REMINISCENCES

OF THE

First Four Baptist Churches

IN SUFFOLK

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INTRODUCTION.

No. 1. - The Church in Eld Lane, Colchester

WHEN I first proposed, four years since, to record my reminiscences of the first four Baptist Churches in Suffolk, I prefaced them with a brief notice of the Baptist Church in Eld Lane, Colchester, from which the first two, directly, and the last two, indirectly, derived their origin. I have decided now to rewrite this first part, because such a narrative has become unnecessary—a complete history of that church has been published in the interval by the present pastor, the Rev. E. Spurrier, so complete, and accurate, and carefully constructed, that it has fully superseded the imperfect one I attempted to give. What is most important of all, the history contains a full transcript of the narrative in which all that is now left of the ancient records of the Church is to be found, the original documents being all of them irrecoverably lost and gone.

It will be seen from this narrative that the Church at Eld Lane was, from its first formation, an essentially Missionary Church. It had, even under its earliest pastors, a band of preaching Elders, who could occupy the pulpit in the pastor's absence, and visit outlying congregations assembling in far distant places in Suffolk, and in towns and villages in Essex, nearer home. In the year 1702, long before we read of any similar movements anywhere, there were twelve of these Elders present in one year, not all members of the Church, and not all present at one time, but apparently resorting to Colchester as a centre of operations, and to consult about their plans

and future movements. The peculiar character of the Church as a HOME MISSIONARY MOVEMENT reached a kind of climax during the pastorate of Mr. John Rootsey, of whom we know so little of what we should be so glad to know. For the loss of this information I hold myself in no small degree responsible.

When I first came to Colchester in March, 1837, men and women were living there who could supply information on any question I might have asked. Mr. Richard Patmore, a son-in-law of Samuel Rootsey; Mrs. Beaumont, the daughter of his youngest son; John Instance, the son of the old pastor of the General Baptists; to say nothing of Esther Ruse, whose memory was a storehouse of Eld Lane legends. Those she did not herself remember she had heard told so frequently that it had, so to speak, become part of her own knowledge. She went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Steevens at twelve years of age, say about 1779, and she had remained with them till they were both dead. All these I might have questioned, but alas! I was indifferent to them all; I was young in years, and painfully young in the ministry: I may say wholly inexperienced.

I had been living ten years in London, and I was too ready to regard all stories of this kind as old world gossip with which I had nothing to do. I had not then read, I did not for several years after read, the sketch of Joshua Thomas, which I had in my possession. There was one person, however, John Rootsey Beaumont, who would not let me off so easily, being younger even than myself, and evermore seeking my company, I was constrained to listen to him, and the story as he told it is just as I printed it, and I re-print it because it is substantially true, though through confusion of dates and even of persons, it is full of errors, and so literally false. I must say, however, that when he, in his easy, good-tempered way, told stories as his mother did of OUR grandfather, John Rootsey, they had no intention to deceive me as to the nearness of the relationship, much less in their blending together as they did the characters and occupation of the father, John Rootsey, and Samuel, the son. In neither of these

particulars was I fully undeceived till I was favoured by G. F. Beaumont, Esq., of Coggeshall, with a sight of the pedigree of his family, so far as it is known, which, by the bye, is a masterpiece of ingenuity, accuracy, and skill. From this I learnt that my young friend, John Rootsey Beaumont was named after his own grandfather, John Rootsey, and that he, John Rootsey, Jun., as I may call him, was named after the good pastor, his grandfather, whose history we so want to learn.

Among them they overlooked the true patriarch of their family, Samuel Rootsey, the man who lived at the distillery, who had a large connection with the farmers in Essex and Suffolk, who, with his wife and many of his children, were for many years members at Eld Lane, carrying on the work of the old pastor, by no means stopped by his decease; indeed, every congregation among which he laboured remained connected with Eld Lane till after his death. As everyone cannot have the chance of seeing Mr. Spurrier's narrative, I will here put down all that we actually know of Mr. Rootsey, as well as the dates of the churches formed after his death, all of them the undoubted fruits of his labors. The strangest and most remarkable thing in his story is that there is not, to my knowledge, in any document we possess, any assurance that Samuel Rootsey, apparently the only son and only child of John Rootsey, was *really his son*. So far as I know, the only evidence of the fact is that Article on Mrs. Patmore, in the *Baptist Magazine*, who is there plainly stated to be the granddaughter of the pastor, John Rootsey, and who we find in Mr. Beaumont's beautiful chart was the eldest daughter, Mary, of Samuel Rootsey, born September 5th, 1747.—See *Baptist Magazine*, 1814, p. 25.

Notices of Mr. John Rootsey in Joshua Thomas' Narrative.

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May 5th,   1709, mentioned as a preaching elder.
Feb. 9th,  1710, assisted at the ordination of Mr. Vickers.
June 29th, 1711, ordained pastor.
Oct. 29th, 1729, directed to go to Woolverstone once a quarter "to break bread."
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July 22nd.  1732, to go to Hasketon to re-admit the members of the Church.
May 1st,    1738, he died. The whole period, 27 years.
July 1st,   1737, Church formed at Bildeston.
July 11th,  1754, Church formed at Langham.
      "     1757,       "     "     Woolverstone.
      "     1786,       "     "     Earl's Colne.
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There seems to have been a general idea that Mr. Rootsey was an aged man at the time of his death: I am quite of a different opinion. I should say very decidedly that he was not more than fifty-five; taken away, in fact, in the full power of his useful work. My reason is this: his only son was not married when his father died. The eldest grandchild was not born till 1747, nine years after his decease. It is true he was a preaching elder in 1709: if I am right, he would be then twenty-nine years, certainly not too young for such an office. I think this fact is rather against the tradition that he was, before he was a pastor, a linen-draper in Colchester. Whether it is more than tradition, whether any actual evidence exists I cannot say, to me it seems improbable in the highest degree.

Here follows the Quotation:—

In the year 1711, the Church at Eld Lane chose for its pastor Mr. John Rootsey, a native of the town, a well-educated, intelligent, energetic man, who entered with the greatest zeal and enthusiasm into the work of Home Missions originated by his predecessor. My impression is that the Rootseys were brewers at that time in the borough; certain it is that Mr. Rootsey had a most extensive acquaintance with the principal farmers in Essex and Suffolk for many miles round. His first efforts were directed to building a new meeting-house, for hitherto they had only possessed an old house on North Hill, where the brewery now stands. As was the custom of those days, they chose for its site the narrowest and worst paved lane in the place. They purchased only just enough ground for the meeting-house itself to stand upon;

they built it flush with the pavement, of intensely red brick. On the whole, it was about as crowded and ugly a place as any in the town.

If the constructors and supporters. of the Independent and Baptist meeting-houses of the eighteenth century, most of them shyly hiding themselves in obscure courts and lanes in London and other places, could only have seen the Baptist Meeting-house at Providence, in Rhode Island, or only the copperplate picture of it in the *Register* for 1800, its grand proportions, its lofty spire, and its look of self -assertion and confidence, they must have been filled with wonder and awe.

Mr. Rootsey's great work was that of training and organizing the body of preaching elders, of whom for some fanciful reason of his own, he would have twelve, and who immediately began to follow him in his efforts to collect congregations in Essex; at Langham and Earl's Colne; and in Suffolk, at Woodbridge, at Bildeston, and at Woolverstone. At all these places small congregations were formed, to whom the elders ministered every Sunday. On being admitted to membership with the Church at Eld Lane, Mr. Rootsey himself visited them once a quarter and administered the Lord's Supper to each in its turn. The first of these five congregations formed into a church was that at Woodbridge,* for though I can find no other record of their existence, it is distinctly stated in the Eld Lane record that they were so little satisfied with their independent position that they prayed to be re-united to the Mother Church, and were received again into its communion in the year 1732. Only two churches in Suffolk therefore remain as the direct fruit of Mr. Rootsey's labours, the one at Bildeston, and the other at Woolverstone. There are two others, of whose history I have some immediate and personal knowledge, one at Wattisham, the other at Stowmarket.

At the close of this paper, I wish to call attention to the Home Missionary work of this Church at Eld Lane,

* Probably Hasketon, a village near.

the earliest and the most persevering of any with which I am acquainted. It began before the earliest of the various sects of Methodists appeared, before the Wesleys or the author of *The Serious Call* were born, before even Isaac Watts in his psalms and hymns had given the tone which Calvinistic Evangelical teaching ultimately exhibited.

In Suffolk especially were their labours blessed on the whole length of what we used to call "The Lower Road" from Bury to Hadleigh, including such places as Buxhall, Battisford, Nedging Naughton, Semer, Kettlebaston, Bildeston, and Lavenham. In Essex, too, from Colchester through the Colnes to Coggeshall and Kelvedon; to Langham, Stoke, Nayland, Bures, Bergholt, and Dedham, and many more villages now gathered into the Churches formed in the midst of them.

Singularly enough, since the above was put in type, I have received from Mr. George F. Beaumont, above mentioned, the account of a document which puts the relationship of John Rootsey to his son Samuel beyond dispute. It is true the fact is not categorically stated, but the deed shows us that the widow of John Rootsey is the mother of Samuel, and we know that he was born in the lifetime of his father.

The deed is the transfer of a farm in Norfolk, and like other documents of like kind, it recites older deeds and wills to prove the vendor's title to the property. In this is recited *first*, a deed dated May 5th, 1731, which mentions John Rootsey, gentleman, of Colchester, as the third party to the contract.

The *second* mentions John Rootsey's will, dated November 8th, 1733, afterwards proved by Elizabeth Rootsey, his widow.

The *third* is Elizabeth Rootsey's will, January 21st, 1757, proved by her son, Samuel Rootsey, and her daughter, Elizabeth Rootsey, who died before her brother.

Fourth, Samuel Rootsey's will, dated January 11th, 1779, proved by his widow, Elizabeth, his son-in-law, Nottingham Dalby, and Robert Tabor, merchant. In 1796, the two men had both died, and Elizabeth, Widow

and sole executrix of Samuel Rootsey, conveys this estate to the parties purchasing it.

We learn from this document, for the first time, that John Rootsey left a daughter as well as a son at his decease.

Mr. Instance, mentioned above, was buried October 8th: the last Mrs. Rootsey, December 3rd, 1837, in the chapel yard.

No. II The State of the National Church

Before I proceed in my account of the first Baptist Churches, it seems to me imperatively necessary to enquire what circumstances had combined together to originate and urge forward this singular movement. How came it to pass that a class of men who have been rarely found at the head of any enterprise—I mean the wealthy farmers of Suffolk—should have begun and carried on a work so alien from their usual habits and character as that of planting churches and chapels in all the principal villages and small towns in the county. It is true that many farmers at that time had amassed considerable sums of money, but this good fortune had come to them mainly through the monopoly of their produce during the long war with France – a war carried on chiefly under the auspices of a Tory administration, of which the farmers were the strongest supporters, the rallying cry being that of Church and State. How came these men to leave the Church—to purchase sites and erect chapels for Dissenting congregations? Above all, how came they to become themselves the leading preachers and pastors over them; able and successful preachers, too, and that in connection with a sect up to that time the most insignificant in the kingdom?

