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The Nottinghamshire Baptists: The Political Scene

Nottingham Baptists and Local Political Life

No Nottinghamshire Baptists actually entered Parliament during the nineteenth century, though they certainly took steps to influence Parliament from time to time and they took a very active part in local civic and political life. Before the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 Nottingham Corporation was dominated by a number of Whig families with a strong representation from the Unitarian Chapel. This church supplied a number of mayors to the town, though it did not quite achieve the distinction of the Unitarian Chapel in Leicester which was known as the "mayors' nest". Later in the century the Derby Road Baptist Church might justifiably have been given this title. Together with the Castlegate Congregational Church, it supplied the greater proportion of the mayors of Nottingham during the century.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Baptists comprised about ten per cent of the town council. The Council at this period has been praised for its long record of genuine public service and blamed for resisting the enclosure of common land. Common lands existed on three sides of the town and, as the population was rapidly increasing, intense overcrowding was inevitable, unless the common lands were enclosed and built upon. This, coupled with bad housing and poor sanitation, led to an exceedingly high mortality rate. The responsibilities of a town council were far less than is the case today. They included poor relief, the maintenance of order and, in Nottingham, the administration of certain trusts, known collectively as the "council estate", and mostly ear-marked for particular purposes such as charities and the upkeep of the Trent bridge. The common lands were mostly held in trust for burgesses who could qualify in order of seniority for a "burgess part", that is, grazing rights over a plot of the common land. Burgess rights could be obtained by serving an apprenticeship in the town, and the great majority of burgesses were framework knitters who clung tenaciously to their rights and who were, for a long time, supported by the Corporation. Malcolm Thomis[1] considers that the Corporation opposed enclosure because the continued existence of the common lands maintained the power of the Corporation, and many of its members, including Thomas Wakefield, a man generous in his benefactions, owned profitable slum property in the town. The writer, however, has not been able to find evidence that these men did indeed own slum property. Some, indeed, actually owned land outside the town which would increase in value if enclosure took place.

Within the town sanitation was inadequate and defective. W. H.

Wylie, a Nottingham historian who wrote in 1853, quotes a Latin couplet:

"Non nisi consingam laudare possum Nottingham,
Gens foetet atque focus, sordidus ille locus",

which might be interpreted:

"I cannot without sin and shame commend the town of Nottingham,
The people and the houses stink, the place is sordid as a sink".

The details of the conditions have often been published: back to back houses, narrow enclosed courts, houses built above sewers and separated from them only by rotting boards, single privies serving large numbers of families and no scavenging service. The report of the Commission of Enquiry into the State of Large Towns, 1841, states that no town in the British Empire apart from Bombay had a higher death rate than Nottingham. Some improvements had, however, been made. By 1830 Nottingham had a good water supply, some streets had been widened and some drains culverted, but this had been financed, not out of the rates, but by public subscription, the Council being only one of the contributors.

After the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835, the Council was democratically elected, though with a limited electorate. The elected Council was not very different in composition from the old, most of the Councillors and Aldermen being re-elected. For some time the watchword was "economy", but in due course wiser counsels prevailed and gradually improvements were made, streets were widened, drains, sewers and pavements were constructed, building standards for houses were introduced and noxious trades were controlled. The working class burgesses continued to oppose enclosure but the Council ceased to do so and, after a few more years, steps were taken to bring it about.

The influence of the evangelical free churches was now increasing. Among the more prominent Baptists who served on the Council over the next generation were Birkin, Frearson, Rogers, Leavers, Oldknow and Heard. A satirical pamphlet published in 1855 indicates the degree of influence they were then exerting in public affairs. The pamphlet is entitled *Who is to be Mayor?* and the following is an extract:

"*Alderman B-k-n:*
There are men present who have filled the chair
When bustling commerce wanted them elsewhere.
These people now have time enough to spare,
A life of energy has been repayed
And many princely fortunes have been made,
Such are the men I'd have you now elect.
('Twere well if they belonged to the Baptist sect.)"

