes of adults as well as of children were taught to read and understand the Scriptures. The experience meetings, called "societies," held for mutual edification and the encouragement of enquirers, were of great service, though sometimes abused like the class-meetings of other bodies. These

were generally held once in the week, and at the close of evening service on the Lord's-day. The common method of conducting prayer-meetings, too, helped to impart to them a lively interest. They were distinguished by both variety and fervour; usually a portion of Scripture was read, half a dozen short and fervent prayers were offered, and "the service of song," which occurred three or four times, was almost invariably restricted to a single verse, which any one might give out, and was repeated as often as the feelings of the worshippers prompted them.

The Annual Associations are kept up, and largely retain their popularity. There is as much preaching as ever, but more time is devoted to the business of the conferences, which is conducted with creditable order and ability. The principle of association operates so powerfully in this direction that there are very few churches unconnected with these organisations.

The Christian ministry maintains its character and influence. If there are now no great preachers who stand out as prominently as Christmas Evans did among his contemporaries, there are many men of great ability, whose style of preaching is better adapted to the exigencies of the present time.

I may observe, finally, that the Baptist denomination in Wales is characterised by an *orthodox unity*. It may be questioned whether, in any other country, the Baptists are so thoroughly united in faith and practice. In former times our fathers were troubled with violent controversies producing alienations and divisions, on Arianism, Arminianism, Calvinism, high and low, Sandemanianism, Campbellism, &c.; but all these controversies have died away amid the powerful revivals and earnest activities of the last quarter of a century. Those great revivals with which at different times the Lord has favoured the people of Wales have had a wonderful effect, not only in the conversion of sinners, but in subduing and harmonising the churches. We know of no existing congregation of either Arminian or Antinomian Baptists, though within our own recollection the distinctions of High and Low Calvinist were strongly marked, and occasioned warm discussions and painful collisions in private and in public; the differences are now scarcely perceptible, or, like the colours in the rainbow, form one harmonious whole. Ministers and people now seldom speak or think of their doctrinal differences. They meet in "the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." This union is our strength; and it may be made available for other purposes than it now subserves. It must, however, be acknowledged that the spirit of the Baptists in Wales, like that of other bodies, is intensely denominational; and the practice of open communion is almost invariably repudiated as unscriptural and mischievous. This will be regarded, of course, as an excellence or a defect according to our own views on that vexed question. The only exceptions are a few English churches, who admit the unbaptized to the Lord's Table, and, in other respects, conform to the religious usages of the denomination in England.

This very imperfect view of the state of the Baptist denomination in Wales we present to the Union with sentiments of humility, gratitude, and joy. Deploring our shortcomings, and surveying with anxiety the "much land" which yet remains to be possessed, we devoutly acknowledge the sovereign goodness of God in the signal success which has been achieved by humble instrumentalities, and are encouraged to put forth our energies for the complete evangelisation of the land. Our predecessors planted; we have watered; and God has given the increase. Not unto us, but unto His name be all the glory! "Thanks be to God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."

The Baptist Denomination in Scotland.

BY THE REV. DR. PATERSON.

The Baptists of Scotland are but of comparatively recent origin. The course of the last hundred years will include all those movements which have given a determinate as-

pect to this body down to the present time. At their first appearing they were what are usually designated Scotch Baptists. Under this name they were known as holding, with more or less tenacity, that there ought to be a plurality of elders or pastors in every church. These were not necessarily separated from business, or furnished with a special training for the work of the ministry. They were supposed to be men of good sense, and able somewhat effectively to expound the fundamental doctrines of the Cross. But, besides this division of the teaching faculty in the church, there were super-added "the gifts" of the brethren; so that on one part of the Lord's-day they attended to what was technically called "the ordinance of exhortation." Their theological creed was generally Calvinistic, with varying amounts of metaphysical nicety in distinguishing the points of faith.

The rise of the other and now greater section of the Baptists in Scotland dates from about the beginning of the present century. Christopher Anderson in Edinburgh and George Barclay at Irvine may be regarded as leading the way. This section, as distinguished from the Scotch, are usually designated English Baptists. They hold the necessity of an educated ministry—in whatever way that education may be obtained—and that the pastors, as far as possible, should be relieved from all secular employment. The "gifts" of the brethren, as a formal ordinance, are dispensed with; while there is the use, to the utmost possible extent, of the teaching ability which God may have conferred upon his children, with a view to the extension of his kingdom. They hold, however, in common with their brethren of the other division, the commemoration of the death of the Saviour by the institution of "the Supper" every Lord's day.

The Baptists of Scotland may be roughly estimated at present at from 8,000 to 10,000. At least, twenty years ago, it was ascertained that their number was then about 5,000. In some localities they have considerably increased during that period; in others they have been either stationary or become altogether extinct. With a few exceptions, they are scattered over a wide extent of country, and bear but an insignificant proportion to the population at large. Taking the inhabitants of the northern kingdom at nearly 3,000,000, these some 8,000 or 10,000 form but a fraction of the mass.

Through the Highlands of Scotland, from Blair Athole as far west as the Island of Tyree, they are found, here and there forming small churches, but so poor as to be unable to support the ministry of the Gospel. The chief strength of the Baptist lies in Edinburgh and Glasgow. In these two cities they may approach to nearly 3,000 members.

In any locality, they are but a small fraction of the population. So much so that in any religious movement, their absence or presence may be counted for almost nothing. In Glasgow, for instance, assuming their number at fifteen or sixteen hundred, what is that in a population of nearly half a million? No doubt, viewed as to their vitality and witness-bearing for God, their position is different; but viewed in relation to the "flesh and blood" aspects of the kingdom, their weight in the balance could scarcely be named. Taken altogether, they are comparatively not wealthy. A few, especially in Edinburgh and some of the larger towns, are men of substance. Some of these have, either in their own persons or those of their fathers, risen by industry, integrity, commercial enterprise, and thrift, to the possession of considerable incomes. But upon the whole, the Baptists of Scotland cannot be regarded as possessed of great riches.

With regard to the means of progressive advancement, there are two Associations in Scotland. One of these institutions—the Baptist Home Mission—has been in existence for forty-seven years. This society, while avowedly formed for the whole of Scotland, has been confined in its operations chiefly to the Highlands and Islands. In this way its missionaries have been, to a large extent, Gaelic-speaking labourers, and consequently their missionary exertions have been confined to a division of the country comparatively poor. Of course, there is a kind of romance thrown around the land of Rob Roy, and other chieftain thieves of the North; and partly from Royal influences, as well as partly from