I wish to point out in this paper one of the circumstances, and that I think the foremost and principal one, which forced these men, some of them at first with great reluctance, to take the steps they did. I mean the deplorable condition of the National Church for the last half of the past and the first quarter of the present century.

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This state of things had arisen from the operation of two causes, pluralities and non-residence, evils which remained unchecked till the years 1816 and 1837. It must be remembered that this evil time was the era of patronage. Not only in the Church, but in the Army and Navy, in all Offices of State, even in literature and art, men did not come boldly forward, relying on their own energy and worth. They waited humbly on some patron, without whose aid it either was, or seemed to be, impossible to make the least forward step in life. So it happened that while many men, gentlemen by birth and education, remained all their lives laborious curates in hopeless poverty, others, who were so fortunate as to secure good patronage, had preferments heaped upon them, of which they strove to the utmost to hold as many as they could legally retain. It is true there was a statute against pluralities, but it was dated as far back as the 21st of King Henry the Eighth, and it rested with the bishop to enforce it. Unfortunately, the dignitaries of the Church were amongst the greatest transgressors. Some of them, who were innocent themselves, were lenient beyond all belief towards the protégés of powerful patrons, so that the utmost that was done was to allow three years' time to a pluralist where there was a good parsonage house, to make up his mind whether he would come into residence or resign the living.

The statute which put an end to these abuses was passed in 1816. It was not retrospective, so that the evil was not redressed for many years afterwards—in fact, not till all the incumbents of such livings had passed away. This abuse, bad as it was, was nothing to be compared with that of non-residence, for this affected more or less every preferment in the kingdom. Bishops spent most of their time in London, especially those connected with the Northern or the Welsh Dioceses. They examined their candidates for orders and they ordained and licensed men in town, they held confirmations once in three or perhaps once in five years, and their customary visitations served chiefly for collecting the customary fees absorbed by the

officials of the diocese. Even archdeacons did not reside, some of them did not even visit the parishes in their jurisdiction. Paley never visited his archdeaconry till he resigned the office, and that was because he got the more lucrative office of commissary, in which capacity he visited it for the new man. Even that great Church Reformer, Bishop Blomfield, held at one time the valuable living of St. Botolph's, Bishopgate, the Archdeaconry of Colchester, and the Vicarage of Chesterford, and when he accepted the Bishopric of Chester it was with the understanding that he should retain the living of St. Botolph's *in commendam* with it. But the evil of non-residence was most ruinous and destructive among the smaller and poorer livings in rural districts, and perhaps it was nowhere worse than in the diocese of Norwich and in the county of Suffolk in particular. In this diocese there are about 1300 parishes—probably one-half of them, at the time I am speaking of, of less value than £100 a year, and two-thirds of them without a house fit for a clergyman to live in.

The excuse for non-residence was not only that there was no house, but that the living was too poor to keep it in repair. Mr. Kitson, who began his life as Secretary under Bishop Bathurst, told me that in his early days there were not less than seventy clergymen incumbents of county livings resident in Norwich, and not less than half that number in Yarmouth. If these parishes were within a distance of twenty miles the incumbent drove over on the Sunday. If not, a curate was employed. According to the income, the size, and the population of these parishes, the services were conventionally adjusted. In some there were two held in the day, in others only one, and in others only one in a fortnight. One curate could manage to serve several of these parishes. Mr. Kitson told me that several men served four churches; once, and only once, he had drawn up a licence for a fifth parish for the same man. In fact, these services were frequently omitted altogether. They were held at an

inconvenient hour, or the overworked curate was prevented. by illness, or stormy weather, or impassable roads, from arriving in time, and he found the congregation dispersed. My remarks are intended chiefly to show the deplorable state of the country districts, but it will scarcely be credible if I say that the evil prevailed quite as extensively in the towns and cities as in the remotest country village. Take for instance the city of Norwich. At that time there were six minor canons; each of them held on an average three livings, one in the city and two in some neighbouring village. Each of them served the Cathedral two months in the year, and regularly closed his own church during his two months' service. Nearly every other church was held by a pluralist, and the same law prevailed in the city as in the country—a service once a week or once a fortnight, save where an endowed lecture secured a regular preacher.

The evil of non-residence, in the destruction of ecclesiastical property, was a secondary one doubtless, but a most serious one. I am unable to decide whether no money, or plenty of money was the greatest disaster. I am inclined to think the latter. Natural decay was more merciful than the vandalism of the village bricklayer and carpenter, or even the village squire. I only describe what I have seen over and over again when I tell of the arches of the naves and chancels of noble churches closed with boarding, or even with solid brick-work where there were clerestory windows to give light within; the aisles and chancels filled with ploughs and harrows and all the plant of the neighbouring farms. I know of one church where there was no clerestory, where the arches were bricked up, and ordinary sash windows inserted to let in the light, where the nave was ceiled and mouldings of white stucco carried round, a gallery being built at the west end. And so the Gothic church had become a modern concert or hall-room, only -with crimson-lined and cushioned and curtained pews instead of seats. It will sound

almost incredible, but I went once, in the year 1827, into the church of St. Saviour's, Southwark, and found it exactly in the condition I have described. The aisles and transepts were full of crates and lumber from the borough market, and the nave filled up with gorgeous seats for the magnates of the parish.

In the remote country parishes the only men that could be depended upon, and who kept valuable property from loss and ruin, were the much maligned and much despised parish clerks. Where there was no resident clergyman, not even a curate, they arranged the services, the baptisms (then of vital importance, being the only registers kept), the funerals, the weddings, having oftentimes to walk miles to hunt up a clergyman; they kept the communion plate, they had the care of the parish chest, they washed and mended surplices, as long as they would hang together, and as to how they fulfilled their duty the registers of every parish will shew. In nearly every case they were filled up only once a year; sometimes by a lawyer's clerk, sometimes by the clergyman himself—copied from the clerk's memorandum, frequently the only man present at such ceremonies, and the only man who kept a record of them. By a curious accident I inherited the services of two of these ancients—men who had had it all their own way, and done everything there was to be done for forty years.

I think I have said enough to shew that so far as religious privileges were concerned, the condition of hundreds of parishes in the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk was most deplorable, and that the apparently presumptious boast of these Nonconformist preachers, that they had "carried the Gospel" into such neglected places, was not so despicable as it now seems to be.

I have only one more remark to make, and that is that the wonderful change which has been wrought within the last sixty years was anticipated in this county to an incredibly small extent by the Evangelical revival. It came too late to be of service where it was most needed. The first man who avowedly

preached these doctrines was Mr. Hurn of Debenham, who came there in 1791. In his Life it is stated that he had no one like minded with himself in the county, that his nearest friends and associates lived as far off as Wymondham, in Norfolk. Mr. Wilcox, the earliest man I can recollect, came to Stonham in 1816; Mr. Nottidge to Ipswich, 1821; Mr. Bridges to Old Newton in 1823.

The revolution which has been effected since 1837, was begun by Bishop Stanley. Empowered by an Act of Parliament passed the same year, he resolved that every clergyman should reside on his own living, that every church should have one if not two services every Sunday. He did not live to see it done, but it is to all intents and purposes effected now. Only in very rare instances is there to be found a church unrestored, and that without selling the bells or the lead off the roof, without a compulsory rate, by the freewill offerings of the people alone.

I could have made this paper twice the length by describing things I have seen and known in those sad times, now so utterly passed away that it seems impossible they should have ever been. It is enough if I can justify the conduct of an honest man, who, finding he could not meet with any man to lead him and help him within a twelve miles' walk from his own home, would call his friends and neighbours together to read and pray, and ask counsel and help of God.

No. III.—The Independent Churches in Suffolk from 1775 to 1825

At the time when the first Baptist Churches began to make way in Suffolk, say from the year 1775, taking in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, there were no less than twenty-one considerable Independent

Churches in one county.* Twelve of these at the least lay on the direct line of this onward movement. It is a fact demanding explanation, that the new converts refused to join these churches, and to avail themselves of the abundant accommodation found in their meeting houses. have heard the reasons given over and over again as long ago as 1820, and even before that time. I will endeavour to state them as I have often heard them given by one not at all unfriendly to the Independents, but living in perfect harmony with them. He used to say:—

The Independents, from the first beginning of their history to the present day, have adopted practices and habits subversive of their own creed. These principles may be stated in two propositions, (1) That the Church of Christ is neither national nor parochial, but essentially *congregational*; (2) That where any body of believers have given themselves first to the Lord and then to one another, to maintain the worship and ordinances of their Master, they are a true Church, and they have in themselves the power and the right of self-government, are *independent* of all external rule and interference, owning no master but Christ alone. No sooner, however, do Independents begin to appear in history than we find them, under the easy government of Cromwell, accepting in considerable numbers the position of parish ministers in the National Church. The Presbyterians could do this with perfect consistency and honesty, for they did not intrude upon the rights of the parishioners, but took the charge of them, and were, as they generally are, true and laborious parish priests. It was wholly contrary with the Independents. They encroached on the rights of the parishioners,

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* LIST OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES IN SUFFOLK, WITH THE EARLIEST DATE OF THEIR HISTORY

Beccles, 1652	Bungay, 1719	Lavenham, 1697
Rendham, 1650	Debenham, 1662	Melford, 1713
Bury, 1646	East Bergholt, 1689	Nayland, 1690
Sudbury, 1651	Lowestoft, 1689	Stowmarket, 1719
Wattisfield, 1654	Needham, 1793	Wickham, Brook, 1682
Woodbridge, 1651	Clare, 1687	Halesworth, 1793
Walpole, 1649	Hadleigh, 1688	Ipswich, 1684

where they had in the building belonging to the parish what they called a gathered Church. They asked our pity when they were expelled from this anomalous position. Instead of that, we rejoice on their account: it enabled them to be honest men. They, too, are inclined to magnify their numbers at the time, to increase our sympathy. We feel, on the contrary, the greater the number the greater the disgrace. Even the hardships they afterwards endured brought their consolation. The fervour and zeal of their first "independence" made them flourish as they did. They prospered and increased for fifty years or more. Most strange it was that contentment in this false position enabled some few of them to swallow the whole contents of the Act of Uniformity. There were two of them at least in the Diocese of Norwich who, under the gentle oversight of Bishop Reynolds, had still "gathered churches" in parish buildings. We observe, however, that no sooner were the Independents as a body able to boast of and to rejoice in their independence than they showed themselves equally ready to sacrifice the other essential principle of their creed, the Congregational Church.

