

II.

HILL CLIFF IN ENGLAND.

III.—The Warrington Cemetery at the Cleft Hill.

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The early church at Rome, in time of persecution, betook itself to the cemeteries and improvised places of worship there till the calamity should pass. Places of burial are often respected even by persecutors. If the Warrington church was to profit in this way, the first step was to secure a burial-ground. Half a mile to the south, beyond the bridge, the roads to Chester and London forked; and half a mile further along the London road a bye-lane turned off toward the Cleft Hill. Near to this lived one Peter Daintith, a yeoman farmer, and there was nothing strange on the surface if he now leased an acre and a half of land, which, with Cheshire generosity, was measured as one Cheshire acre, from William Morris of Grappenhall. But who was William Morris? He was a minister from Manchester, where he had just been figuring in the courts, and had so fallen out with his neighbors that he seems to have thought a change of residence would do him good. Moreover, two years earlier he had married a daughter of John Wigan, the Baptist minister and colonel, in the presence of Baptist witnesses, and he was now living within two miles of Dunbabin, his brother-in-law, a Warrington Baptist. When, therefore, we find these names on the deed, together with those of one or two Cheshire men and another from Liverpool, we are prepared to find that, although there is mention of a man to work the harvest, yet this is no ordinary agricultural lease.

Three years later the Baptists have twice risen in arms, and have been suppressed, and it is time to make for safety. The patch of ground is sub-leased to a farmer in the neighborhood,

and then a third document, known to lawyers as a release, completes the transfer. This last deed sheds a chastened light over the whole transaction. William Morris, the minister, has died a year before, and his son appears as heir. He chooses one Lancashire man and one Cheshire man, and puts them in trust of the field as a burial place for Baptists and Congregationalists of the two counties. A vague sentence at the end empowers the trustees to turn the buildings on the land to any use they please. The witnesses to this deed include a man from a convenient distance north in Lancashire at Burtonwood, a Manchester gentleman, William Morris' widow, her father, the indefatigable ex-colonel, just out of the hands of the Manchester magistrates and waiting his trial at Lancaster, with his son, John Wigan, junior, trained for the ministry. Here is a nice nest of Baptists!

Reactionary legislation thus far had only expelled from the State Church those who would not submit to the bishops. But when these ejected Presbyterians began opening private meeting houses, the old Conventicle Act of Elizabeth supplied a model which was improved upon, and in 1664 it was made illegal to attend any religious meeting at which more than four people assembled besides the family. How lucky that John Morris had been so vague about the use of the building, how lucky that it lay on a byeway, how lucky that it lay within a mile of the river so that the sheriff of Cheshire could be evaded by slipping into Lancashire; or else how provident of canny John Wigan and his son-in-law, William Morris, to ensure all these advantages.

So quiet did the Warrington friends keep, that when two years later a history of the district was written, no word about this obscure little patch was inserted. The aristocratic author was intent on county families and old churches, and probably would have disdained to mention a parcel of farmers and tradesmen slinking to a barn in a wood. There is not even any token that they set apart any one of their number as minister: poor John Wigan, who would doubtless have been ready and able enough, was up in London on bail, where he and his wife died in the plague; we can only be sure that his son would place his gifts at the disposal of the church.

It is somewhat important to remember that, while burials now began to take place here, and while worship was probably held as regularly as possible on Sundays, yet for six days in the week persecutors were blinded by the regular occupation of a laborer on the premises. The deeds show that there was a tenant here, whose interests were guarded in all the transactions, and whose name does not appear on any church record. Not until three lives fell in could the trustees claim the ground solely for religious purposes.

Under the Conventicle Act it now became useful for the bishops to secure particulars of those likely to defy the law, and a long list is to be seen at Chester, whence the President of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire furnishes a list of nineteen Baptists in Warrington at the date 1665. Among them are such names as Samuel Dunbabin; James Winterbotham, to be known afterwards at Manchester; Hugh Heslop, once a member at Hexham, who a few months earlier had laid Maria Heslop to rest in this ground, where her tomb stone can still be seen, perhaps the earliest of all; with others independently known to belong to the church. Other Baptists were also delated to the bishop in villages near, evidently members of the Warrington Church.