For many years people like William Felkin and the Methodist editor of the *Nottingham Review* had been urging improvements, especially in housing and sanitation and, to permit this, enclosure of the common fields. Hitherto Baptists had opposed enclosure along with the others, but it was Felkin who, in 1841[2], proposed to the Council that a

committee be appointed to look into housing and sanitation. The following year, after the 1841[3] Commission of Enquiry, a Health Committee was appointed apart from the Council. Its members included the Rev. W. J. Butler, rector of St. Nicholas, Dr. J. C. Williams, Thomas Wakefield and two Baptists, Felkin and Leavers. Felkin and Dr. Williams were the two most active members of the Committee and when the Nottingham Enclosure Bill was before Parliament in 1845, their evidence was used in its support. The Enclosure Act was followed by a new era of social and commercial expansion in Nottingham, and it was in this period that the improvements referred to took place. The Commissioners appointed under the Enclosure Act took twenty years to complete their work and during this period, when the powers of the Council were limited, many mean streets and inferior houses were erected which remained until comparatively recently. It was therefore not until 1865 that the building of the new Nottingham really began.

In 1847[4] another committee was formed at the instigation of John Heard to make a broad survey of public health in the town. This committee included the Baptists Felkin, Biddle and Birkin and made its first report that year. It listed in detail areas where improvement was most necessary and made its recommendations. Improvements were made year by year and the Report of 1848 concludes with a passage indicating the religious convictions which were the inspiration of much of this public service. The passage states that the Committee acknowledged the wisdom and power of "the Great Disposer of all events" and were fully confident that "in obeying the laws He has ordained for the preservation of health, they were serving the best temporal interests of the Community and, while they were entirely dependent on Him for the result, they had desired to act with such energy and zeal as though the results depended entirely on their own efforts".

So highly were Felkin's services valued that he was the only nominee for mayor in 1850, the first time any mayor had received such support. He was re-elected the following year—such a thing had not happened since 1640. Richard Birkin followed Felkin and became the only man to hold the mayoralty on four occasions. Birkin was a member of the Public Health Committee of 1847 and was chairman of the committee which drew up the Nottingham Improvement Bill in 1857. In 1859 the important Finance Committee, which consisted of the chairmen of the other committees and was thus in a strong position to influence the town's development, included the Baptists Birkin, Felkin, Vickers, Biddle, Heard and North as well as six other free churchmen. R. A. Church comments that these men were Nottingham's business elite, they were accustomed to dealing with large sums of money, they combined business ability with a high quality of leadership and carried on the tradition of public service handed down by the old Corporation. Under their leadership the Council carried a measure of prestige lacking in certain other large towns.[5]

The fortunes of the Gas Company may be quoted as an example of their efficiency. In 1873 it was taken over by the Council, and John Barber, a Baptist, was chairman of the undertaking. In the first year the profit was £700, in each of the next two years it was £8,000 and in 1880 it was £24,000. These profits were used to pay off the original shareholders, to establish a reserve fund and, on four occasions, to reduce the charge for gas by twopence a unit and then to reduce the town rate.[6]