The Churches, in number and importance, shrunk by degrees into comparative insignificance, while the committee of management rose into dignity and power. The committee was selected from the subscribers or seat holders, and the more influential members of the Church. All the funds raised in the place were in fact provided by them and under their control. They virtually chose the pastors and paid them, and when it was necessary to secure legal sanction, their decision was laid before the Church, moved and seconded by the deacons, and carried without complaint or hesitation. Anyone can see for himself at this date, 1820, on any Sunday afternoon, the effect of this policy. He can watch the important and numerous congregation leaving the chapel, and an hour after he can see the members of the Church leaving after the Lord's Supper, a humble and scanty flock contrasted with the congregation which had left before. Now, the Baptists contend that they are,

both in theory and practice, Congregationalists and Independents; whereas those who arrogate to themselves these titles are such only in name.

There was, however, an antecedent reason why we Baptists eschewed the Independent Meeting, which met us before we had noticed and well weighed those mentioned above. The ministry and whole style of preaching was not in 1775 and on to 1800 what it had been fifty years before. The wave of scepticism which had arisen with the Deistic controversy was undermining and about to overwhelm the Presbyterian Churches, and it had not left untouched the congregations of the Independents. The seminaries of learning were in a serious degree affected by it: in what way and to what extent we may see plainly from Dr. Priestly's account of Daventry College while he was a student there. Many students of that college were afterwards placed in Suffolk. The sermons, which in former days contained able expositions of Scripture, had lost their fervour and earnestness, their savour and sweetness, and had become careful and elaborate essays in divinity and theology. Had it not been so we could have overlooked many extraneous fallings off, and swallowed much we did not like, as we did in later times in the churches, when Hurn of Debenham, Wilcox of Stonham, Bridges of Old Newton, and Nottidge of Ipswich, began to preach in them. I wish, however, to state *all the reasons* why we steered clear of the Independent Meeting, and built others for ourselves.

And now I will, on the other hand, state what my ii young friends among the Independents said to these charges; for I myself, when a youth and young man, had no other associates than these. One in particular who had left the Baptists for this very reason—he had 7 no companions among them and could find none —replied in this way:-

I know and understand all that you have now said: I have heard it from your father before you, in fact you are quoting him throughout, and I acknowledge it to be (with some explanations and limitations) just and

true. First, let me say that there is no evidence whatever that the Independent Churches were affected by that "wave of scepticism" of which you speak. I noticed you used the word congregations, and so far I admit the charge to be true. There were to be found attending our places of worship at first many—and even now here and there a few—who were carried in that direction. Remember, however, I boldly assert that the Independent Churches were all along pure and true, and that the temporary effect on the younger ministry was temporary only, and quickly passed away. Our ministers differ greatly from the Baptists. They are, as a rule, better educated and more learned; but, I must insist upon it, sound in the faith, omen of them as earnest and zealous as could be desired. The contrast between the humble church and the numerous and wealthy congregation I admit too, and agree that it is an anomaly. It has not escaped the notice of the heads of colleges and the leading men of the denomination. It is already in a process of amelioration. In many cases the rules of our societies—what are in fact bye-laws—date back into Puritanical times. They were adapted to a people and state of society which could not exist for ever. I have read some that are in MSS., which are undoubtedly both tyrannical and inquisitorial; to which not only our younger men, but their fathers before them, never would submit. They are founded on a kind of conventional morality —to a great extent on class distinctions—which up to this time has divided men from each other who are equally unblemished in their personal and domestic life, and who would be regarded as men of honour and worth in every society. In some places these bye-laws have been swept away: in others they have been pronounced obsolete. A number of excellent men, with their wives and families, have been received as members of the Church, and I am persuaded that in a few years this distinction, which I admit is anomalous, will be done away. Understand, however, that I am not a slavish admirer of Independency and Congregationalism in the abstract. I envy Churches where the parochial system

prevails, and I wish that Congregationalist and Baptist Unions were more of the nature of a presbytery. I wish too they had power to interfere with and repress the extravagances and the abuses of the system they represent but cannot control.

So far, my Suffolk friend. This speech was later than the former one by ten years, and it seems to me to be equally fair and true.

What the *Zeit Geist* may yet have in store who can tell? We remember the Wesleyans a society only. Now the society is a Church: a Presbyterian Church strictly so called; fairly entitled to be called, far more than her Scotch sister, the Presbyterian Church of England. The new century may see the ministers of the conference all bishops; the chairman an archbishop with the title retained for life. The old eighteenth century Independent Meetings became chapels in 1800; they were churches in 1850; their services, their music, their organs, their hymns, the chants, the anthems, are advanced beyond the conception of men of 1820: they are advancing still, whither we cannot say. It is not likely they will long continue without a governing body. Political union will not suffice for ever. What will it be? Let us devoutly pray that it may tend to make the Church of God ONE, and its name ONE, for such it has not been since the third century of its life.

22.

REMINISCENCES.

1.—The Church at Bildeston

The early history of this Church may be briefly summarized and passed over. My chief object is to give my own reminiscences of its chief and most notable pastor, William Hoddy.

The nucleus of this Society is probably to be sought for at Kettlebaston, where the majority of the members met before they removed to Bildeston. It is said they were driven from this place by difficulties thrown in their way by the Vicar of Lavenham; whether it were so or not the removal did them no harm. Other difficulties were encountered by the Church from its first formation. The date of their first covenant was July 1st, 1737: I suppose it was called a covenant because there were no ministers present to form them into a Church in the usual way. In the next year, however, May 14th, 1738, Mr. John Miller was ordained over them as their first pastor. All the ministers present were Independents, the chief men of the neighbourhood in that day, and very kind it was of them to be present in the absence of all ministers of the Baptist denomination. Mr. Rootsey of Eld Lane Chapel, Colchester, was the proper person to represent them, but he had died on the 1st of May this same year, and there was not another Baptist Church nearer than London, or Norwich, or Cambridge. I am not at all sure that if Mr. Rootsey had been alive and well he would have been present. The Church at Eld Lane was formed on principles of Strict Communion; all the members and all the communicants had been immersed after profession

of faith. The people at Bildeston were united on principles of free or Open Communion. Some of them had only been sprinkled in their infancy. The ministers present were Mr. S. Wood of Lavenham, Mr. Ford of Sudbury, and Mr. Saville of Bury St. Edmund's.

I once had in my possession a copy of the unpublished notes of Mr. Harsent on the Independent Churches of his day. He made this amusing remark on Mr. Saville, present on this occasion: "He was a good preacher, but *not polite* in his conversation, considering how long he had been resident in the *most polite* town in this part of the kingdom." The Church at Bildeston, however, in spite of what was then held to be its ambiguous position, was tenacious of its character as a Particular Baptist Church, indeed it is so described in the trust deeds of the chapel. Mr. Miller died in 1745. July 15th, 1746, Mr. Joseph Palmer was ordained pastor. He came from London, from the Chapel in Little Wild Street, Longacre. The celebrated Dr. Stennett was then its pastor: his son and assistant in the ministry, Joseph Stennett, assisted at this Ordination. If there were once more no other Baptist ministers present, we must bear in mind that there was still no other church near. That at Woolverstone was not formed till ten years later, 1757, and that at Wattisham not till 1763.

Little Wild Street is one of the few Baptist chapels of the eighteenth century which has not been swept away by modern improvement. In the year 1839, Elizabeth Ann, the daughter of the pastor of this church, the Rev. Christopher Woollacott, was married to Robert, afterwards Sir Robert Lush, Judge of the High Court of Justice. Sir Robert and Lady Lush continued to be members of this church till their decease. Sir Robert died December 27th, 1881. It is an extraordinary and almost incredible fact that during all this long period these people continued to meet occasionally at Battisford Tye, and Bildeston; their final settlement at Bildeston was not till 1765. Mr. Palmer continued pastor till 1774. The history of the next twenty years of this Church is not of sufficient interest to be recorded in detail. In

1795, at the invitation of every member of the Church, Mr. William Hoddy accepted the pastorate. He was ordained August 18th, 1795. With what I can gather of his former history, and with what I so keenly remember of his person and character, I conclude this paper.

William Hoddy was born in March, 1750, at the farm at Ringshall, known as Ringshall Chapel, of which his father was both owner and occupier. In the month of May, 1762, the father died, leaving a widow and five small children. The farm was sold to Mr. John Hitchcock, who entered into possession at Michaelmas the same year. Pitying the condition of the widow, Mr. Hitchcock offered to take the eldest boy, William, to board, lodge, clothe, and educate him, and teach him the business; doubtless a most charitable offer, the best thing that could have happened for the lad. We must remember, however, that a lad brought up on the farm, rising thirteen years of age, was well worth his salt, and not likely to prove a burden to his employer.

The account that follows is that substantially given by Mr. Hoddy's son in the *Gospel Herald*. Had it only been furnished with dates it would have been all that can be desired. There is not, however, a single date given from his birth to his ordination, through the whole forty-five years. We should have been told at least at what age he was baptized, when he was sent out a preacher, when he left Mr. Hitchcock's, when he took the farm at Naughton, and when he left it to live in his house at Bildeston. Of only one date in this long interval I am sure. His father, William Hoddy, was buried in Ringshall Churchyard, May 21st, 1762.

Never was an act of Christian charity and kindness more amply repaid than in this case. The boy was bright, active, and intelligent: he seemed to have inherited the piety and earnestness of his parents, and he had the best example set before him in the family in which he lived. "At a very early age" he was baptized; and joined the Wattisham Church. As he grew older, Mr. Hitchcock was able to entrust the entire management of his business to his hands. He

set the men to work, he paid them their wages, he took corn and stock to market, and acted as a wise and good steward of the farm so long as they remained together. While yet "a boy in the stack-yard," he was noted for his remarkable gift in extempore prayer, so that he was even then summoned to meet with the elders at the pastor's house. He was sent out by Mr. Hitchcock to preside at cottage meetings, to read the Scriptures and expound them, from which there was scarcely a step to his beginning to preach, or to his being invited to preach before the Church, and to be sent out by them as a qualified minister.

From that time he was invited to preach in all directions, wherever a minister was sick or absent from home, till at last he was invited by the people of Bildeston to become their pastor, an invitation which he accepted in the year 1795! The boy of thirteen is now a man of forty-five, and not one solitary hint is given as to when he left Mr. Hitchcock, where he lived after he took a farm of his own, and whether after he became pastor at Bildeston he remained a farmer still. That he had a farm of his own somewhere is clear from the following story. He was in the habit of preaching occasionally in a cottage at a village called Semer, near Hadleigh. He was summoned before the magistrates, at the instigation of the rector, for this offence, and was fined twenty pounds; the holder of the cottage, a widow woman, being fined to the same amount. Mr. Hoddy refused to pay, judging himself protected by his license, protesting that he had no intention to break the law. In this, however, he was mistaken, for as the law then stood it was necessary, not only that the preacher should have a license, but that the place in which he held his service should be licensed too. So the fine was enforced. A waggon and a tumbrel were seized on Mr. Hoddy's own farm. The poor woman's house was stripped of all she had by most reluctant officers, and the whole exposed for sale in Hadleigh Market. Mr. Hoddy got a friend to buy

in his property, and he gave the poor woman new furniture for the old she had lost. At the next meeting of the Suffolk Benevolent Society at Stowmarket, the members came prepared to reimburse Mr. Hoddy for all his loss. Curiously enough, there is a story exactly similar to the above, told of Mr. Farmery of Diss. Were I a German New Testament critic I should say they were the same; but I am not. No doubt both the stories are authentic, though they both labour under a serious defect. Mr. Hoddy's story has no date, and Mr. Farmery's has no place. All we know is that the former happened after 1790, and the latter at a place near Diss.