With a list revised yearly in this fashion, with stringent laws against meeting, with many gentry and others sore at past oppression and ready to enforce these revengeful laws, small wonder if the jails filled with Baptists. At one time, out of 386 prisoners in one town, 289 were Baptists and others taken at unlawful meetings. King Charles hoped there was a reaction against such persecution, and in 1672 he began to pave the way for the Catholics; his first step was to notify that he suspended all laws restricting religion, and to invite ministers to take out licenses to hold conventicles and to register their places of worship. Many did, and the Presbyterians of Warrington at once erected a meeting-house. But when the lists of these new places of worship began to accumulate at the county seats, the Episcopalians took alarm, and in Parliament next year forced Charles to withdraw his declaration and revoke the licenses.

From the first some dissenters had feared a trap, and had seen

the danger in furnishing an accurate list of their leaders and of their places of worship. The Warrington Baptists had been like Brer Rabbit, they lay low and said nothing. And so when the archbishop scrutinized the documents, called on his bishops to make a parish census and find out exactly the strength of Non-conformists and Romanists everywhere, the storm here broke on the Presbyterians but passed harmlessly over the Baptists. The official list at Chester has no word of our friends.

Yet every now and again a lynx-eyed summoner might have seen a melancholy train despoising the parish grave-yards and going miles across country to the Warrington cemetery. In 1676 Charles was Independent of Parliament, and did not care to conciliate the bishops any longer. When William Witter of Netherton ended his pilgrimage, leaving three little children, his body was openly interred here with a stone to commemorate him. Three years later his aged father John was borne from the bishop's own seat of Chester to lie beside him; and in the same year Elizabeth Seddon of Withington, near Manchester, rejoined her husband Joshua after seven years' parting.

A graphic account has come down of the terroism of those days, for the law might always be enforced. A London Baptist, worn out by persecution in Southwark, had given up business and retired to a little village a mile out from Warrington on the Cheshire bank. On the Sunday he saw some people leaving the town, and following them was guided to Hill Cliff, where the appearance of strangers in town-cut clothes caused some alarm. Six years had to pass before such worship was legal; but the Londoner not only gave more strength to the feeble community, fifty years later one of his family was to become a regular minister here.

When Rowland Hall found his to the cemetery in 1683, there would seem to have been a building, probably converted for public worship as John Morris gave leave. In 1689 toleration was secured, and the Baptists were free to build openly in Warrington itself; they seem to have been content with a small house up a yard. But in 1694 a new building was registered at Hill Cliff in Appleton, and for a while God's Acre was hallowed by regular worship here.

IV.—The First Ministers.

Presbyterians were accustomed to have ministers set free from all other employment and devoted simply to pastoral care. It was often remarked that their ministers paid by voluntary contributions were better off than when they had been State clergy subsisting on tithes. Baptists generally followed a very different practice. Often in one church were to be found several "ministers," though one might be the chief and in pastoral charge. The general rule was that all worked for their living, although if any were poor they might share in the usual poor fund. Thus in the London churches even later the chief ministers, those who appeared to an outsider to be the heads of the churches, were of the following trades: A glazier, a weaver, a cooper, a tailor, a glassmaker, a baker, a life-guardsmen, a butcher, a ribbon-weaver, a journeyman shoemaker, a tinsmith, a hatter, and a tallow-chandler; with only three not specified, two of whom appear to have kept schools. The Presbyterian ministers resented having to meet such men, and looked down on them greatly. But Samuel How, the cobbler, had vindicated the calling of such men by the Spirit, and the custom rooted itself strongly.