Poor Law Administration

Two leading Baptists, Absalom Barnett and William Felkin, each made a substantial contribution to the humane administration of the Poor Law in Nottingham. Barnett was a member of the George Street Church until 1847, when he moved away with the section which formed the Derby Road Church; he was presiding elder of the latter church until his death in 1850. He became Assistant Overseer of the Poor in the parish of St. Mary in 1819 and gave much thought to Poor Law administration, publishing the results in a small book entitled *The Poor Laws and their Administration* (Nottingham, 1832). At this period costs were rising rapidly. The Napoleonic wars had been followed by much unemployment and local unpaid officials found it difficult to refuse relief to people who were, in effect, their neighbours. The "Speenhamland" system whereby the income of low paid workers was supplemented out of the rates also greatly increased the cost of relief. Barnett examined the causes of poverty and attributed it to fluctuating wages. He condemned the unfair methods of remunerating outworkers which were adopted by unscrupulous manufacturers. Such methods included the "truck" system, that is, paying wages partly in kind, and "stinting", the custom of sharing out the work in hard times among a large number of workers who were charged full rent for their knitting frames but were unable to make a living wage. Ale-house sick clubs were also condemned since their funds tended to be wasted in intemperance and their older members were excluded from benefit by flimsy pretexts. Barnett also condemned relief measures by which pauper labour was paid less than trade rates, or the contracting out of paupers to employers who received their labour in exchange for their keep. He condemned money allowances which tended to depress wage rates, the giving of clothing which was often pledged for drink, and the payment of rent which gave the landlords a vested interest in pauper tenants. Barnett urged that those capable of work should be found employment on public works which would not interfere with general employment, that poor law administration should be controlled by elected overseers with a salaried official and that pauper children should be educated away from the workhouses. He recommended the establishment of schools of industry and the separation of criminals from those who were merely poor, of the sick from the healthy and of children from the aged. He urged that conditions in the poor house should be made irksome for able-bodied

paupers so that there would be no temptation to abuse the facilities, but that none should be treated in such a way as to endanger health or be subject to needless privation.

Many of Barnett's principles were put into operation in Nottingham and many were incorporated in the 1834 Poor Law Act. The Act itself, however, was passed hurriedly and with little debate by a Parliament anxious to reduce the poor rate. It had this effect, but it was universally detested by the poor. It provided for Unions of parishes, so that workhouses might be built large enough to separate the different classes of inmate. Conditions inside, however, were extremely irksome and it was almost impossible to provide outdoor relief. Much suffering was caused before its more objectionable features were amended.

Condemnation of the 1834 Act began in Nottingham about three years after its passage and a petition for its repeal in 1840 gained 5,000 signatures. Further petitions were reported in the *Nottingham Journal* of 30th March 1838 and the *Nottingham Review* of 12th February 1841. Barnett was appointed not only Overseer of the Union under the 1834 Act, but also Clerk to the Board of Guardians. He was over-worked and under-paid, and an assistant relieving officer was appointed. This official lacked Barnett's moral qualities and there were accusations of neglect and harsh treatment, but in the enquiry which followed Barnett was vindicated. Because of the depressed economic conditions the workhouse was overcrowded, and in 1837 the Guardians decided that outdoor relief must be re-instated. This was forbidden by the Commissioners appointed under the Act, so a private fund was established, administered by a committee which included Barnett, Vickers and Felkin. The following year the Commissioners were approached again to permit outdoor relief on Barnett's principles. This time they agreed and public money could now be spent in providing work for the unemployed. Gradually the more obnoxious features of the Act were removed; Elie Halévy estimated that by 1847 seven-eighths of those receiving help were on outdoor relief. In that year the duties of the Commissioners were taken over by a Poor Law Board whose duties, in turn, were passed on to local government boards in 1871.

In the latter half of the century many Baptists served as Guardians of the Poor, in fact it would be difficult to find any time during that period when there were no Baptists on the Board. Among those who served most frequently were William Felkin, Richard Birkin, John Barber, William Booker, Henry Leavers, Henry Ashwell, William Vickers and a Mr. Hurst. Ashwell, a deacon of Derby Road Church, served thirty-six years as Guardian and Overseer at Basford. Of Felkin's contribution, Barnett said that he was[7]

> "the most valuable man who ever entered upon the duties of a Guardian. . . . He had a particular concern for the sick and was ever present at the bedsides of the dying. He superintended the Sunday School . . . [and] was a leading figure at the afternoon

service at the Workhouse. . . . He could not accept the doctrine of 'less eligibility' if it implied anything less than an adequate diet for the inmates. . . . When complaints were made he was ready to go to any length to uncover the truth. . . ."