After a life-long friendship, it must have been a painful affair, that settlement of Mr. Hoddy at Bildeston. It was like the separation of father and son, both in their domestic and religious life. Mr. Hoddy could not have letters of dismissal from Wattisham to Bildeston. Mr. Hitchcock could not be present at the ordination, nor could there be for the future any religious fellowship between the two communities.

Mr. Hoddy was one of those extraordinary men, who, when he pleased, could by every word and look and gesture create irrepressible and unextinguishable laughter. He had a stolid and rugged countenance, which at first sight seemed as void of expression as if carved in stone. His remarks, when repeated again, were the tamest and feeblest of all attempts at wit. He spoke in gentle tones, as if only addressing the persons next to him, but the laughter began and went on till at last he himself caught the infection. The whole audience were in agonies, and he and they were glad to take refuge in perfect silence till they could recover from their torment. Had he not been called to a higher office he would have made a fortune for himself on the stage, and a fortune for any house that engaged him. Now let me make haste to tell the other side of his character. In all matters of religion he was one of the most devout and serious men I ever knew. He never joked on such subjects: he never turned a text of Scripture from its proper use.

I never heard him make fun of good people, not even of their failings, and in the pulpit he was so grave and earnest, and had so much pathos and gentleness in his voice and manner, that both himself and his audience were frequently moved to tears. He was greatly beloved by the aged poor, with whom he was always grave and serious. I believe he considered it a matter of conscience to repress all his overflowing wit and humour whenever he thought it might do harm. If there were any people to whom he showed no mercy, it was to those who could not see a joke, and who were so supremely stolid and dignified that they treated him with lofty contempt. Sometimes in a small party he would address his conversation to one of these very matter-of-fact sort of persons. With all gentleness and courtesy, he would perplex and mystify them with wholly unintelligible strokes of wit and fun, till the chorus of laughter reminded him that he was perhaps inflicting pain, and then, to the equal astonishment of the victim and his audience, he would at once desist.

There is a society in Suffolk called the Suffolk Benevolent Society, which held its annual meetings at Stowmarket—I believe it does so to this day. The big wigs attending that meeting—I ought rather to say the dinner at the Queen's Head—held Mr. Hoddy in fear and awe. At all meetings he was grave and serious enough, but at the dinner—well, all the harm he did was to save the comestibles, for it was impossible for people to eat and laugh too. I had the honour of being present on one of these occasions, and if ever there was a man of modest and unassuming behaviour at that dinner it was this extraordinary man. He did not attempt a conversation, he was as quiet and unobtrusive as any man there; he sat at the far end of the table, away from the great personages present, and for a few moments all was quiet and well. It so happened he had to carve a goose, and in doing so, he said quietly to a friend next him, "Do geese count their birthdays by months or years? If by months, this one has seen many. It is surely an age since it was born." This

absurd remark served as a beginning: from that moment no one could eat in peace. The attempt to be quiet only made matters worse. To look at his face only was quite enough to set them off anew, till out of sheer pity he grew silent and said no more.

With what delight we used to see his honest face enter our house; what a warm welcome he always received. We looked forward to the pipe and glass after supper, and to the tale he was sure to tell: the most harmless, and, I must own as to the plot and dialogue, the most feeble tales ever told. It mattered not however: If he had only recited "The house that Jack built," We should have laughed just the same. My father understood him, I believe, better than anyone else in the world; he could see his jokes a mile away. If he chanced to over-hear some doleful tale of famine and destitution addressed to the mistress, about the want of everything in the world, even the staff of life he saw at once the mystification, and would shout out to me, "Boy, get Mr. Hoddy some bread."

I have said before how loving and gentle he was to the poor, and how dear he was to them. I remember in particular one gaunt, masculine old woman, to whom he had been a messenger of mercy, transforming her from a village harridan to a decent and worthy member of society. She lived at a place called Combs Ford, and whenever Mr. Hoddy preached anywhere near her home she would be infallibly present, in her old red cloak and faded bonnet, with two or three others of like feeling, standing at the bottom of the pulpit stairs to greet him as he came down. I can see the group before me now, his kindly old face looking into her bronzed and hardened one with mingled smiles and tears.

One year, I cannot tell how long ago, there came a terrible outbreak of typhus fever at Combs, and as was the sad fashion of those times, no one could be found to attend to the sufferers. In the emergency Mary Woods came forward, and offered to do all she could. Many died, but some were saved, mainly through her

attention and care. At length she herself was taken with the fever, and there was no one to attend on her. Mr. Hoddy heard of her case, and at once came over to see her. He called at our house afterwards and told us that it was indeed true that she had no one to attend to her, and that she was left to die alone, but that the help was of little importance now. He had asked her if she was at peace, and resigned to her hard lot. She replied, "Yes, my friend, I am at peace and I am content: so much so that if it were the Lord's will I should lie here just as I am till He comes again, I think I could say 'Thy will be done.'" The old man, addressing the mistress, said, "Madam, I dare say you have more than one set of china in your possession, and that it is not the best set that is most in use. Now Mary Woods was not china at all, but plain Delf—pray don't laugh, yes, yes, *very plain*—but into these coarsest jars and bottles people put their very best things—wines, fruits, and what not, and I think the Master sometimes does so too. I think he did in this case."

This good man in his best days was the John Berridge of Suffolk, and like John Berridge, portentous letters were written, like those of the Countess of Huntingdon, and sound advice given to repress his incorrigible humour, but all in vain. It was enough that the good man was entirely self-controlled, that the interests of true religion were safe in his hand, as safe as with the man who never provoked a smile and never saw a joke. In one respect he exceeded the Fellow of Clare and the Vicar of Everton. Berridge carried his drollery, not only into his discourses, but even into his hymns and sacred songs, from which the simple Baptist person would have shrunk with instinctive delicacy and fear.

In all notices of Mr. Hoddy's life and character which I have ever seen, this remarkable gift of his, with which nature herself had endowed him, stamping it upon his features, and making it an essential element of his personality, is carefully ignored and concealed. His own relatives and friends seem to have regarded it as an infirmity—and, perhaps, a snare. A man, who, when

he pleased, could make people forget all their troubles, and laugh with him by the hour together; who could conquer the most obtuse and stolid, and make them despise themselves for yielding to his power—was surely a benefactor, not an enemy of his kind. I remember an old lady much addicted to self-torture, exclaiming, "Oh, Mr. Hoddy, I have been laughing for hours, in fact, all the evening, and I came here expecting to do nothing else but cry." "Madam," said he, "I am glad you have been better employed."

I cannot say when I first knew Mr. Hoddy—I only know that I distinctly remember him since the year 1816. He was then sixty-six years of age. For the next three years, till the death of Jabez Brown, he rarely missed a week in coming to see him for the day. I left Suffolk in 1827; early in that year I saw him for the last time, and I well remember the feeble joke we so laughed about at the time. Someone asked "How is Mrs. Hoddy?" With portentous face, as if announcing her death, he said "She has a new bonnet." We were too wise to reply, but it came out that fashion had reached even the parsonage at Bildeston. The enormous dimensions of the bonnets of the period had been too remorselessly reduced, the consequence was a severe cold and tormenting cough. Mr. Hoddy lived five years after this; he died on the day his wife was buried, December, 1831, aged eighty-one years.

The only communication from Mr. Hoddy I have found in print is in *The Register*, vol. iii., page 32, date December 19th, 1797:—"In the beginning of the year 1795 I had an invitation to preach to the people meeting in the town of Bildeston. After I had laboured among them some months, the whole Church, without an exception, invited me to the pastoral office. Their call I accepted, and on the 18th August, the same year, was solemnly ordained over them. The church then consisted of twenty-six members. I have since baptized five persons; there are others in the congregation apparently the subjects of vital godliness, whom we expect to join us. Among those I have baptized was my eldest son,

who was something more than thirteen years of age. We have excluded two persons. The congregation has increased. Afternoon and evening lectures are well attended. Brotherly love and holy peace in a happy degree abound upon us."

Since the above was in type, I have discovered that William Hoddy, farmer of the parish of Naughton, was married to Ann Edgar of the Mill Hill Farm, Great Finborough, on the 10th October 1780. He was then thirty years of age. After the death of this lady, he was married a second time, about the 1783. This second wife was, I believe, the mother of all his children. My belief is that he took the farm at Naughton and had left Mr. Hitchcock as early as 1775, when he was twenty-five years of age.

No. 2.—Woolverstone

I have noticed before that Mr Rootsey had an extensive acquaintance among the farmers in Essex and Suffolk, and nowhere was he more heartily welcomed and nowhere was he more glad to make a stay when weary with his work than at Woolverstone. Here he could get a blow upon the river and upon the sea. It was his custom at all these places to hold a meeting in the evening in the kitchen, or in some part of the farm premises, either for a full service or for familiar conversation with those invited to attend. These first efforts of his were furthered by the elders whom he set apart to aid him in his work. Several persons were baptized by him, and were admitted as members into the Church in Eld Lane to whom he occasionally administered the Lord's Supper from the year 1729 up to the time of his decease in 1738. No mention is made at this time of any meeting-house, nor can I find any further mention of this people for twenty years,

In the year 1757, nineteen years after Mr. Rootsey's death: eight men and four women were dismissed from the Church in Eld Lane, who were formed into a separate

Church, two of the brethren were appointed deacons, and in the following year, 1758, they chose Mr. Samuel Soden, from Cannon Street, Birmingham, to be their pastor. They obtained a little house on what is now the Berners' estate, which they continued to occupy till the death of their pastor in 1773. They used the Cathouse as a place for baptism. In the year 1851, my old friend, Mr. Pollard, read a paper at Stoke Chapel, containing substantially the facts I have narrated. Mr. Pollard did not seem to be aware how long a time had elapsed since Mr. Rootsey had held services there. It was not less than twenty-eight years from the time he first administered the Lord's Supper to them to the time in which they had a separate existence as an independent church.

Mr. Pollard adds a story to his account which is too singular to be passed over without notice, and may deserve a few brief words of enquiry as to its probable truth. He says that "the great-great-granddaughter of the Protector Cromwell, the grandmother of the present Archdeacon Berners, attended the services at the little chapel, and that her presence had great influence in promoting the decorum and propriety of behaviour of those who frequented them." Though Mr. Pollard read this paper in 1851, he had probably drawn it up some years before, for the Archdeacon had died in 1846. I confess that when I heard this story I thought the tone of it was apocryphal, but I find in looking into it more closely it is just possible that it may be true. In the first place the descent may be seen at a glance from the following table:—

1. Oliver Cromwell.
2. Bridget Ireton, his daughter.
3. Bridget Bendish, his granddaughter.
4. Henry Bendish, his great-grandson.
5. Mary Berners, his great-great-granddaughter.
6. Charles Hornets, her son.
7. Henry Berners, the Archdeacon, her grandson.