It is a very great error to think that many University men were numbered among Baptists in the seventeenth century. At the very outset John Smith was indeed a notable exception, but he never set foot in England as a Baptist, and indeed died within three years of adopting such principles. There were a few others like himself, Episcopal clergy who became Baptists: Donne, Jessey, Marsden, Saint Nicholas, Skinner and Tombes are specimens of those who never entered into relations with other Baptists, and wasted their efforts by independent action, even if they did not subside into silence after 1662. A few more did throw themselves into denominational life, such as Bampfield, Cornwell, Dike, Fownes, Cosnell, Jenkyn Jones, Hanserd Knowles, Laurence Wise; and with them may also go two doctors, who acted as Baptist ministers, Ichabod Chauncey and Edward Stennett. But this list is nearly exhaustive; only

a score of Baptists were University graduates. Speaking broadly, our ministry was not cultured. This fact comes out also from the consideration that of 2,257 men recorded by Calamy as suffering about the year 1660, only 41 have even been claimed as Baptists, while a careful scrutiny will greatly reduce the list. Perhaps only ten Baptists accepted State pay for their ministry.

Of these, undoubtedly Colonel Wigan was one; but he did not long influence Baptist life, as he died in the great plague of London in 1665. His son had been trained for the ministry, and it is probable that he rendered some help at Warrington, where we have seen him witnessing a deed, but nothing has come to light to prove it. Nor is there any sign that Thomas Tillam returned to his wife's home to take charge of the church he had founded. On the contrary, we can trace him at Colchester and involved in a huge emigration scheme to Bohemia, which hardly veiled a military plot for the overthrow of the king. To Warrington Tillam seems never to have returned, but the church found one of its own members able to minister to her. Twelve miles north, at a village called Haigh, lived a husbandman named Thomas Lowe. He became a minister of this church, at what date is not yet known, but probably by 1680, and possibly even ten years earlier, when he would be thirty-seven years old.

By 1688 the nation had had enough of King James, and welcomed William of Orange. Under his rule persecution ceased, and soon the churches began to pull themselves together, take stock of their position and plan for the future. The London Particular Baptists issued a call to their brethren throughout the country, and from many parts appeared representatives of 105 churches, including Farmer Lowe from Warrington, but nobody from Manchester nor from another Cheshire church hard by. What a gathering there must have been in the pumping station next the brewhouse on the broken wharf, where the venerable Hanserd Knowles entertained the Convention. The London Confession of 1644, revised and reprinted more than once, seemed now needlessly to emphasize the differences from others. The Presbyterian Confession at Westminster had been

considered by another London pastor, who had removed its Pe-dobaptist heresies and remodeled it in a Baptist sense; this had been tested for eleven years, and was now acknowledged to be the belief of the assembly. To the present day this Confession of William Collins, countersigned on behalf of Farmer Lowe, expresses the belief of millions of American Baptists.

Presbyterians had influenced the meeting in other matters, and we find a resolution that formal ordination was very desirable, and another that a fit maintenance ought to be provided; though it is ambiguously added, "according to their abilities". What would Farmer Lowe say to that? More to his taste might be the recommendation to group small neighboring churches, and the reproof of ministers wearing long periwigs. He evidently enjoyed the gathering, and three years later came again. Four years afterwards he was traveling beyond Derby, and died at a hamlet near Burton, whence his body was brought sixty miles to rest in the little cemetery beside the Cleft Hill.

The next few years saw changes. A physician living on the outskirts of Liverpool found fifteen miles too far to come to worship, and licensed his own house for the purpose. Yet when his wife died, two years later, her body, too, was borne to the Warrington grave-yard. The members took no step for another minister till two years had passed, but then an unusual chance arose of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Twelve miles away was another church, enjoying the ministrations of a man who, like John Wigan, junior, had been trained for the ministry in the Church of England, but was unable to accept the conditions of employment there. He was learned enough to write sermons with Hebrew, Greek and Latin in them, and to lay them out in scholastic fashion with three heads and seventy-two points! Such a man was wasting his sweetness on the desert air at the hamlet of Warford, whereas Warrington was a large town that respected learning, and quite able to appreciate his excessively high Calvinism. So Francis Turner was induced to transfer his ministry, which he exercised here for another twenty years, during which the Liverpool members hived off under another minister. In his day substantial merchants came to the congregation, even from as far away as Chester. And we

are not to suppose that they usually made an excursion to the rural grave-yard; they had a meeting-house up an alley in the town of Warrington itself, though not to compare with the stately building of the Presbyterians, far less with the official church, now in Episcopalian hands again.