Parliamentary Reform

The defects of Parliament as a democratically elected body before the Reform Act of 1832 are well known, and it is only necessary to mention briefly here its limited electorate, its pocket boroughs, its unfair system of representation and the bribery and economic pressure at election times, all combining to ensure that Parliament was dominated by large land owners. The Nottingham merchants, as would be expected, were wholeheartedly in favour of reform, together with most of the population. Yet, after reform had been achieved, the working class movements began to feel that, although suffrage had been extended to the middle classes, they themselves had gained little, and they began to press for further extension of the suffrage and for more radical reforms. In this connection it is interesting to find that the middle class Baptist merchants and manufacturers were among those who consistently pressed for universal suffrage.

As early as 22nd January 1817, at a public meeting at Weekday Cross, we find the mayor, William Wilson, and two councillors, of whom one was a Baptist, John Ashwell, advocating that the Government be petitioned for reform of Parliament and universal suffrage.[8] The Borough Records of 5th February that year show that the mayor was urged to call a meeting of the Council to consider petitioning the House of Commons for reform. The requisition was signed by twelve citizens, of whom William Soars, O. T. Oldknow and John Ashwell were members of the George Street Baptist Church, and Richard Hooper, though by then belonging to the Established Church, was the son of a former minister of Friar Lane. After the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 the Nottingham Town Council protested at "the violent way in which the demonstration in Manchester had been suppressed", and sent a copy of the protest to the Prince Regent. The Baptists Oldknow, Ashwell, J. H. Barber and Soars were associated with this protest and supported the public meeting in the market place which followed. The *Nottingham Journal* describes the meeting unsympathetically and states that "radical reform was openly advocated". The *Nottingham Review* reports sympathetically and tells how the action of the Hussars at St. Peter's Fields was condemned in the strongest terms.

Economic conditions were better in the 1820s and the demand for reform receded but returned by 1830. Grey's Reform Bill was introduced in March 1831 and, after a considerable struggle, was passed in June the following year. It enfranchised ten pound householders in the boroughs and leaseholders in the counties. When the Bill was first rejected riots followed in Nottingham and the castle was burnt down. While the Bill was before Parliament, Nottinghamshire Baptist leaders

were strong supporters of reform, speaking at meetings and organising petitions.[9] During the reading of the third Reform Bill a meeting of the Nottingham Political Union, a radical working class organisation, was attended by a number of middle class manufacturers who actively supported the Bill. Among the Baptists present were J. H. Barber, who was then mayor, and O. T. Oldknow.[10]

Most radicals considered the Reform Act of 1832 only the beginning of reform and, as the working classes had gained little from it, demands for universal suffrage began to arise, one of the best known groups making this demand being the Chartists. At a fairly early stage we find the Nottingham Baptists, together with other dissenters, supporting universal suffrage. A leader in the *Nottingham Review* of 21st September 1838 describes the demand for extension of suffrage as "just and righteous" and urges the people to "agitate, unite, appeal and demand until it be obtained". When Joseph Sturge, the Birmingham Quaker who founded the first Complete Suffrage Union, stood for election for Nottingham in 1842 with a platform including universal suffrage, he was actively supported by the Whig-Dissenting group. Over the next ten years there are frequent reports in the local press of prominent Baptists, including ministers, supporting moves for the extension of suffrage; indeed, they continued to do so until the franchise was extended to all borough rate-payers in 1867 and to county rate-payers in 1884. "Universal suffrage" at that period meant, of course, universal male suffrage.