For some reason or other the birth, marriage, and death of Mary Berners *née* Mary Bendish are not mentioned in the published records of either the Bendish or the Berners families, not even in Palmer's *Perlustrations of Great Yarmouth*, where the history of the Bendish family is

minutely recorded. But this, fortunately, is no obstacle to our enquiry, for we know that the son of Mary Berners was born in 1740, so that it is clear she was contemporary with this little church in the park. It is true that this estate was not then in the possession of the Berners. It belonged to a man named Tyson, who in the year 1720 was a bankrupt. It was claimed by a solicitor, John Ward, Esq., of Hackney, Who held a mortgage upon it. The affair was thrown into Chancery and it was not settled till 1773, when the estate was ordered by the Court to be sold. It was purchased by William Berners and the mansion built by him in l776. Here, however, comes in the possibility of the tale. The old hall might have been rented of the trustees by William Berners and his wife, formerly Mary Bendish. Her grandfather was not only an Independent, but an Independent minister, and pastor of the Church at Yarmouth. With all these presumptions in its favour, my sentence upon this story is that if this tale is not, it ought to be true. The change of ownership in the estate was no doubt the cause of the dismissal of the little Woolverstone Church from the chapel. Their minister died in the same year, and after much deliberation and prayer, they determined to remove to Stoke Green, Ipswich.

They purchased a row of cottages on the site of the present chapel, and not being at the time prepared for further outlay, they converted the two in the centre into a chapel, and the two outside ones into a vestry and a house for the minister. They invited Mr. George Hall to become their pastor. He was ordained in 1775, and remained with them till his decease in 1810. The thirty-five years was a time of great prosperity. He found them a little flock, and left them a flourishing community. The decease of Mr Hall brings them into the full light of history, and all I care to note will be matters of personal observation and memory. My first visit to Stoke Chapel was in the year 1819, when I was present at the ordination of Mr. James Payne. I do not remember anything of the sermons or prayers or services of the day, but one

circumstance I do remember, which caused great excitement. A tune called Hampshire was heard for the first time in Suffolk on this occasion. I do not think it had up to this time appeared in print. The author of it, and of a great many other favourites of that day, was a Mr. Moreton. This man's tunes had been circulated in MS. for many years, till at last the copyright of them was purchased by T. Walker for his *Companion to Ripon*. They were published first I think in the sixth edition in 1823. This tune was written for a hymn of Dr. Watts, the first in the first book, in fact the first he ever wrote. The melodies of some of these old tunes were very inspiriting, much more pleasing than those which followed them. The objections we now urge against them are directed against what was then held to be their chief excellence, the threefold repetition of the principal strains.

The choirs of that day were arranged in three divisions, and these strains were sung alternately by each of them—sopranos, contraltos, and bass. The effect was not bad at all when the voices were good, and all sung in tune and in time. This hymn has eight verses. There are two strains thus repeated in the tune, one of them only in the soprano and bass. The pace at which tunes were sung would be considered now-a-days too painfully slow even for "the Dead March in Saul." The hymn was given out by the clerk two lines at a time, so that there was no chance of going ahead. I firmly believe it took a quarter of an hour to sing this hymn through. The enthusiasm was so great that it was demanded again for a second service, copies of it were eagerly sought for, and I believe in less than three months it was sung everywhere, where there was a choir, in all the chapels in the county,

The most remarkable part of the history of Stoke Chapel is the number of really able and efficient ministers sent forth from among them. Mr. John Hitchcock was the first sent out, while they were yet at Woolverstone, in the year 1791; Mr. Francis Ridley in 1794, John Keeble and James Thompson probably in the same

year 1806, James Smith in 1808, and three or four others whose names I forget. None of these men had any special training for the ministry. They began by holding meetings for prayer or by saying a few words at a cottage service, when the minister did not come. It became known that they had gifts for usefulness. They were invited to preach before the Church, that the members of it might form an opinion of them. If there was any doubt, such opportunities were repeated, till at last, by open vote, they were sent forth as qualified to accept any position that might be presented to them. It says very much for these good men in these early times, that they fully justified the choice which was made of them. Their diligence in study, and in acquiring the learning necessary, even in this limited sphere, must have been equal to their activity and energy in their public work. Nothing but sterling worth and sheer devotion would have given them power to surmount the disadvantages of their position.

John Hitchcock and Thomas Ridley were both of them dead before I was born, but John Thompson and James Smith, John Keeble and Mr. Cowell were all present on this occasion, November, 1815. They have left their record in many places and in many hearts. I used to hear a story, sixty years ago, that John Thompson and John Keeble appeared before the church as candidates for its approval at the same time. Keeble was so illiterate that he got Thompson to read the Scriptures for him. Yet Mr. Thompson remained all his life at Culpho, and Keeble was immediately sent to London, in the neighbourhood of Portman Square. The story may be true, but it is not worth much. Mr. Thompson had a good education as a farmer's son, and had, no doubt, read much and thought much after he was a man. His style of preaching was with him perfectly natural —no attempt at drollery or wit. If he were quaint and droll at times, it was because he could not help it. In general, his style was exactly the style of his hearers: it provoked no laughter among them, not even a smile. It might have done so to

strangers, but it did not to them. His phrases were homely, but full of shrewd intelligence and deep earnestness of feeling. Of all the men who were sent out from Stoke his labours were most abundant, and attended with the greatest success. At the Association at Bury, in 1801, the numbers in his church were returned as 350. He is said to have baptised in his lifetime 658 persons—I should have thought many more. The only whimsical trait which reached my childish ears on that day in 1815 was that he prayed for people by name. If he referred to anyone there was no roundabout covert description of them, putting the people to a puzzle as to who was meant. He prayed "That there might be such a revival of religion and such holy earnestness as there was when good Mr. Hall and good old Master Sage were alive." I have no idea who 'good old Master Sage' might be. but I have never forgotten his name to this day. No doubt he was a member at Stoke. I cannot refrain from mentioning a somewhat ludicrous contrast to this plain speaking of John Thompson. The late worthy Dean of Norwich, Dr. Pellew, had occasion in a sermon to allude to a potato. It was not in the time of the famine, but years after, when potatoes were again scarce and dear. It seemed clear to his fastidious taste that the word "potato" was inadmissible in a sermon in a cathedral, so he spoke of it in true Johnsonian phrase as "that valuable esculent which even with us is a portion of our daily food, and was in the Sister Island a necessity of life." As a matter of taste, I am not sure that the village parson had not the best of it.

John Keeble was a very different kind of man. To begin with, he was by birth an Irishman. He was born and lived in Londonderry till he was nine years of age. Whether his parents were English or Irish I cannot say, but the very fact of his early residence in that city must have moulded his character to some extent; no doubt it redeemed his speech and manner from the homely singsong and striking dialect of the Suffolk speech of that day. It was no small com-

pliment to the man sent out as preacher only one year before, to invite him to preach the sermon before the Norfolk and Suffolk Baptist Association, held at Diss in 1797. The sermon must have been a remarkable one too, which induced a man from London, acquainted with Blandford Street to recommend him so urgently that he was invited first to supply the pulpit and afterwards to become their pastor. He remained there until his death, in 1824' aged sixty-three years. I never saw him after this day in November, 1815, but heard of him long after I went to London, as a man I good ability, who was greatly loved and deeply lamented. He was a man of singular modesty and humility. His great friend, Mr. John Chin, of Lion Street, Walworth, whose place at that time I attended, frequently spoke of him in terms of warmest affection and praise.

Mr. James Smith who was ordained 1808 over the church at Ilford, was as popular a preacher in my early years as any one who visited Suffolk. At anniversaries and ordinations his assistance was eagerly sought for, but though I knew him well, I have only a dim remembrance of his personality. He was afterwards removed to providence Chapel, Shoreditch, where he ministered from 1833 to 1836, when he died in his fifty-eighth year.

This ends my account of Stoke Chapel, which I visited after 1815 many and many a time, but only to see what many persons can recollect and describe better than myself.

No. 3.—The Church at Wattisham

In my introductory paper, which was merely explanatory, I pointed out the condition of the National Church at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century, as furnishing occasion for the singular movement I am attempting to describe. I should think very few

Churchmen in the present day could read without pain the story of John Thompson of Grundisburgh. Here was an honest, manly, serious young fellow, warmly attached to the Church, strongly prejudiced against Dissent, scrupulously keeping not only the greater, but even the lesser fasts and festivals of the Church, at a time when, we are told, nobody observed them (1780), who sought for no novelties of creed or doctrine, but simply for such teaching as he said he found in the Liturgy and Articles of the Church—a man who would have walked any distance to find any minister who could understand his feelings, and teach him what he longed to know— who actually did, on one occasion, walk from Bury to Colchester for this purpose alone, and failed altogether in his pursuit.

But now about the Chapel at Wattisham, one of those out-of-the-way Meetings built, not because there were any number of people to attend it in the place, for I question whether it had then 150 inhabitants all told, but because it was in the very centre of a number of little gatherings for miles round. One might fancy at this very time, seeing the people driving to it on a Sunday morning, that the roads had been made on purpose for the people to drive to Meeting, and for nothing else besides. Almost all I have to say about Wattisham will cluster about Mr. Hitchcock, the founder of the Society, for though he was dead before I was born, there was no man whose character and personality was more constantly kept before me. The few events of his life have been often narrated. I have little to add to them. The great difficulty I have with all these reminiscences is to find any dates which will give them any show of accuracy. If a place is mentioned, it is enough to say it was near Bury, or Diss, or Hadleigh. If an event is described, it happened soon after, or some years after another, *also without date*. This is especially the case in one notice in the *Gospel Herald*, on which I rely for many facts, but in which there is no specific date for forty-five years. Nearly all these dates are even now recoverable. I wonder that those most interested in them have not taken the pains to obtain them. Mr. Hitchcock

was born in the year 1732. When we first hear of him, he is an intelligent, well-educated, very active and earnest, and fairly wealthy young farmer of twenty-five years of age. He was baptized in that year 1757, as a member of the Baptist Church at Bildeston, and was formally admitted to its fellowship the same year. It is clear that the Church at that time was a scene of violent commotion and intestine strife. The dispute was evidently the vexed question of Free Communion. At last, the most vehement of the malcontents, among whom was John Hitchcock, for the sake of peace, were persuaded to resign their membership. A testimonial was given to him, perhaps in the name of the rest, saying that the separation was for 'peace sake only,' and should not prejudice him in seeking fellowship with any other community he might desire to join. The whole of this party joined the Church at Woolverstone the same year.

