

Colchester and the Missionary Movement.

IN the records of the launching of the Baptist Missionary Society attention has been mainly concentrated on the churches of the Midlands and the North and West of England, but East Anglia ought not to be left out of the picture. The fact that Andrew Fuller began his ministry in East Anglia would naturally suggest that, when he threw his influence into the missionary enterprise, his appeals would not be lacking in response in that part of the country. During his Soham pastorate he made many contacts with neighbouring churches and their ministers. In Pearce Carey's *Life of William Carey* there is an extract from a letter written by Fuller to "his friend Stevens of Colchester." Thomas Stevens was pastor of the Colchester church from 1774 to 1802 and, during his ministry, he not only formed an Essex Baptist Association but extended the activities of the Colchester Baptists into the adjoining county of Suffolk. There is ample evidence of the zeal of Colchester Baptists for Home Missions, and three years after starting work at Langham, on the Essex-Suffolk border, a church at Stoke Green, Ipswich, was formed and became the mother church of the Baptist churches in that town. All these three churches contributed to the B.M.S. in the first year of the Society's existence. The Colchester church gave £9 1s. 0d. Langham £8 8s. 0d. and Ipswich £2 12s. 6d. The books of the Ipswich church were searched by the present secretary at my request, but they contain no reference to missionary activity. The Langham church is no longer in existence, but the minute books, now in my possession, make no mention of work for the Society in the earliest days. Even the Colchester church books contain very little information on the subject. It appears rather strange, as one peruses the pages of these old Minute books, that so much is recorded regarding what now seem trivial events, while the really big things receive so little notice. There are, however, two entries in the Colchester book which can be quoted. The first is as follows: "Lord's Day, May 17, 1795. In the afternoon we made a collection on behalf of the Baptist Mission to the Heathen, this was the second collection made for the same purpose." How much that second collection amounted to is not recorded. The second note is fuller and of greater importance: "Monday evening, December 7, 1795. Our first meeting for prayer was held for the success of the Missionaries who are gone or going to preach the gospel among the Heathen. A like service had been attended to at Mr. Hobbs' Meeting House [i.e. the Lion Walk Congregational Church], the first Monday in November. It is to be carried on alternatively here and there on the first Monday in

the calendar month." This entry is followed by a Note: "N.B. The Baptist Missionary Society (to which we may be said to belong) have now two missionaries in the East Indies and two are now on their voyage to Africa. The other, much larger Society [i.e. the L.M.S. founded in 1795], composed of Christians of almost all names in our Island, is about to send several to the South Sea Islands. This Society has raised a very great sum of money for the support of their undertakings. Mr. Hobbs carried to London more than £225 from Colchester—one gentleman gave £100 of it himself. We have had two collections for the Baptist Society and some of our friends did what they could, but the enlargement of our Meeting House prevented our doing great things."

It is interesting to learn that the united missionary prayer meeting in which the Baptists and Congregationalists united was carried on without a break for forty-three years. The two churches have been near neighbours since the seventeenth century, and a very friendly spirit has always prevailed between them. The Congregationalists celebrate their 300th anniversary this year and have a slightly longer history than the present Baptist church, which dates from 1689. But there were Baptists in the town some fifty years earlier, though unfortunately the records are extremely scanty.

It is a matter for regret that after 1795 there is no further record of missionary activity in the Eld Lane books until 1812 when a separate book reveals how calamity became the inspiration of renewed enthusiasm. This book bears the following inscription on the first page, beautifully penned with artistic flourishes, "An account of the Formation, together with the transactions of the Colchester Auxiliary Baptist Missionary Society, established 20th December, 1812." The next page relates the circumstances which prompted the action of the church: "When intelligence relative to the destruction of the Printing Office, etc. by fire belonging to the Baptist Missionaries at Serampore arrived, the Ministers of that connection laboured very assiduously to repair the loss, and this they did by soliciting the liberality of all Christians, and the Friends of Christianity residing at Colchester were not backward in giving their assistance and support. The propriety of forming an Auxiliary Society at that time was suggested, and after some deliberation several friends convened in the vestry of the Baptist Meeting House on 20th December, 1812, for the purpose of forming such a Society, when the following Resolutions and Rules were unanimously passed and adopted—1. That we do heartily approve of the objects and conduct of the Baptist Missionary Society. 2. That this Society be called 'The Colchester Auxiliary Baptist Missionary Society.' 3 and 4 deal with appoint-

ment of Officers and Committee. 5. That a subscription of one shilling per quarter constitute a member. 6. Refers to meetings of Committee. 7. That a list of subscribers be kept by the Secretary who shall report at the different meetings the names of those subscribers who may be in arrear."

The first meeting of the Society was held on "Ladyday, 1813," when it was reported that seventy-five subscribers had been enrolled and the first quarter's contributions were £5 4s. 1d. For some reason not recorded there was soon a deplorable falling off of subscribers, and by 1816 only twenty-three names remained on the books. Under July 14th of that year an entry reads, "In consequence of many subscribers having declined continuing members of this Society and its being feared that a greater falling off would take place unless some immediate measures were adopted to prevent it, Miss Sarah Patmore, Miss Eliz. Francis and Miss Hester Francis generously offered their services to raise penny per week subscriptions and upwards in order to assist the Society, which proposal was received with many thanks." As a result of this new effort the number of subscribers rose to 124. But the Society still had its ups and downs, and by 1821 there had been a further decline. For eight years there is a gap in the record which may indicate that during that period there was nothing done. But in 1829 there was a revival of interest, and subscriptions for that year totalled £30 15s. 3d. In 1832 a fresh start was made with a rise to £77 14s. 9d. in subscriptions. The Auxiliary was again remodelled in 1839, and on the 3rd of March in that year Anniversary sermons were preached by the Rev. Eustace Carey. That is the final entry in the book, but there has been preserved a receipt signed by Joseph Angus dated July 5th, 1849, from which it may be assumed the Society continued to flourish.

A fact which may partially account for the difficulty in maintaining the interest of the Colchester Auxiliary is that about the time of its formation a split occurred in the Eld Lane Church which resulted in the founding of a Strict and Particular Baptist Church which still meets at St. John's Green. This church does not come into the story of the B.M.S., but it is interesting to note that the missionary spirit was carried into the new cause. This is seen in an event which took place early in 1835. A son of the pastor, Dowling by name, had gone on a business trip to Van Dieman's Land and, writing home to his father, he depicted the awful conditions prevailing in the convict settlements on the Island. As a result of that letter the minister resigned the pastorate at St. John's Green, went to Van Dieman's Land, and founded churches in Hobart and Launceston from which the nineteen Baptist churches in Tasmania had their origin.

J. E. COMPTON.