Chartism

The Whig-Dissenting group invariably sought to gain political ends by moderate and democratic methods and, from time to time, it supported certain Chartist aims. During the 1842 election, when both Whig-Dissenters and Chartists supported Sturge, serious disturbances arose, culminating in "The Battle of Mapperley Hill". This took place when soldiers were sent to oppose a threatening assembly of 5,000 people on Mapperley Hill. Although military force was needed to disperse the crowd, the commander, Sir Charles Napier, acted with notable restraint and sympathy. Afterwards, twenty-four participants were sentenced to periods of imprisonment ranging from two to six months. The magistrates responsible for these moderate sentences were the Baptists John Heard and William Vickers. At a "Meeting of the Middle Classes" in the Exchange Room in 1848, to which the Chartist leaders were invited, the main speakers were the Baptist laymen John Heard and William Felkin and two ministers, Hugh Hunter and James Edwards. The aim of the meeting was to draw the attention of the Government to the poverty and distress in the town and to urge steps to remedy this. At this meeting Hunter spoke in favour of universal suffrage.[11]

It is difficult to discover whether any large number of Baptist working men were Chartists. Records of prominent persons survive much more frequently than records of ordinary individuals and a

church member may have been a supporter of Chartism without any record of that fact surviving. It is well known that the father of John Clifford was in sympathy. Another member of the Beeston Church, James Cross, seems to have been a sympathiser too, but when the local Working Men's Institute in 1839 asked the Beeston minister, Francis Smith, to preach a sermon on behalf of the Rev. James Stephens "who was under prosecution for alleged sedition", and to take up a collection for him, the church considered it "inexpedient" to do so.[12] Stephens, a Methodist minister, was not a professed Chartist, but his fiery oratory was at the service of Chartism. William Calladine, a deacon of Hucknall Baptist Church, was a Chartist. The case of Robert Arms, a member of the Basford Church, was brought before the church in 1839 because he had "identified himself with the Chartist religion" and he was excluded because he had "united with a body of Chartist religionists whom we do not recognise as a church of Christ and among whom there are individuals who hold the principle of physical force in order to obtain certain political principles". A footnote, however, says that the resolution was never passed and five months later Arms was "received into church fellowship".[13]

Chartism carried an aura of religion. Prayers were offered at its meetings, its songs were called "hymns" and its speeches "sermons". It would seem, however, that working class Baptists as a whole regarded the movement with mixed feelings. There was sympathy with its aims, but not with violent methods, but as information is difficult to obtain, there may have been more Baptist Chartists in Nottinghamshire than we know of.

Other Political Movements

The Nottingham Baptist manufacturers heartily supported the repeal of the Corn Laws. These laws imposed on imported grain a duty which varied inversely with the market price of grain. They were favoured by landowners and agriculturalists because they ensured a stable market for grain and regular employment for the farm labourer, and were opposed in the industrial areas on the grounds that they maintained the price of bread at an artificially high level. While manufacturers are accused of desiring the abolition of the Corn Laws so that they could keep down wages, there is no doubt that repeal of the Corn Laws appealed to the idealism of the evangelical middle classes—cheap bread was to the advantage of the poor. The principle of Free Trade generally was also in accordance with the outlook of 19th century Dissent. The leaders of the Anti-Corn Law League, Cobden, Bright and Thompson, were evangelical in outlook and supported other causes dear to the hearts of Nonconformists, such as religious freedom, temperance, world peace and the abolition of slavery, and it is not surprising to find Nonconformists supporting them in this matter, too.

In Nottingham, particularly after 1839, Baptists took a leading part in anti-Corn Law agitation, chairing or speaking at meetings.

Usually only the names of prominent people are mentioned in the reports of these meetings, and they include many Baptists. One of the most frequently mentioned ministers is the Rev. James Edwards, of the George Street Particular Baptist Church, but at the same time the thousands of signatures obtained on the many petitions sent to Parliament could only have come from ordinary working people, including the rank and file of the churches.