Three years later, in the summer of 1762, Mr. Hitchcock purchased of the executors of William Hoddy what is known as the "Chapel Farm" at Ringshall. He entered into possession at Michaelmas, having been married early in the same year. He lived in this house all his life. His son Ebenezer also lived and died there. Two maiden daughters I found still living there on my last visit to those parts on August 14th, 1837. On March 9th, 1763, twenty-eight persons, including Mr. Hitchcock, were dismissed from Woolverstone to form a Church, as yet without a place of meeting. They had hitherto met at the house of Mr. Joseph Enefer at Buxhall, occasionally at Mr. Wincotte's, Greenwood, Nedging. I have some faint remembrance that on this occasion they met at Buxhall: Mr. Sowdon, the pastor at Woolverstone, presided at the meeting. In the autumn of the same year, Mr. Hitchcock was solemnly set over them as their pastor.

'Soon after this' (that unlucky phrase once more), Mr. Hitchcock purchased some land at Wattisham, with a house upon it. He converted the house into a chapel, he had the property invested in trustees, and presented the whole of it to the Church free of all costs, consenting at the same time to be their pastor without remuneration of

any kind. In the usual accounts, this is all said to have happened in the one year 1763, which seems to me absurd. The trust deed would at once fix the date, should it be wanted. I have an idea, I hardly know how acquired, that it was in 1769. Thus it was that Wattisham Meeting began. At this early period there were no religious newspapers or magazines of any kind in existence. It is the merest chance if we get a glimpse of what was then going on. This chance we get only in obituaries of later years. The next note I find is in the year 1775, when John Rootsey, son of Samuel Rootsey, at the Distillery, Colchester, came to live at Ringshall, apparently at the Chapel Farm, to learn to be a farmer. He was then a lad of seventeen. His eldest sister was married to a Mr. Daldy of Ipswich. She and her husband were over at Ringshall, plainly on a visit, and took the opportunity of being baptized by Mr. Hitchcock preparatory to joining the church at Stoke.

This lad, evidently the pet of a large family, named after the old pastor of Eld Lane, John Rootsey, had a farm all ready for him, waiting for him to take possession of it, at Aldham near Hadleigh. So having made an offer of marriage to Dinah, Mr. Hitchcock's eldest daughter, on the 21st of October, 1778, they were married "by consent of parents," the bridegroom twenty, and the bride seventeen, as nearly as I can fix the ages. This somewhat hasty marriage was not so successful as their parents could have wished it to be. They had a large family, while they were themselves still young, and were severely handicapped by youth and inexperience in the race of life.

This marriage explains all the complications and mysteries of uncles and aunts and cousins among the Rootseys, the Hitchcocks, the Patmores, the Beaumonts, which, till I discovered it, were quite unfathomable to me.

Mr. Hitchcock died in 1800, fifty-eight years of age, we should say somewhat prematurely, not an old man in years, and as a minister and father but little past his prime. One of his sons and two other of his daughters

were married at Ringshall, Ebenezer in 1791, Priscilla, Mrs. Pilgrim, and Elizabeth, Mrs. Herbert, in 1798. I can only find records of three public services at which John Hitchcock was present—

1. At Earl's Colne, at the opening of the chapel, December 27th, 1786; and at the ordination of Mr. Pudney, July 19th, 1788.

2. At the ordination of Jabez Brown, Stowmarket, July 4th, 1797. On this occasion he gave the charge. Text, Isaiah xl. i., "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."

3. At the ordination of John Thompson, July 19th, 1798. Here he "preached to the people," from Ephesians v. 2: "Walk in love."

He joined the Norfolk and Suffolk Baptist Association in 1782. He resigned in 1784. He was a member again in 1790, the only meeting he seems to have actually attended, when he speaks of only two Baptist Churches in Suffolk, ignoring Bildeston altogether! I have given the substance of his letter in what I have written above. It may be seen in *Dr. Ripon's Register*, vol. i., pp. 61, 62.

In 1794, my father, then a lad of nineteen, a member of Mr. Bromley's church, Needham Market, began to attend at Wattisham Meeting. My father and mother were both of them baptized by Mr. Hitchcock. He used to describe the old chapel as the most quaint and curious looking place he ever saw.

He said the first time he was there a tablet was hung upon the pulpit, with "L. M." printed upon it. This was exchanged for " S.M." or "C.M." according to the metre of the tune required by the hymn. seemed they had only one tune for each metre, and at first none for peculiar metres at all. The precentor or clerk had a few tunes from Playford's Psalter, printed at the beginning of his book. They may be seen in old editions of Watts to this day twenty-six in all. Next to hatred of song tunes was the contempt for all musical instruments, above all a bass viol. On one occasion when my father was present, some audacious youth attempted

to smuggle this enormity into the gallery. The deacon saw it, and hurrying upstairs, he called out in broadest Suffolk, which I prefer to translate, "What does that thing do here? It has no soul, it cannot praise God. Take that thing away." My impression is that this was no other than Mr. Ralph Hitchcock, the pastor's son.

The present chapel was built in the year 1825, with ample room outside it for a minister's house and garden, for a vestry and school-room, for cart-sheds and stalls for horses. I will describe a Sunday spent there, when the old ways had been exchanged for new, which were certainly much better. I have said that Mr. Hitchcock died in 1800; for some reason Wattisham suffered a kind of eclipse after his death. Though I knew the ministers, they did not take my fancy. I do not think I ever saw the old place, though I well remember the opening of the new one by Mr. John Stevens, of Meard's Court, who was our guest all the time of his stay. Wattisham, however, recovered all its former glory on the ordination of Mr. John Cooper, in 1830, and it was during his pastorate I paid the visit I now describe.

I went over to a friend's house on the Saturday evening. We were aroused early on the Sunday, for in this household it was the busiest day in all the week. There was the milking, the stock to be seen to as usual, and all needful outdoor work to be done. Such a breakfast as I had never seen in my life before, it seemed sufficient for days instead of a few hours' fast. The most wonderful thing was that it was all consumed. By nine o'clock the vehicles were at the door in which we were to be conveyed to chapel. Two or three baskets were stowed in them, containing such provisions as could be packed in the smallest possible compass. The younger members of our party were teachers in the schools. This fact necessitated an early arrival. There were many labouring men already there, who took charge of the horses and carriages. I think a brief prayer meeting was held in the vestry before the service began. This occupied just an hour and a half, from 10.30 to 12. After the minister left, the people remained quietly in

their seats. They drew out their baskets of provisions, and ate them almost in silence. They conversed only in whispers, and on that day certainly preserved the greatest decorum. After about twenty minutes the windows were opened for ventilation, and they left the chapel; it was a fine day, and many walked a short distance from the chapel, returning (the majority of them) at 1 o'clock—the juniors to the school, and the seniors to a prayer meeting. Service from 2 till 3.30, when all returned home to their duties at the farm. In the villages near Stowmarket the Independents had small meetings built by private gentlemen, and supplied by them in the day time with teachers of children; in the evening with a preacher to conduct a service. To one of those we were driven in the evening. It was at Hitcham, at that time presided over by Mr. Edward Prentice of Stowmarket. So ended what I am justified in calling a busy day. This was between fifty and sixty years ago; to be precise, November 12th, 1837. It need not be said that such services as these had great attractions for the agricultural population at that day. Probably Wattisham Meeting is still what it was, but in numbers of places the meetings are but the shadows of what they were in former days.

No. 4.—The Church at Stowmarket

It is impossible to account for the existence of the church at Stowmarket without giving a brief notice of that at Diss, from which both pastor and people had been originally dismissed. This church at Diss was formed under the ministry of Mr. Farmery. He came to Diss in the year 1790, a young man about twenty-six years of age. He was a man of profound and earnest piety, of extensive reading, of fervid imagination, and great eloquence. Many intelligent and thoughtful persons, over a circuit of even ten or twelve miles were attracted by his preaching, and not

a few of them in later years were led follow him in the ministry. This class of persons were not such as needed instruction in the rudiments of the faith, they desired to be men.

Mr. Farmery had his evangelistic services in cottages and other buildings on Sunday and other evenings in the week, but in the morning and afternoon of the Sunday his main idea was to build up and lead on to perfection those who had already believed. The phrase so often in use of "Preaching Christ" was understood by those people in a somewhat different sense to that in which it is used now. They meant by it discourses on the person of Christ, on his Godhead and Manhood, and the wonderful results of their combination; on his offices as a Mediator, a Surety, a Priest, an Intercessor. The foundation of such discourses was sought for in the Epistles to the Hebrews, to the Ephesians, the Philippians; and as a human master Mr. Farmery followed, with implicit trust and confidence, no other than Dr. Thomas Goodwin, the famous chaplain of Cromwell. Dr. Goodwin certainly differs from the majority of the Puritan writers, from Dr. Owen in particular, in one important characteristic—in spite of his prolixity there is a glow and fervour in his style, a playful and quaint humour, and a great deal of what was then described as "savor and unction," in his most learned treatises. I shall hardly be credited if I say that much of this came indirectly from Patristic stores, but it is a fact nevertheless, for though the Puritan writers did not ostensibly study the fathers,. they were -deeply versed in the labours of the Schoolmen. The oracle of Dr. Goodwin was St. Thomas Aquinas. In his esteem the Summa Theologioe was not dry and barren, but to those who knew how to use it, full of substantial food.

I make these remarks to show the distinctive character of Mr. Farmery's preaching. I have heard it thus described by one who knew him well, and attended his meetings occasionally for years. So completely had he read and digested the first two volumes

of Goodwin's works, that he could preach his sermons divested of all their prolixity and technical phraseology, to the intense delight of his hearers. So familiar had the people become with them that when Mr. Farmery was sick or absent, extracts from Goodwin marked by the pastor were read by a gifted brother instead of a sermon. My informant was present on one occasion when this was done.

Impossible and incredible as this may seem, it accords in one particular with an experience of my own. I was not a little excited by these stories, and had a great longing to see one of these volumes. On enquiry I found that the complete edition of five volumes could not be had for less than eight guineas. The price may be seen in Lownde's catalogue to this day, but the treatises had been each of them published separately at first, and might be picked up in old book shops. I kept a look-out for years, and strange to say I got the whole by slow degrees in various stages of perfection or decay; the collection lasted for many years, down to 1840. I only mention this fact to show that there was a great demand for Dr. Goodwin's works at that time, and a most inadequate supply.

Now among Mr. Farmery's most warm and passionate admirers was a man named William Rust, the very same in age, in temperament, in eagerness for learning, and, though a comparatively recent acquaintance, had come to be loved by Mr. Farmery so ardently that they were regarded as brothers in all that related to the ministerial and religious life. This man was to all intents and purposes a character made up of such apparent contradictions as are rarely found in any man, much less in a good man. He was born in 1760, and died in 1796. Of course I had no personal knowledge of him, but his eldest sister survived him fifty years, and it was from her I gathered such particulars as she knew of his early career, which at least may serve to explain the curious contrasts of his character. She was not disposed to favour him. The ashes of a family feud were still warm, and she

was a staunch Churchwoman, not at all, flattered by having a brother a Baptist parson, however clever he might be.