When the aged minister died, the future policy was a little uncertain. A manse was built for Jonathan Hayes, and in his time the church came into contact with a new group of Baptist churches in the valleys to the northeast, where also the question of a professional ministry was being agitated. Then came Hall, a son of the London cheese-factor, and then McGowan, a baker, who later on developed into the minister of Devonshire Square in London, and even secured a D.D. Two more succeeded, one of whom saw the erection of a new meeting-house, and the other initiated a series of scandals which led to the closing of the building and the sale of the furniture. The first period of the history ends in 1785 with the dissolution of the cause.

Since then there have been revivals and splits, but the foothold in Warrington was lost, never to be regained. The town was now the northern center of Presbyterianism, with a seminary for young ministers, which became a hotbed of Unitarianism. When Baptists, after seven years, plucked up heart to begin again, it was on the Cheshire bank exclusively, where a sturdy little church now thrives close to a dense population; and has built new premises on the old burial-ground. Warrington itself has been reoccupied for the denomination within the last sixty years, but by two new bodies of varying doctrinal complexion, not by a branch of the old community. One of these seems, however, to adhere to the old peculiarity that theministers must be self-supporting.

V.—Two Early Sister Churches.

Forty minutes from Liverpool lies Manchester, and just outside the Exchange station is the little cathedral, opposite to which was housed the first Baptist church in the north of Eng-

land, whose existence is only just being brought to the attention of modern Baptists.

In Commonwealth days the cathedral was only a Collegiate church, supposed to be served by a Warden and College of Fellows, whose corporate buildings lay across the street. But these had passed to the Countess of Derby as a town house; and when her husband was executed for his share in the civil wars, the building were confiscated to the state. The Gate House was leased by Major John Wigan, of Cromwell's Infantry Guards, once an Episcopalian clergyman; and in 1649 he converted it into a Baptist meeting-house. Here he gathered a good congregation, including Edward Gathorne, a rich citizen who took a most prominent part in town affairs. But as Wigan was engaged in high politics and was designated to higher military rank, he handed over the congregation to another minister, Jones by name. Welshmen have ever done well for Baptist principles, especially in Manchester.

Wigan watched well over the temporal interests of his family and of his church, and when the feoffees of Humphrey wished to acquire the whole of these premises for the great Library and Hospital that still occupy them, he stood out for a high price, and secured his own terms for the Gate House. It is not quite certain yet whither the church transferred its meetings, though one or two trifles point to a migration to the Cold Arse, where we know of a meeting, and where ninety years later a Baptist church was certainly gathered.

Nor can the career of the fiery Jones be certainly traced, owing to the fact that there are several men of his name all intermixed in these affairs. He may have blended religion and fighting, for we know many details of a Baptist colonel and of a Baptist captain. He may have added plotting in the early days of Charles II., and a most romantic story can be told of that valiant Baptist Jones. He may be the unnamed Baptist minister thrown into Lancaster jail along with Wigan for his share in the 1662 plot and insurrection; or this may be his compatriot, Evan Price.

But the church somehow continued to exist, to the disgust of Bishop Gastrell, when he obtained a report of all church

affairs in his large diocese of Chester. When the Five-mile Act ordered all ministers who declined the oath of allegiance to keep five miles away from every corporate town, Manchester became a refuge for them, as it was not technically incorporated. And of the three congregations that maintained themselves, one was Baptist. The mob, however, became fiercely Episcopalian and even Jacobite, so that Dissenters had to live retired lives, while it is doubtful if our friends kept any records. But there are yet hopes that a continuity may be established for the 1649 church with one that meets in the suburb of Didsbury.