The *Nottingham Review* of 10th September 1841 reports the great meeting of Dissenting ministers in Manchester on 17th August that year. There were 645 ministers present including 182 Baptists, among whom was Hugh Hunter of the Broad Street Church. The following Sunday Hunter reported on this after the monthly united Nonconformist service. He referred to the deputation from "seven thousand emaciated weavers" and announced a Day of Prayer on 6th September on account of the "distress rendered by the iniquitous restriction in trade". The Day of Prayer began with a crowded prayer meeting at 6 a.m. and ended with another crowded meeting addressed by Baptist, Independent and Methodist ministers. In December that year a "Great Free Trade Meeting" of Midland manufacturers and merchants in Derby was addressed by Cobden and Bright. Large numbers attended and the meeting went on for nine hours with scenes of great enthusiasm. John Heard was chairman and the usual contingent of Nottingham Baptists was present in force.

These are just a few of the steps taken over a long period involving Nottingham Baptists in the repeal of the Corn Laws. The Laws were eventually repealed in 1846 when Sir Robert Peel, swayed by a series of poor harvests and the Irish potato blight, introduced the necessary bill.

The Liberal and Labour Parties

When the Liberal Party came into being about the middle of the nineteenth century it was the party of reform, and the Nottinghamshire Baptists, who had hitherto been radical Whigs, supported the Liberal Party almost to a man for the rest of the century and beyond. They were often leaders of the local party. In the 1880s many of them were members of the "Liberal 88", the Liberal Union Council. In 1884, for example, the Executive Committee of the Nottingham Liberal Union included the Baptists E. and J. Renals, J. P., W. H. and J. T. Mallett, J. Ward, William Sulley, Anderson Brownsward and Joseph Bright. The Rev. D. Davies, minister of Collingham Baptist Church 1879-1886, was so active in the local Liberal Association that he was given a testimonial when he left "for his earnest advocacy of the Liberal cause". William Calladine of Hucknall Baptist Church was Liberal chairman of the Urban District Council 1881-1885 and again in 1892. These are just a few examples. The list might be very considerably extended.

Many Baptist working men joined the Labour Party when it came into being, particularly, as would be expected, in the colliery areas

around Kirkby Woodhouse and Kirkby-in-Ashfield, also around Eastwood and Newthorpe. Trade Unions, especially in their early and more idealistic days, found sympathisers in churches other than those in colliery districts. The Forest Street Church, Kirkby, which included many miners in its membership, agreed as early as 1874 to allow the Colliers' Union the use of the chapel one night a week at the modest rent of five shillings a month. They were still using the chapel three years later.[14] The memory of one member, Harry Toon, an active member of the Kirkby Colliery Union, who stood out against a tyrannical manager, still remains with the Forest Street Church.[15] Kirkby Woodhouse allowed the Labour Electoral Association to use its church for a public meeting in 1887 and maintained its contact with the labour movement for many years; its minutes show that it allowed the use of its chapel for a meeting of the Independent Labour Party and hired its schoolroom to the Co-operative Society Penny Bank for a tea and entertainment.[16]

Among the central Nottingham churches, George Street received a request in 1905 from the Railway Workers' Union for the use of a room on Sunday mornings. Although the time coincided with service time the request was granted, no charge being made except "a small acknowledgement to the caretaker". In 1908 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners applied for the use of a room on Monday and Friday evenings. The rooms were already in use but the fact that the request was made indicates that the Union expected a sympathetic response.

Peace and War

After the Napoleonic wars, the wars in which Britain was involved were relatively small and were at a distance. Nevertheless Nottinghamshire Baptists showed their realisation of the barbarity of war on a number of occasions. The Beeston Church minutes are among the few which go back to the Napoleonic period and they express concern about the situation on two occasions. On 26th May 1811 the church decided to hold a regular prayer meeting "to call on God for his assistance and protection to his church and relief from these troublesome disasters which are abroad in consequence of the present war". The following year the church sent three delegates to a meeting "for peace" organised in Loughborough by a group of Derby ministers.