She said that at the time of his birth the family were in easy circumstances, her father was prospering in business. and saving money every year. He was very proud of his eldest son, and used to say, in a foolish boastful way, that the boy should have the best education which could be obtained in those parts, and that he should never have "to soil his hands." with trade. It seems that the first part of this programme was carried through, how and where she could not tell. All she knew was that the boy was totally ruined and spoiled. Her reason seemed to be that he returned to his home with invincible repugnance. His father had become a man of dissolute habits, his savings were gone, and his business required the lad's assistance to counterbalance his own neglect. It is not surprising that he grew silent and reserved; and as every year his responsibility increased he appeared to them tyrannical and austere, and not like a brother at all.

In the year 1778, when he was eighteen years of age, the strain upon him became intolerable. He insisted upon leaving home; he had nothing but a change of clothes, and, though he only went to Stowmarket, with the exception of a brother then in the cradle, he never saw or spoke to one of them again. How he made his way, what he underwent before he reached success, no one ever knew; but it is certain that in five years' time he was in business for himself, had a comfortable home, and was happily married at twenty-four years age. He lost his wife in about two years, but in 1790, when he was thirty, he had married again, and had acquire sufficient property to purchase, not only the house where he lived, but all the block of buildings surrounding it. As matters stood at that time, he was certainly one of the principal tradesmen in the town.

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I said to my informant, "Surely there must have been something very remarkable in this lad to have accomplished all this in twelve years in a small country town?" "Well," said she, "I cannot deny it. Even his seriousness, his reserve, his very address had a charm. His speech was graceful and correct, and, though not particularly good-looking, he was slender and straight and, I must confess, well shaped, and of a good figure, and not a little vain, I can tell you, of his personal appearance. He wore his own hair, which was dressed and powdered every day. It was long, plentiful, and fastened with black ribbons into a queue. He never were colours, only a suit of darkest grey—the coat trimmed with black silk braid —small clothes, and black silk stockings, for dress, and wonderfully neat shoes. To those whom he loved or had his confidence, he was pleasant in the extreme, full of playfulness and gentleness; but to everyone else, however just, however tender he was at heart, his manner was as cold as ice, he was as haughty and impenetrable as if he was the Grand Turk, and they his slaves."

Up to this time, 1790, he was a devout and earnest Churchman. It was only about the year 1791 he first began to walk to Diss. He had relatives there, but he certainly never saw them; he went to hear Mr. Farmery, and for his sake alone. Strange to say. during all their fraternal intercourse, the questions of Church and Dissent never seemed to have been mooted. No doubt Mr. Farmery saw that this inpenetrable man could not be questioned on what he did not choose to converse.

In the year 1794 the Independent Meeting was re-opened at Needham Market, and a sturdy, acute Scotchman was appointed pastor. Needham was only three miles off and Diss was thirteen, so that on bad days it was a haven in which the Stowmarket company could find refuge. Mr. Bromley was sorely in need of help, and, not being afflicted with nervousness or too much delicacy, he bluntly asked

Mr. Rust to give him his aid. The dogged perseverance of the one overcame the shyness of the other, and for a short time he consented to be not only a member, but a deacon of the church. In the beginning of this same year, he was, to his intense annoyance, "interviewed" for the first time by a member of his own family. The baby brother he had left sixteen years ago was now a lad of eighteen. He had served an apprenticeship with an uncle at Diss, and as he had no home to go to, he came first to his brother to ask him, not for help, but for a recommendation to some employer. The elder never smiled, nor spoke a word of recognition or welcome. He looked at the lad while he was speaking, and at last, as if moved by the exact repetition of his own case at the same age, he said, "it is impossible for me to receive you into my home, or even to ask you to stay; but if you wait here for a short time I have no doubt I can take you to a comfortable home, where you can remain as long as you please. I shall be able to find you employment at once." He did this, and was uniformly gentle and kind in dealing with the lad, but he never relaxed in his haughty reserve or imperious manner, so that in three months' time the situation became unbearable, and the youth, who was as merry-hearted and frank as the other was austere, escaped to Needham Market, where he lighted on his feet, found many kind friends, and became a member at Mr. Bromley's Meeting. The two brothers were there united in Christian fellowship, the same distance being still maintained between them.

During all this time this extraordinary man had a class of disciples and friends who simply adored him. They met at least three evenings in the week, and with unwearied patience he read the Scriptures and expounded them to them. On the Sunday, when they walked to Diss, he beguiled the distance with his fervid eloquence, and his explanation of the topics discussed in the chapel. All they wanted was to

make him their minister, to put an end to their wanderings, that the wives and children of some of them might share in their privileges. Mr. Bromley was a stumbling-block in their path, though they dared not say so, and they heartily wished it out of the way. In a very short time it came to an unexpected end.

One evening, early in the summer, the elder brother said to the younger, "I wish you to walk home with me this evening I have something important to say to you." To hear was to obey. When fairly on the road he began, in the tone of a deacon rebuking a refractory member, to complain of irregular attendance at chapel, and, what was more, absence from the Lords table. The reply of the younger was that he had become a Baptist, and though not yet a member of any Society, he shortly hoped to be so. The older man, obviously with no other purpose than to find out what the lad had to say himself, entered upon an argument in defence of infant baptism, to which the other replied as skilfully as he could. The talk lasted through the whole distance, till they were close to Stowmarket when all of a sudden the mask of coldness and masterfulness dropped away, never between these two to return again. They spent a cheerful and happy evening together, and it was agreed that the whole company of Stowmarket disciples should offer themselves, some for baptism and the whole of them for church, membership at Diss, into which society they were joyfully received. This was obviously, as in other cases, a mere conventional arrangement, for the very next year they were dismissed, sixty-seven in number, to Stowmarket, and Mr. Rust, with the full sanction of the church, was sent out as a minister.

All on a sudden there seemed to flow upon this little company a tide of prosperity. There came to live at Stowmarket an old gentleman named Robert Elliot. He was by business an architect. He had a wife and no family, and having quite sufficient money

to do so, he ostensibly retired from business, and built himself a good house in the town. He had a friend in the neighbourhood, a Mr. Bull, a farmer at Wetherden, who was also a man of some property, and they suggested that a meeting should at once be obtained. On part of the property purchased by Wm. Rust there stood a large and lofty warehouse built by the Government, during the perpetual panics on the subject of French invasion, for stores. It had been unused for a long time, and they valued it to Mr. Rust at £100; it had probably cost twice that sum to build it. It was a house of one or two stories, but the walls were so well built and so substantially, that there was no danger in removing the ceilings and floors. Mr. Rust agreed to sell the building for £100. Mr. Elliott undertook, if the funds were provided, to use all his skill in converting it into a meeting, and to see that it was done in the best and cheapest manner. It was well done. Three lofty windows with semicircular heads were opened on the south side, a baptistry was dug in the centre of the floor, seats were fixed against the wall all round—the surest way of getting the largest number of sittings—and the pews occupied the middle space. I remember the place well, for I went to so school there for many ears.

When all was ready, the day of opening was fixed for a Sunday, and Mr. Rust decided that he himself would preach. On the Monday following a deed of conveyance being prepared, the building was to be conveyed to trustees. The money was to be paid to Mr. Rust, and an account rendered of the expense of alterations, all the funds for which had been subscribed. The Sunday came, the lace was crowded in every part to the very doors. Mr. Rust, paler, and apparently exhausted with anxious thought, preached two such sermons as all the hearers declared they never heard before, or expected to hear again. He spoke in one even tone of voice, so low at times that he was scarcely audible, but these were the most eloquent and most

striking passages, and the people unconsciously stood up and cane forward to hear. The text was from St. Matt. xiii. 43, "Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The afternoon sermon was merely a continuation of the sermon in the morning, as if there had been no break in it. He did not seem to be conscious of the presence of his hearers. No doubt subsequent events suggested the idea, but they said he seemed like one taking farewell of earth, and gazing intently into heaven.

On the Monday morning his wife left him, as she thought, asleep, but when she returned to wake him, she found him wholly unconscious, and though he lived on to the Saturday morning, he was never for one moment conscious again. At first he was a good deal disturbed by sickness, and by the efforts made by the doctors to rally his exhausted powers, but it was soon discovered there was no hope. He wasted the little strength remaining by earnest and fervent exhortations, intended for the young people he had trained in habits of devotion and piety, and not till the last night his active brain at length found rest.

Of course, the grief and sorrow of friends and the pity and sympathy of all were very great. Mr. Farmery could say little more, either at the grave or in his funeral sermon, than "Alas! my brother." But the catastrophe did not end with his death. He died intestate; he left a widow and two little girls, the eldest five years old. Letters of administration had to be taken out. Trustees were appointed to guard the interests of the widow and children. They were compelled to claim the meeting, with all its improvements, and the people had to pay a rent for many years for what in one day more would have been their own. So ended the first act of this little drama. One short act follows, which I will give in a concluding paper.

Stowmarket.—Part 2.

After the first cloud of sorrow and alarm had begun to break, and the light to shine once more, the people at Stowmarket began to see that there were mitigating circumstances in the calamity which had overwhelmed them. The nearest and closest friends of Mr. Rust acknowledged their doubts as to his qualifications for a successful pastor. Of his qualifications as a minister they had no doubt at all, but when that inner circle of warm and attached, friends began to extend itself into the villages for four or five miles round, as it very quickly did, would he welcome them and take them home to his heart, as he surely ought to do? Would that mist of reserve which concealed his real character ever melt away? Those who knew him best and loved him most said "No."

When I hit upon this subject, talking with his sister thirty years after, she also uttered a scornful "No." Pressing her for her reasons, she said, "Because he had a perfect horror of shaking hands with anybody, and that would never do for a Baptist parson." Probably Mr. Farmery thought the same. In a letter which he wrote to Mr. Elliott he said, "You have lost a brother, but you want a father. As a church you are all so new to your position, I may say so young and inexperienced, that you need for our guidance and help, not a brother, but a father, and I believe that God in His providence has prepared such an one for you." He then proceeded to tell them that Mr. Jabez Brown, who had been twenty-eight years pastor of a church at Yarmouth, was now, for sufficient reasons, about to leave, and might perhaps be induced to come to Stowmarket. If he would, their happiness and prosperity, with God's blessing, would be so far assured as anything could be in this life. So it fell out—Mr. Brown came in the year 1797, and he lived and laboured among the people till his death in 1819. During the time I knew him,

which was from my childhood to his death, no one saw more of him and knew more of him than I did. My remembrance of him is of one of the most devout and humble, the wisest and meekest man I ever knew. He was thoroughly versed in all the theology of the day. He was a very fair scholar, especially in Greek and Hebrew. He had a quaint way of expressing his opinion on a subject after everyone else had spoken, in pithy sentences, full of sly but always harmless humour, remembered for years after, and quoted with the prefix, "as Mr. Brown used to say." I ought not, however, to pass over a whole twenty years without a word. These people were, during that time, among those happy ones who have no history. The only fact standing out with any prominence is the building of the new meeting, and the opening of it. There were many inconveniences connected with the old place. There was no ground attached to it beyond the drop of the caves. The access to it was up a narrow passage, and by the terms of their lease they were not allowed a right of way to the south side, but were compelled to have entrance and exit through one door only from the passage itself. The trustees could not or would not sell the building till the youngest child was of age in 1816, and yet with the recklessness of consequences we are familiar with in these times, many interments had taken place all along the aisles. The bodies buried there when the place was abandoned in 1814 had all of them to be removed—they were re-interred round about the Independent Meeting at Needham Market.