This came up into daylight after the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, with a pinmaker from a Yorkshire village fourteen miles away as its minister. The new trustees appointed for its building on Coldhouse Lane, including one from Warford in Cheshire, were of the old school theology. From this church descended one where the hyper-Calvinists were led by William Gadsby; but the old building was tenanted till eighty years ago, when the roof fell in and destroyed the early records.

Twelve miles south of Manchester, and as far from Warrington, is the tiny hamlet of Great Warford, which contains the oldest building in the occupation of English Baptists. It is strange that so much attention has been paid to Hill Cliff, and so little to this church, which has even greater reason to interest us.

During the Civil Wars, two or three neighboring mansions were fortified by their owners, and guerilla warfare went on till the Royalists were suppressed. A parliamentary garrison was maintained by Sir George Booth about 1642 at Chorley Old Hall, now used as a farmhouse, half a mile from Alderly Edge station. The tradition runs that a Baptist church originated there and then, but no single name affords the means of testing this tale, the date seems eight or ten years too early, and the fact that the Booths were of the moderate party and presently became royalist, is rather against it.

Not far from the Hall, but well off any main road, was a rough farm building of oak framing, wattle-and-dab filling, clay floor and thatch roof. When the evil days of 1662 arrived, this was used as one of four meeting-houses by the Bap-

tists of the vicinity, who adjourned irregularly across the borders of the various townships to evade detection. What were these townships? Local tradition thinks only of a radius of five or six miles, and dares name none. But we have actual evidence at the time of Baptists in Manchester, Warrington, Nantwich and Newcastle-under-Lyme, all within twenty miles, a distance thought little of in those days.

When toleration was secured in 1688, this little steading was duly declared as a Baptist meeting. Here the word was preached by the erudite Francis Turner, and a congregation used to assemble from Knutsford, Stockport and even Macclesfield, while five miles away at Mottram, land was secured for a burial-ground. One of Turner's sermons on Romans 6:4 survives, specially strong on the baptism of believers; and a little brook hard by gave opportunity to practice what he preached.

He was followed by his son John, but even as Warrington tempted away the father, so Liverpool tempted away the son, who left a vague promise to help them, easily forgotten. Slowly the cause declined, till part of the old barn was converted into a cottage, and still so remains.

Then Warrington detached one of its members, living at Stockport, only twelve miles away, and he was installed as pastor by three leaders in Lancashire and Cheshire. A new church book was obtained, and abundant information is entered in its pages. A collection was made every six months for the minister, and it seems that in four years he received \$64, which shows he was not pampered. They kept a tight rein on him in other ways; his conversation was deemed frivolous, and he was deposed, restored, deposed again. The quarrel was patched up after he tried a new cause nearer his home, and he lived on to the age of 70, too feeble at last to preach after coming the twelve miles. In the year of his death the meeting-house was fitted with a dado of plaited rushes, while the clay floor was covered with bricks and planks by the new minister. Except for trifling repairs during the 120 years since, the place remains in substantially the same condition, and deserves a visit from those who care for Baptist antiquities.

The church is true to its own tradition in several respects.

Most of the ministers have lived far away, have supported themselves, have been appointed in youth, have raised the place to some vigor, and have seen it decline with their advancing age. The present pastor is a venerable shoemaker, residing several miles from his own place of worship, opposite a modern Baptist chapel with which he has nothing to do. His members simply pay for the horse which he needs to drive to the main chapel and to its branch. They are of a slightly peculiar cast of doctrine, but on the whole abide by the old confession of 1677 and 1689, not compromising with modern thought, but emphatically repudiating the idea that the minister should receive a due maintenance.

Here may end these brief sketches of ancient English Baptist churches. The conventional history of our denomination is sadly in need of verification, or rather of radical correction; and bringing to light such obscure churches, or exposing mistaken stories, may pave the way for such work. It may also interest Americans if they see that some problems of the thinner districts were the same in the old land.