A generation later the "Peace Society" or "Society for the Promotion of Present and Universal Peace" found support among the Nottingham churches and in 1851[17], just before the Crimean War, the Mansfield Road Church appointed its minister, Rev. G. A. Syme, and two deacons, S. Stevenson and William Booker, to attend a Peace Conference in London, evidently organised by the Peace Society. Syme lectured at his church the following week on the Peace Movement and in 1853[18], at a meeting organised by the Peace Society in the Exchange Hall, he moved a resolution to petition Government

to enter into negotiations with other countries for the reduction of standing armies.

In April 1854[19], during the Crimean War the Nottingham Baptist churches joined in a day of fasting and prayer declared by the Government. Syme spoke very fully at a public meeting led by ministers and clergy on this occasion. Collingham joined in united prayer services, while East Leake spent the day in prayer and fasting. In March 1855, after a winter of disaster in the Crimea, the leading Nottingham Baptist churches observed the "day of humiliation" called by the Government, offering prayers for peace. The wars in Europe brought their quota of refugees and the *Nottingham Review* of 25th June 1852 reports a meeting, at which Richard Birkin presided, supported by the leading personalities in the town including the Revs. G. A. Syme and W. Stevenson, to promote relief measures for Polish and Hungarian refugees. Their plight resulted from the revolt in 1846 of the Polish provinces of Prussia and Austria and the Hungarian rising of 1849 against the Habsburgs which was suppressed with the aid of Czar Nicholas I. Refugees from both these incidents fled to Turkey. Britain supported Turkey in her resistance to pressure to have them extradited. Subsequent military moves on the part of Russia led to the Crimean war, with Britain and France supporting Turkey against Russia.

When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857 Baptists were intimately concerned through their mission work in India. In October that year the Secretary of the B.M.S., E. B. Underhill, visited Nottingham and spoke at public meetings in the Particular Baptist Churches in which he criticised the selfish policy of the East India Company. A fortnight later the Rev. Arthur O'Neil, a Particular Baptist minister from Birmingham, speaking at a crowded meeting in the Mechanics' Hall, condemned the Company for the annexation of territories, raising so much of its revenue by a land tax, spending too little of its revenue for the benefit of the people of India and using so much fertile land for the growing of opium. He advocated assumption of the government of India by the Crown.[20]

Toward the end of the century the subject of war began to loom large again. In 1899 the Rev. J. Neighbour of Retford discussed the issue of peace at the close of an evening service[21] and the church passed a resolution in favour of the Czar's proposal for a conference for the limitation of arms. This proposal led to The Hague Conference of 1899 and the eventual establishment of The Hague Court of Arbitration. In 1909 Nether Street, Beeston, concerned at the deteriorating relationships between England and Germany, passed a resolution supporting Baptist moves to exchange representatives between German and English Baptist churches, one object being to strengthen the bond of peace between the two nations. After the outbreak of war in 1914 Nether Street, Beeston, seems to have been the first local Baptist church to subscribe to the National Relief Fund for Belgian Refugees.

Later, Derby Road maintained a house which accommodated several Belgian refugee families for four years.

Other examples of efforts by Nottingham Baptists to influence affairs abroad, particularly in territories controlled by Britain, included their support in 1828 for the legal prohibition of *sati* in India and their protests in 1846 against both the duty on tea (which penalized the Chinese unjustly) and the salt monopoly of the Government in India; the latter remained a bone of contention for over a century. There was repeated protest, for example in 1856 and 1890, at the extensive growth of opium in India for export to China. On several occasions Nottingham Baptists took the lead locally in efforts to urge Westminster to adopt constructive policies toward Ireland.[22] In 1831 Felkin and Rogers were among those who helped to raise a fund of between £600 and £700 "for the starving peasantry of Ireland". Baptists were in favour of the abolition of tithes for the support of the Anglican Church in Ireland, and Irish municipal reform was actively supported by the usual group of Baptist leaders as was, a generation later, Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill. In 1906 two churches at least, the working class church at Kirkby-in-Ashfield and the middle class church in George Street, expressed their support for a Baptist Union Assembly resolution which urged the Government to intervene in the Congo to protect the native races against Belgian maladministration.