It so happened that Mr. Elliott had become the owner of a valuable piece of ground at the back of the houses on the east side of Bury Street. To this orchard, as it was called, there was a good entrance at the upper end, and there he proposed to give a sufficient portion of it, not only for a meeting, but for a fair-sized burial ground and a yard big enough for the whole congregation to assemble in it. The whole affair was entrusted to Mr. Elliott as to design and execution, and to me at that time it seemed to be a most charming little place—

as bright and pleasant as the style of building then in vogue would allow it to be. It had neither vestries nor school-room outside the building. It was all contained under one square roof. I remember the day of opening well, January 4th, 1814, chiefly because, to my intense mortification, I was sent out with the children to be taken care of for the day, I myself having almost reached my sixth year. In order to make the services as attractive as possible to all parties, Mr. Edwards, from Cambridge, then the most famous preacher in the Eastern Counties, was invited to preach in the morning. It was Mark Wilks, from Norwich, in the afternoon; Mr. Murrell, of St. Neots, a bright-eyed young man of thirty, in the evening. The place was crowded. Pews at that time of day were not such cramped and narrow affairs as they are now. There was room to stretch our feet as well as sit at ease. On this as well as on later occasions I can remember there was a double row of people in every pew all over the place, one sitting, one standing, the aisles and lobby, as well as the gallery stairs, being all full. People coming from a distance could not but admire the spirit an energy of these people, the pretty meeting-house, the venerable pastor, and the smiling deacons. They responded in the collection with a heartiness that filled the collectors' hearts with gladness and surprise. My father was never weary of telling how they had all of them taken the precaution to set the plate upon the to of their hats, so that after passing it round a pew they could empty it every time. He declared that when he went into the vestry (or what served for one) his hat was quite full of bank notes. Alas! they were not fives and tens in those days, but £1 only. I hardly dare say it, but I have a very vague remembrance that they collected over £130 that day. It was such a triumph that I did not hear the last of it for years to come.

And now about Mr. Brown, a man deserving a historian better than thousands who have obtained one in the present day. He was a tall, thin, spare man,

with very striking features, an aquiline nose, a most pleasant smiling mouth, and kindly-looking dark grey eyes. The hair was as white as snow. He wore a long frock coat, such as the Quakers then wore, with a stand-up collar, black velveteen small clothes, much worn at the knees, and long-flapped black waistcoat, into which he was in the habit, when meditating, of thrusting his left hand, a button or two being loosened for the purpose. His company was sought for everywhere, and in spite of his gravity and silence, more was learnt from the few words he spoke than from all the loose chatter besides. There was a famous book society in Stowmarket at that time—perhaps it exists now. The meetings were monthly, held at the members' houses, where Mr. Brown's presence was the greatest charm. His shrewd and droll remarks on the books they had read, his good-natured raillery of those taken in y novel opinions—altogether, the quiet fun and originality of his sayings, made these gatherings quite delightful remembrances of my boyhood. If it be asked, How came I there? I may say I had learnt, in my silent, thoughtful way, to be very useful. I found lights for the men's pipes. I handed back their empty glasses, and waited upon them generally with much delight. In after years I read all the books, and with one or two exceptions, knew more about them than anyone. This, however, was a dead secret. Nevertheless, I was an unchallenged guest at home, sometimes by special invitation at some of the houses in the town, and at one or two in the country.

I should like to show you Mr. Brown at his own home, for it was what would not a little surprise people now. He lived on the left-hand side of Ipswich Street, going up towards Combs, just above the Church Lane. It was nothing but an ordinary cottage, such as was occupied by artisans, bricklayers, carpenters, and ordinary working men. The door opened into the room, and there was one step down into it, as was the fashion in those days. The window by the side of the door was a good-sized casement, with diamond quarries,

and a shutter hanging down on hinges, which could be turned up and bolted at night. It was a good-sized room—say eighteen feet square—paved with white bricks, and only a broad strip of carpet for a rug upon the hearth. The fire-place was opposite the door and window. It contained a capital Redford stove, no doubt a present; and I must confess there was a capital clear fire in it almost always; coals, no doubt, being given, with orders to use them without stint. My father spent invariably two evenings in the week here, from six to eight, an in the winter time he almost invariably took me. If I loved Mr. Brown, I loved Mrs. Brown ten times more. The dear old lady seemed to have so modelled her life and character upon his that she was as gentle and amiable as he was, with all the additional kindness and sweetness of a mother into the bargain. The good old couple sat in two Windsor elbow chairs opposite each other, and my father sat opposite the fire. Mrs. Brown placed me next the fire, by her own side, covering me with her skirts to protect me from the draught. About half-past seven she was moving noiselessly about, making preparations for supper. There were generally two small iron saucepans simmering on the hob, one containing a pint of gruel with a small onion in it for herself, and the other some savory concoction for her husband. The conversation was most pleasant to listen to. Mr. Brown was a capital story-teller, and Mrs. Brown, who knew his stories all by heart, reminded him of little bits he would have left out, and so added to their life and length. I have often wondered how these men managed to make one pipe last out the whole evening—it was a churchwarden's, of course—but they always did. When the church clock struck eight, and the curfew bell began to tell, we instantly started for home. The good people had their supper, and were in bed by nine o'clock. Mrs. Brown kept no servant, but all the women at the Meeting were her willing slaves. The gentle smiles and kindly notice of the old lady were an ample reward.

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In the opening of the year 1819, it became apparent at length that Mr. Brown could no longer do the work required of him: three services on the Sunday and two in the week, and he now eighty-three. After much correspondence, the most hopeful and favourable recommendation was of a young Welshman, John Philips by name. He had been a student at Abergavenny up to 1816, when he received an invitation from the Church at Wem in Shropshire, over which he had been ordained in October of the same year.

As we had a large parlour and bed-room never used, he was invited to take lodgings with us. He was a nice, bright, intelligent young follow. I liked him much, and saw as much of him as anyone. He was very gentlemanly in manner, very courteous and reverent in his behaviour to Mr. Brown. I believe the old gentleman loved him much, and ardently wished he might be his successor. One day—it was on Sunday afternoon, November 28th, after Mr. Philips had concluded his sermon—my father, who gave out the hymns, said, "We will refrain from singing, for a message has just reached me that our beloved pastor has been taken away. There arose from the whole assembly one loud sigh of distress, breaking out at last into such sobs of weeping that the service was only with great difficulty concluded, and the people dismissed. The funeral did not take place till the 7th of December. Mr. Ward conducted the service both in the chapel and at the grave. The whole church and congregation followed the funeral on foot. They assembled in the road at the Duke's Head, and as soon as the procession was formed, they followed in couples from the house to the meeting, which was once more filled with double rows in every pew. For some reason, I cannot tell why, I was not there. I stood at the Greyhound corner to see them pass, and I thought the procession would never end. While standing there, Roger Pettiward, of Finborough Hall, rode up on a spirited horse, which was much offended at the loud tramp of the people. "Hudgell," said the

squire, "what is all this? Who are those people blocking up the road in this way? "Well, squire," said the man, "it is them Dippers, Baptists they call themselves, burying their parson. A rare sight of them there are. Let me lead your horse on the path up to the Camping Land." It was a sight—the women all sobbing aloud, and I am sure the squire himself was awed by it. Dear old Mrs. Brown survived her husband only four months; she died on the 19th May, 1820. Mr. Brown by some means had obtained a little property of his own. I had once the probate of his will, but I seem to have lost it. I have, however, the papers giving an account of the final settlement of his estate, which comes to £180 15s.! I have also a silhouette likeness of him, which is sufficient to bring him before me just as he was—the shape of his coat and necktie clearly marked. I wonder whether there is another anywhere to be found.

I have very little more to say. After Mr. Brown's death, Mr. Philips received an invitation as a candidate for the pastoral office. My deliberate judgement is that their rejecting him was a fatal mistake. No one that came after him ever achieved a real success. The congregation increased, the meeting was enlarged to double its original size, but the first fire was never re-kindled in it, and Mr. Brown had no successor. Mr. Philips left our house at Christmas, and took a small but comfortable house near the Meeting. The first objection made was that he was a Fullerite—that is, he preached the slightly modified form of Calvinism advocated by Andrew Fuller, which before that time used to be called Baxterianism. The fact was that Mr. Philips was nothing more nor less than a Welsh Calvinist; he was wholly outside the area of the controversy agitating the Suffolk Baptists. But, alas, the second difficulty was far more formidable than the first, and it was this that really sent him away. His wife, not himself, was the offender. I recollect her well. She was a lady in every way, in

birth, education, and manners. Her figure was graceful, she had a pleasant expression of face, and I thought when he first introduced her to us, they were as handsome a couple as you would wish to see. But (and the but is a very serious one) she was eccentric to the border of insanity. She was always well dressed; she wore a very costly and beautiful, shawl, a fashionable bonnet, these and her pattens in-doors from morning till night. She had six cats, on which the greater part of her time, and, it would seem her whole interest, was occupied. Mr. Philips, in his good-natured way, had introduced me to her as the most intimate acquaintance he had at Stowmarket. The good lady took a fancy to me, and one day when he was out, she asked me to dine with her. I then saw with my own eyes what I despised as mere scandal before. I saw for myself how she managed her establishment. There was a shoulder of mutton for dinner, which came home ready cooked from the bake-office. I sat opposite to her. I hope I do not mistake, but I feel tolerably sure of the number—there were three cats on three high stools on each side of the table. She had succeeded so far in training them that they sat quite still till they were helped. The slices she gave them were as carefully cut as if they were for children, and placed on a cheese plate before each of them. Here nature proved too strong for the trainer—they took the slice of meat off the plate, and ate it upon the stool on which they sat. I was dreadfully tired of the lady and her cats, and got home as soon as possible. Of course I told my father what I had seen, and he mentioned it to Mr. Philips, who laughed in his easy good-humoured way, and said "Mrs. Philips is a stranger here at present. Nobody took any notice of her at Wem. The cats afforded a harmless amusement to herself, and injured nobody." Alas! they injured him. In the church at Stowmarket not only did the women vote as well as the men, but they were allowed to move resolutions and second them. I, of course, was

supposed to be wholly ignorant of such matters, but I knew, all the same, that the women's votes on this occasion so swelled the adverse votes of the men, that on the 29th September Mr. and Mrs. Philips, to my great sorrow, left Stowmarket. In splendid disdain of the shawl, bonnet, pattens, and cats, Mr. Philips was warmly welcomed on his return to Shropshire. He settled at Whitchurch, over which church he was ordained pastor in 1822, and remained there for many years—a quarter of a century at the least, for I see his name in the *Baptist Manual* for 1846.

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