Many other examples might be quoted concerning the public activities of the Nottingham Baptists and further research would doubtless reveal still more. There are those who consider that it is the duty of a Christian to concentrate on spiritual issues and leave political and civic administration to others. This was not the view of the leading Baptists in Nottingham in the nineteenth century. We do not find them lacking in an emphasis on the vital importance of spiritual issues but we find them also entering freely into public life and, according to their lights, applying their Christian principles within these spheres. It may be considered that they fell short in some directions and that the abuses of the early days of industrialisation were permitted to continue far too long, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the men of their generation, with as much zeal as any other generation and with more opportunity than most, endeavoured to put Christian principles into practice in public affairs. The writer, for one, would be delighted to exchange any administration he has known for the disinterested undoctrinaire administration of the evangelical elite of nineteenth century Nottingham.

NOTES

[1] M. I. Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham, 1785-1835* (Oxford, 1969), p. 125.

[2] *Nottingham Borough Records*, ix, p. 29.

[3] S. D. Chapman, "William Felkin" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Nottingham University, 1960), p. 250.

[4] *Nottingham Borough Records*, ix, pp. 56-9.

[5] R. A. Church, *Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900* (London, 1966), p. 199.
[6] *Nottingham Borough Records*, ix, p. 138.
[7] Chapman, p. 202.
[8] *Nottingham Date Book* (Nottingham, 1884), 22nd January 1817.
[9] *Nottingham Journal*, 12th March 1831; *Nottingham Review*, 26th March, 29th April 1831.
[10] *Nottingham Journal*. 18th March 1832.
[11] *Nottingham Mercury*, 21st April 1848.
[12] Beeston Church Minutes, 4th March 1839.
[13] Basford Church Minutes, 23rd March 1840.
[14] Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Forest Street Church Minutes, 22nd September 1874.
[15] Information from Mr. L. Allen, Church Secretary.
[16] Kirkby Woodhouse Church Minutes, 10th September 1887, 26th September 1911, 12th January 1912, 7th August 1912.
[17] Nottingham, Mansfield Road Church Minutes, 23rd July 1851.
[18] *Nottingham Review*, 15th April 1853.
[19] *Ibid.*, 28th April 1854.
[20] *Ibid.*, 16th October, 30th October 1857.
[21] *East Midland Baptist Magazine* (1899), p. 31.
[22] *Nottingham Date Book*, 6th June 1831; *Nottingham Review*, 19th February, 26th February, 10th June 1836; *Nottingham Journal*, 17th April 1886.

F. M. W. HARRISON.

Review

Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity. Ian Sellers. London: Edward Arnold, 1977. x, 102 pp. £5.95 (hardback), £2.95 (paperback).

It is refreshing to turn to a book that lists 'BQ', for *The Baptist Quarterly*, as one of its standard abbreviations. This is one of the signs that Dr. Sellers' study of Dissent in the last century is firmly based on detailed research that has appeared in recent years, not least in the pages of this journal. He has published a number of important articles in the field and is the author of one of the very best chapel histories, an account of Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, whose ministers included the Baptists C. M. Birrell and C. F. Aked. Dr. Sellers, who tells us that he was raised in the Primitive Methodist tradition, is well qualified to guide his readers through the by-ways of Nonconformity.

His book is neither a narrative nor, like an earlier co-operative work with John Briggs of Keele, a collection of documents. It is organised by subject in five chapters—on Nonconformity's denominational structures, theology, patterns of church life, place in society and politics. Within the chapters the analysis is ordered broadly chronologically, and then usually according to denomination. The result is a comprehensive, though brief, survey. His conclusion stresses that social service was normally associated with outbursts of evangelism—a find-